

"We Beheld His Glory"

Northcote Deck

All material used by permission of the author, as published on
plymouthbrethren.org.

Also online at <https://plymouthbrethren.org/series/6240>

KEE Ministry Library · Faithful Men
kee-ministry-library.netlify.app

Preface

Loizeaux brothers: Publishers

19 West 21st Street

New York City

First Edition 3,000 — June 1942

Preface

We need “medicine” occasionally for the “healing” of the soul, but we cannot thrive on medicine alone. On the other hand we need food continually, to nourish us, that we may “grow in grace.” This little book goes forth, not so much that it may search the conscience as that it may feed the soul. For of old God strengthened and sustained His people with “Bread from Heaven;” and later the Saviour said: “I am the living Bread which came down from Heaven.” May these meditations on Him and His Word be used of God in some small measure to minister “seed to the sower, and bread to the eater,” and Christ to the believer.

In the main, the chapters which form this book have appeared in “Not in Vain,” the quarterly paper of the South Sea Evangelical Mission, which will be sent to any address for a year, on receipt of name and address and twenty-five cents towards production and postage, by the Secretary of the Mission, 8 Oberon Crescent, Gordon, Sydney, Australia, or any of the representatives of the Mission listed at the end of this book. The article “In the Midst,” has also appeared in the “Revelation” Magazine by whose kind permission it is now reprinted.

The Son Of God

“Thou Art Fairer” (Ps. 45:2)

“Fairest Lord Jesus,

Ruler of all nature!

O Thou of God and man the Son!

Thee would I worship,

Thee ever honor,

Thou my soul’s glory, joy, and crown.”

The personal appearance of the Saviour was well-known to His disciples. For three years they had looked into His very eyes, and eyes are ever the windows of the soul. They had listened reverently and continually to the cadences of the voice which spake “as never man spake;” had become happily familiar with the very intonation of the “gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.” They had ministered to His bodily needs, and brought Him “meat,” had “abode” with Him, and been “blessed” by Him. He had “showed them His hands and His feet,” and one had leaned “on Jesus’ bosom,” whom He loved.

Now it was all over. He was gone from their midst, gone to glory, and to His Father. No longer would He travel in their boats, or eat in their presence, or share with them “the way going up to Jerusalem.” There would be no more suppers at Simon’s in the best of gracious company, or wondrous meals at Emmaus, in the evening. No more “fires of coals” would be lit by the lake side, with “fish laid thereon and bread.” No longer would He

bid them: "Come and dine," in holy and happy bodily intimacy.

No; He was gone, as He foretold, and naturally "sorrow filled their hearts." For what a blank His bodily absence left in their lives and outlook. No longer would that gracious form appear in the emergency and in the storm, with His, "Be of good cheer; it is I!" or in the upper room with His "Peace be unto you." No more would He sleep by their side at night, or pray with them in dread Gethsemane.

No; in all this they were called to learn a new lesson. Though they had each had faith in the Son of God, they were now called to a life of faith, with no longer a sight of His blessed comforting Person. As Paul expressed it later: "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more," as such. They were called to exchange His occasional bodily presence for His continual omnipresence. They had lost the Christ of Galilee, they were now to learn the Christ of Glory, in fact to walk by faith and not by sight, to depend not at all on the flesh, but entirely on the Spirit.

And yet the Scriptures give so many significant and loving details as to His Person, His features, His lips and eyes, His face and form, that surely we are to love not only His appearing in the future, but His appearance as He was in "the days of His flesh."

(1) Think first of the face, later "marred more than any man," for our redemption. It can be a face of sternness on occasion, for "the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." Yet it is a face of love and grace, that attracted little children, and disarmed their fears. It was a face of sternness to Himself when "He steadfastly set

His face to go to Jerusalem," and to death, and hid it not from "shame and spitting." Yet it was a face of love and compassion for the humblest believer. Once, in the sight of the disciples, "His face did shine as the sun." But mostly His glory was veiled. Yet this did not make impossible the Psalmist's cry: "Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant," for our blessed Sun of Righteousness ever shines upon His own in benediction and blessing. Thank God for every further glimpse of "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" which is revealed to us, as "seeing through a glass darkly," we learn to know and love His very visage. Some glad day we shall see Him "face to face" in everlasting glory, and faith will give place to eternal sight.

(2) And then His ears. How they catch the softest whisper of confession or trembling love! How graciously willing He is to hear our cry. "Let Me hear thy voice," says this Heavenly Bridegroom, "for sweet is thy voice;" sweet to His ears in spite of the worship of angels and the chorus of the cherubim; sweet to Him in spite of the imperfections He must often see in His own. Thank God this "Ancient of Days" has never in the course of the years, become "hard of hearing." We are specially reassured: "The Lord's ear is not heavy that He cannot hear." Oh, let our song of praise rise to Him "evening and morning and at noon," in response to His kindly desire, and may He waken our ear, morning by morning, to hear fresh revelations of Himself.

(3) Then those eyes, all-seeing eyes! His eyes we read in Revelation 1 are as a flame of fire, as they scrutinize the "churches" with a glance which should shrivel up all our self-complacency and confidence and pride; yet eyes so tender, so sorrowful over the sinning saint, that they

sent Peter out to “weep bitterly.” Eyes that break the heart, yet heal it, and are so loving in their glance that they “suffer the children,” and draw them to His arms (And we are all children still!). We read, on the one hand, that “He lifted up His eyes on the disciples” in affection as He uttered the blessed Beatitudes (Luke 6:20), yet looked away with infinite compassion on the perishing multitude (John 6:1) as if to direct our gaze, and enlist our sympathy in seeking to give them of the Bread of Life. How “the eyes of our understanding” need to be attentive to His commands, as we gaze continually, by faith into “the eyes of Him with whom we have to do!”

(4) And His hands! What are we told about them? Well, they are mighty, creative hands. Psalm 102:25 reveals “the Heavens are the work of Thy hands” Yet Psalm 139 also reassures us: “If I...dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy Hand lead me and...hold me.” They are so mighty, yet so tender; so strong, yet so sympathetic. Yes, our eternal destinies are completely in those hands, and they are eternally safe. Indeed, all our hopes and prospects for time and for eternity centre in these hands of God.

“My yesterday was Christ upon the tree,
Who bore the condemnation due to me.
Today I journey on, and He must lead,
He knows my pathway, and He knows my need.
Tomorrow is not, yet His wisdom plans,
I leave my future in His loving hands.
Full well I know those hands all worlds upbear,

The hands that hold the stars shall hold my care.”

Let us turn in closing to the vivid verses which end Luke’s Gospel. Let me quote some of the sentences for your better remembrance. “And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.”

Here we have a most delightful glimpse of coming glory, a foretaste of the redeemed in Heaven. Here we have a grouping of the accomplished purposes of God, for which the Saviour came to earth.

Man was created for God’s “pleasure” (Rev. 4:11), but sin in Eden destroyed any pleasure God could have in man, and any communion man could have with God. From then on, the purpose of God was to restore them both. The dying Saviour had cried, “It is finished,” at Calvary. At the time it was not evident what was “finished.” The Sun had seemed to set in eclipse and oblivion. Yet He had stooped but to conquer. And in the last three verses of Luke’s Gospel we have a summary of salvation, and the fruits of victory.

The Saviour had clearly announced: “I am the Way ... no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” And in these closing happy verses we see that great highway of salvation established and in operation. At last traffic can be resumed between Earth and Heaven. And blessed be God, it is two-way traffic, as it were! On God’s part, “He lifted up His hands and blessed them.” And on man’s part, they lifted up their hearts and “worshipped Him.” Blessing ever pouring down from those pierced hands, worship ever ascending from men’s contrite hearts.

God's purpose towards man was accomplished. No wonder "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God."

As we have thus contemplated the Person of the Saviour, as revealed in His Word, surely the response of our hearts must be that of the Psalmist: "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into Thy lips, therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever" (Ps. 45:2). May we too ever "rise up and call Him blessed!"

"Fair is the sunshine, fairer still the moonlight,
And all the twinkling starry host;
Jesus is fairer, Jesus shines purer,
Than all the stars that Heaven can boast."

"John bare witness of Him"

Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist (Matt. 11:11). Such were the words of the Saviour in A. D. 31. I suppose they form the greatest commendation ever spoken by God of a human being. This was the man so important, with so unique a ministry, that he shared with the Saviour in having his birth announced beforehand. His mother was kinswomen to Mary the mother of our Lord. But his birth was not announced merely a year before; it had been foretold by Isaiah 700 years before. For this forerunner and herald of the Saviour must be fully authenticated by the prophets, like his Divine Master, who was born a few months later than he.

(1) John is remarkable in this, too, that he was one of the few men really mistaken for Christ. Of course the events

of the time gave color to the idea. The days had been dark indeed since Malachi wrote 400 years before. Since then there had been no word direct from God. And now surely the time was ripe, and many waited for the consolation of Israel. So, as this strangely-dressed prophet rose on the horizon of Israel, having spent his life "in the deserts till the day of his showing to Israel," "the people were in expectation." The result was that "all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not" (Luke 3:15).

Stories are not uncommon in the mission field of God's messengers passing on their way with the gospel through some populous town or tiny village, with a message for the soul and perhaps with medicines for the body. Some were allowed of God to leave such an aroma of Christ behind them, that when, long after, the Saviour was described by some later messenger, previous hearers mistook the earlier missionary for his Master and said: "Oh, yes; we had the One you describe, your Christ, pass through our town years ago. He was just like you say!" Oh, may some Divine aroma distil from our unworthy lives, as we pass through the spiritual wilderness which surrounds us! May we so adorn the doctrine, and so commend the Master, that we may at least be clearly recognized as belonging to His family and being His children, with a strong family likeness to Him!

(2) And John was not only great in his birth. The Saviour said he was great in his life. For the Saviour made a tremendous pronouncement about that life, and into a few simple words imported tremendous truths "He (John) was a burning and a shining light" (John 5:35). True, there are many lights that seem to shine, but

really are not burning at all. How they glitter in the sun! How dark they are in the dark! For it is only borrowed, reflected light that comes from them. And many lives are the same, outwardly upright, yet inwardly sinful and unregenerate. They have never been lit by the One who said, "I am the Light of the world;" shining but not burning, they are doomed to outer darkness. But John was a burning light, having been filled with the Spirit from birth. But he was also a shining light. Yet there are many lamps which are truly burning but yet which give no clear shining; the light is dim, or so obstructed and hidden that no light emerges. And just so with many believers. Yet shining should be the constant result of burning, and this was so true of John, the shining light, that men were "willing... to rejoice in his light." God grant there may be a clear shining from each of our burning hearts, that we may ever be God's beacons in the world's darkness.

(3) John had been described long before in inspired language in Isaiah 40:2 and Malachi 4:5. He was to be the voice of him that crieth... "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." "He shall turn the hearts of the fathers." These prophecies were repeated to his mother at birth (Luke 1:17), and the Gospels show that Isaiah's prophecy was clearly attributed to him. Thus when John was officially asked by the rulers of the Jews: "Who art thou?" he makes a sublime response. He gives a description of himself and his mission that would to God were literally true of all of us, God's messengers! "I am the voice," he said, "the voice" of one crying in the wilderness. Where could we find a simpler, more selfless, and safer description of anyone called to be God's messenger?

For how much the human personality often obtrudes into, and obstructs the message from God; so much of the messenger is seen that little of the message is heard. "The voice!" What an ambition to have that true in some small measure of us all! A voice from God with nothing of the human to detract or distract from the message. It is deeply impressive at times to be in an overflow meeting where the message is being relayed to the audience, but no human messenger is in sight. "I am the voice," just that and no more, with no desire for some of the credit or applause, "content a little place to fill, if God be glorified."

(4) And then the humility of the messenger (John 1:27). "His shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." And the further statement in John 3:20, so often quoted, so inspiring, so little aspired after: "He must increase but I must decrease." What a wonderful, what a concise, summary of growth and grace and life in Christ! "None of self, and all of Thee." God make it true of us!

(5) Let us now turn to the first chapter of John's Gospel, and join the multitudes from Jerusalem and all Judea at the Jordan where John was baptizing. Now the great moment approaches of which Isaiah had written, and Malachi had prophesied, and the Saviour had waited thirty years of His earthly life, and for which John had been created and appointed. "The voice" was no longer to sinners to repent. It was raised now in that clear eastern air to announce officially the coming and the presence of the One who was to be God's perfect sacrifice for sin. So John cries: "Behold the Lamb of God!" And in making that announcement John had completed his great destiny. He had pointed men away from himself as the preacher to "Another," the Lamb of

God, who alone could impart the righteousness he had heralded. And in so doing, as Paul pointed out in his sermon in Acts 13:25, in this declaration John “fulfilled (Gr., ended) his course.” He had accomplished that for which he had been sent into the world. From now on he must indeed “decrease,” and that result was soon apparent, for the next day, repeating his cry, “Behold the Lamb of God” (John 1:36), two of his disciples detached themselves from their old leader, and “followed Jesus” to become two of His band of twelve. John had indeed passed his zenith. What need for the moon when the Sun of Righteousness had arisen?

But that cannot be our final estimate as to John. For at the end the Saviour speaks of him as of no other man. In the providence of God, Herod was allowed to shut up John in prison, and later to behead him. But John had kept the faith! For, languishing in prison, when he had proclaimed a Messiah who was to set the captive free, he still sends his last quavering question: “Art Thou He that should come?” Thereby he showed his perplexity at the strange lack of action of the One who was to “bind up the broken-hearted,” yet seemed to have no concern for his breaking heart. Yet his triumphant conviction that Messiah must and would come shines forth in the rest of his message: “Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?” “For if Thou art not He, we shall go on looking for Him, we can never abandon the hope, the search, for God’s Anointed.” Here was faith perplexed yet persistent, which betokened the greatness of John. Here was a man so great that the Lord was able to leave His servant in prison, without an explanation but just a promise, “Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me.” It is surely only His choicest saints with

whom He can deal like that, and still He finds it good for us and pleasing to Himself, to sometimes ask for faith which does not ask for explanations. "Lord, increase our faith!"

The Solitary Saviour

"And Jesus was left alone" (John 8:9).

The word "alone" (monos), is used eight times in the Gospels in connection with the Saviour. It truly expresses one aspect of the cost to Him of being made sin for us, when He became incarnate, that He might accomplish our salvation. One hesitates to speak of His being "lonely," the word hardly seems reverent applied to Him.

But eight times we are told that He was alone, and it will be profitable to consider what that implied and involved to Him. John 8:9 may be our initial passage, as it so stresses the moral isolation of the Sinless Son of God on His shining way to the cross. That day in Jerusalem, surrounded by a critical crowd of sinners, His searching words so convicted them of sin that they were literally driven, one by one, from His holy presence, until "Jesus was left alone" with the woman.

I think that scene gives the clue, and supplies the underlying reason why He so often was alone, isolated by His innate purity and holiness. From eternity He had dwelt "in the light no man can approach unto." And in His earthly life this continually compelled that moral solitude, which must have been His experience through the years, and have cost Him so dear.

He had divested Himself of His glory, He had laid aside His riches, when He came to earth, but His purity He

could not lay aside. But having “a body prepared for Him” His very humanity craved human sympathy and fellowship, and this was largely denied Him. “God setteth the solitary in families,” wrote the Psalmist, but the Saviour’s natural family had failed Him, as we shall see, and His adopted family did not really come into “the fellowship of His sufferings” till after He had gone back to Heaven, with the result that He was called to tread “the winepress alone” (Isa. 63:3).

As a Child, one glimpse only we have of Him, when in Jerusalem His mother discovered Him “in the midst of the doctors” (Luke 2:46). And then the curtain drops, and nothing is revealed of the eighteen hidden years that followed in Nazareth. What did He do and say those unrecorded years? How did He feel? At least we know how He lived! As ever it was, “I do always those things which please Him.” We know, too, how He toiled for a living. “Is not this the carpenter?” records Mark 6:3. How much that sentence reveals and implies! He did not preach during those silent years of preparation in Nazareth, or they would have remembered it, and not merely have referred to Him as the carpenter. No mighty works were done in those years either, for the “beginning of miracles” was at Cana. No; of public witness there was evidently none in Nazareth, for “His hour was not yet come.”

Did He find sympathy in Nazareth with His mission, or fellowship in His solitude? Evidently the common people never realized that in their midst lived One so “high and holy,” nor shared in His sorrow over sin. His very friends (Mark 3:21) deemed Him “beside Himself” when He began to preach later on. They evidently had no glimpse of His glory. His “brethren,” too, did not believe in Him

(John 7:5) when His ministry began. We must suppose that in earlier years they, too, must have failed Him in real sympathy and understanding. Even then Psalm 69:8 was being fulfilled, "I am a stranger unto My brethren ... an alien unto My mother's children."

There remains then Mary His mother. Could He make a real confidante of her? We know at His miraculous birth "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). And as to the doctors, Mary "kept all these sayings in her heart" (Luke 2:51). More we are not told. The scene at Cana does imply Mary's perfect confidence in her Son and His power. But does it imply that she was His confidante? Had He been able to unburden His heart to her as to His Person and mission, and coming death as Sin-Bearer? Did He find in her that solace for His solitude, that human sympathy, which He sought later on? It hardly seems as if this could have been so even with Mary, for as Psalm 69:20 puts it: "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." So far "about thirty years" He lived in Nazareth, the solitary Saviour, cut off from human sympathy and understanding, unrecognized, unknown. Well has it been put:

"The come and go of busy feet,
With sound of hammer down the narrow street;
A little two-roomed house with scarce a breath
Of air; in busy, crowded Nazareth.
Yes, here for love of thee, through silent years—
Oh, pause and see, if thou art wise—
The King of kings dwelt in disguise."

There indeed, day after day, the Lord had been living the Sermon on the Mount years before ever He preached a word of it. Yet, strange to say, that perfect sinless life lived as an example, changed no other lives. It was to take a cross to do that.

Later, when His ministry had begun, He paid a visit to Nazareth, where alone in all the world a perfect human life had been lived; and with what result? In His home town of Nazareth we read: "He could do no mighty work... because of their unbelief." Pathetic verdict! Thank God He has changed His home town now, and dwells in the heart of every believer. Yet, alas, though His abode is different, only too often the home conditions are the same; unbelief in the heart, hence no mighty work, to His eternal sorrow and our eternal loss. "Lord, increase our faith!"

Then came His public ministry, and the time when, kindly and deliberately, He had to divest Himself of His earthly relations. For now these natural ties had to be superseded by supernatural ties, and brethren after the flesh had to be replaced by brethren in the Spirit. So, to the seeking mother and brethren (Matt. 12:50) He decreed: "Whosoever shall do the will of My Father... the same is My brother and sister and mother." So He turned from His natural family to His adopted family. Twelve of them He called to be His disciples, and the function and purpose of these new adopted relations is carefully and for all time set forth in Mark 3:14. He ordained twelve that: (1) "They should be with Him, and that (2) He should send them forth to preach." Those words set forth the order of importance of their purpose and call. Their office was to be twofold: They were to

share His joys and sorrows with Himself and they were to share His salvation with the world.

(1) "That they should be with Him." Earliest man "heard the Voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." Even then He was seeking fellowship with His creature man. He has been seeking it ever since. So the disciples were called "that they might be with Him." We too are called (1 Cor. 1:9) "to the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord," for the highest function and possibility of man must ever be the fellowship of God. Service, however exalted, is after all but a by-product of Christian life. The main, the highest, function is fellowship.

Of course we need preparation for it, even as believers. When the prodigal came home, the Father did not invite him to sit at the feast in rags. It would not have been fitting, nor was it needful to do so. The loving father could and did fall on his neck and kiss him, in spite of all his rags. They did not prevent reconciliation. They did prevent communion. Even so, there is a fellowship with God which cannot be enjoyed by any believer without suitable preparation and apparel, the robe of Christ's righteousness put on. As with the prodigal this is supplied free, on the terms that we do "put... on the Lord Jesus Christ," day by day.

This preparation for fellowship is often long and costly. Many lessons had to be learned by the disciples in their school of prayer. Many must be learned by us, yet how well worth the learning! Many indeed are the "strange ways" and acts of God. Time, too is needed, and there is often bewilderment. Yet there must be patience and trust in the dark. "A saint's life in the hand of God is

often like a bow and arrow in the hand of an archer. God is aiming at something the saint cannot see, and He stretches and strains, and every now and then the saint cries, 'I cannot stand any more!' God does not heed, He goes on stretching till His purpose is in sight, then He lets fly!"¹ Those words well describe some of the trials of faith of the believer. It is a real help to realize the process going on. We cannot see Him clearly, we cannot quite understand what He is doing, but we know Him. We may often have to learn to trust Him in the dark. Only so is deepest fellowship developed.

"That they might be with Him." As He said later: "They did continue with Him in His temptations," yet only in body. Yet how far off they were in real sympathy and understanding! When, "offended" at the truth, 'many of His disciples walked no more with Him' (John 6:66) He cries: "Will ye also go away?" Then though Peter made a sincere and important declaration, "Thou art the Christ," yet when the Saviour spoke of His inevitable cross, Peter only willing for the crown cries, "Be it far from Thee, Lord!" So, refusing to discuss His death, he failed Him in His need. Later at the transfiguration, sent by God to revive their fainting faith, Moses and Elijah spoke with Him concerning just that "departure" He was to make on the cross, and so supplied the disciples' lack.

But why prolong the recital of the disciples' failure and the Saviour's isolation. Only after Pentecost and the gift of the Spirit did the disciples and believers really begin to enter into "the fellowship of His sufferings." Was there any sorrow like His sorrow? Can we not make amends today? He has promised to enable us to abide in Him. Thus by the Spirit's aid we may walk in unbroken communion and fellowship with the Saviour. Then, day

by day, He may “see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied.”

(2) “And ... send them forth to preach.” Believers “were called Christians first in Antioch.” The people knew they were actually disciples and converts of Barnabas and Saul, yet those were not the names they were called by. Because of their evident likeness to their Saviour they were called Christians. The change was wrought by Him and not by men. Today lives must authenticate lips. Because they do not, most sermons are in vain.

“From church and creed the light goes out,

The saintly life survives;

The blessed Master none can doubt,

Revealed by saintly lives.”

The Saviour’s Journey, down and up

“I beheld Satan...fall from Heaven.” So cried the Saviour one day in Galilee (Luke 10:18). That describes a tragic event in Heaven which has had far-reaching results on earth. For having rebelled against God, the tempter succeeded in involving man in his ruin, and dragging him down with himself in what is rightfully called “the fall of man.” And what a fall it was! From the will and love and presence of God! For it changed the whole direction of the human race, to make it ever downward, away from God, down into darkness and ruin. So the needful appeal in Job 33:24 is “deliver him from going down into the pit!”

And that downward trend of the human race, away from the innocence of Eden, was so rapid that in nine generations the whole earth was “corrupt before God,”

and the world had to be purged by the Deluge. Yet even those flood waters were unable to cleanse Noah's heart, or to reverse the ever-downward direction of the human race, "deceitful and desperately wicked." At once the inevitable process began again, and it has continued ever since. So that, today, in a way unthinkable a generation ago, the evident trend of large sections of the human race is back to the "law of the jungle," and might, not right, seeks to rule the world of men.

Who then is able to reverse this fatal trend of the human heart? Who can change it so that it may be no longer downward, but upward and Godward? Man cannot do it for himself, for he has now a nature that is "enmity against God." Nor is he able of himself to get free, for "the whole world lieth in the Evil One," and is under his power and dominion, and the Devil will never of himself relinquish "the prey of the terrible." To reverse this downward evil direction a Saviour was needed. The operation could not be performed from Heaven. The Deliverer would have to act as did the "Good Samaritan" of old, who came "where he was," to meet the sinner's need. This emphasizes the fact that six times over in the sixth chapter of John the Saviour pointedly declared: "I came down from Heaven," "I am the Living Bread which came down from Heaven," etc. He had to descend that man might later ascend.

(1) First then, He came down to be born of Mary, for as Man He must die for man. So from the lowly resting-place of Mary's arms and the manger, let us trace His ever-upward progress from the cradle to the grave, and so to the opened Heavens, whither He carried "a multitude of captives" into glory.

(2) Taken up. Then let us behold “the Child Jesus,” brought by His parents “to do for Him after the custom of the law” (Luke 2:27). Then the aged Simeon appears led by the Spirit into the temple, and we behold a charming and symbolic scene. For, beholding “the Lord’s Christ,” the old man “took Him up” in his arms and blessed God for Him, in the sublime words of the “Nunc Dimitis.” So the Saviour’s first stage upward to the cross and to Heaven is up into a loving believer’s arms!

(3) “Jesus went up” (Matt. 3:16). Passing by the silent years at Nazareth, the time of His public ministry drew near. Then, that He might “fulfil all righteousness” He presented Himself as an Israelite to John, His prophetic forerunner, in Jordan. There He publicly assumed the humble guise of Jehovah’s Servant, in meekness and submission. “Then Jesus when He was baptized went up straightway out of the water,” went up symbolically out of death into life. Then there came the first of those “voices from the excellent glory,” which ever approved Him on His way to the cross.

(4) “Led up” (Matt. 4:1). Immediately upon His enduement with the “Spirit of God” for His earthly ministry, there came the official assault of the Prince of Darkness He had come to conquer, which is called “the Temptation.” Deliberately He was “led up” of the Spirit into the wilderness, to the encounter. There after fasting forty days, He met and defeated the great adversary of souls with the Word of God, the armament ever available to the humblest believer. “Led up by the Spirit,” He but used “the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” It is deeply significant both in language and intention that two of the temptations were: “If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down,” and, “All things will I

give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.” Is this language accidental? Surely the very words imply a moral as well as a physical movement, the very downward tendency of the human heart He had come to reverse. No; His direction was not “down to the pit,” but ever upwards to the throne of God, taking with Him His blood-bought Bride.

(5) “Going up.” Passing over His earlier ministry, after His rejection by the nation, we read in Luke 9:51: “He steadfastly set His face to go to” the cross, and of the same journey we read in Mark 10:32: “They were in the way going up to Jerusalem” for it could not be that a prophet perish out of the capital. And it was a going up! Up to the city, “Beautiful for situation,” up to the Temple, centre of the worship of His Father, up to the council of the priests and scribes with their jealousy and hate, but supremely up into the plans of God, that He might become the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” But His very going up indeed implied a laying down of His life, a ransom for many.

(6) “Delivered up.” Then came the last dark night of the betrayal, when He was arrested in the Garden, and brought before the priests and scribes. By them He was to be condemned and then to become, as Peter expressed it in Acts 3:13, “Jesus whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate.” That was their purpose, to deliver Him up. They did not realize it was also “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” For while the rulers in their blindness delivered up the Saviour to the injustice of Pilate, God was also active, and in Romans 8:32 we are specially informed of what was not evident at the time of His death: “He that spared not His Son, but delivered Him up for us all...

shall...freely give us all things." The Jews, then, in their hatred delivered Him up to injustice; God the Father, delivered Him up to the altar (as with Isaac of old), where "the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

(7) "Lifted up" (John 3:14). How then was the Lamb of God to die? If the Jews had had their way He would have been stoned, the Jewish mode of death. But stoning would have meant a casting down, first of the Saviour, then of the stones. This however was not the plan of God, nor would it have been in keeping with the progression of the Saviour upward to Heaven. But long before God had settled for all time and beyond dispute that He was to be lifted up, not cast down. So the brazen serpent (Num. 21:9) was made a type of the coming Saviour, and there was "life for a look" to the dying Hebrew, as there has been "life for a look at the Crucified One" to every dying sinner ever since. And very early in His ministry, the Lord Jesus accepted the type, and applied it to Himself in the words of John 3:14: "As Moses lifted up the serpent...even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." "Must" because it had long been the will of God; "must" because, as He said: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." That was His purpose, hence this had to be the mode of His death.

And so "they crucified Him," and on the hill of Calvary, as "sitting down they watched Him there," the chief priests mocking Him said, "If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." But such belief would have been unavailing, for He had to die that we might live. "Come down!" No; He could not, for it was upwards He was bound, up to the cross, the only way to Heaven.

(8) “Raised up” (Acts 2:24). And now came the most momentous fact of all. It is well expressed by Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost: “Ye men of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God ... ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain whom God hath raised up because it was not possible He should be holden of death.” It has been well and truly said that the whole fabric of Christianity has been reared upon the fact of an empty tomb. And that He did die, and did rise from the dead, is the best attested fact in human history. The subtlest brains in the world have sought in vain to disprove the resurrection, and have utterly failed. Interpret it as we may, react to it as we will, reject it if we dare, the fact of the resurrection stands absolutely certified, unshakable, in human history.

“Raised up” in victory to live for evermore; “Carried up” in triumph to Heaven and home (Luke 24:51); “Received up” into everlasting glory (Mark 16:19); these are some of the concluding stages of the upward progress of the Son of God who graciously came down from Heaven for our salvation.

(9) “I will raise Him up” (John 6:40). And what of us? What of all “the redeemed from among men?” What of the multitudes of captives He led to Heaven in triumph? Why, He has something very particular to say about us all. And He said it four times over in the sixth of John, it was so important to us; it was such a glad anticipation to Him. The momentous fact is that the direction of every believer’s life has become permanently changed from down to up! In fact we are now each one linked on to Christ; in His upward progress we share in the triumph of His resurrection from the dead; we are all bound for Heaven. This was the Father’s will, the Father’s plan,

“that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” He was raised up from the dead, and just as surely every believer will share in the same mighty miracle and be raised up.

(10) “Look up, and lift up your heads” (Luke 21:28). Meanwhile, what is our prospect, our outlook on this world of sorrows and alarms? Our outlook must ever be an uplook. “Look up, and lift up your heads,” is as binding on us, and as needful for us, as many other great and precious promises and commands. It is the Divine prescription for gloom and discouragement. It is just as sorrowful to the Saviour as it was on the way to Emmaus that we should “walk and be sad.” We have come to the days when, rightly, “Men’s hearts are failing them for fear.” They have surely begun to come to pass. Then let us “look up, for our redemption draweth nigh.”

(11) Finally “caught up to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17). He was “carried up,” we are to be “caught up!” Whose are the hands stretched out now to keep us, then to receive us? Surely the One whose hands were once nailed to the tree for us. For the Lord’s Christ “having spoiled principalities and powers... made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” And in spoiling them He delivered us, and finally and for ever has reversed the downward direction of every believer’s heart. So that we too are now bound upward, to be raised up, to be caught up! Wherefore, let us “comfort one another with these words.”

“Though the shore we hope to land on,

Only by report is known,

Yet we freely all abandon,

Led by that report alone;
And with Jesus,
Through the trackless deep move on."

"A Man of Sorrows"

"A Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3).

Yet "anointed... with the oil of gladness" (Ps. 45:7).

In Hebrews 11 we have been "compassed about with a great cloud of human "witnesses." These were not "epoptes," actual eye-witnesses. A different word is used which rules out the idea of their being spectators, but which signifies those who witness by their faith in God. (Griffith Thomas). Yet immediately we have had displayed to us all these paladins of faith, we are exhorted in Heb. 12:1 (as in the transfiguration) to get our eyes off men and on to God. For our only safe and habitual objective must ever be "looking unto Jesus." He, only, is to be the focus of our eyes, and hopes and hearts.

But more than this is needed. So in Chap. 12:3 we are given another very interesting and important command: to "consider Him," lest we be weary and faint in our minds, a condition which is so chronic in many believers. Here a unique and expressive Greek verb is used, nowhere else found in Scripture: "analogizomai." This word which is translated "consider," implies much more than to "ponder." It has rather the meaning of "reckon up carefully" (Young). From this verb we get our English word "analogy," which implies the comparison of things partly alike for their better understanding.

So we are to "reckon up carefully" "the contradiction of sinners against Himself;" to seek to estimate some of the sufferings and sorrows of the Holy One who died for us.

Let us think at this time of the mental and moral anguish that came to Him in being "made sin for us." Truly was He called the "Man of Sorrows." This is a title that echoes down to us from Old Testament times. Yet when we come to the Gospels, those detailed records of His life, we find hardly any expression of His sorrow of heart. True, He often expressed His sorrow for others. He wept over Jerusalem. He groaned at the grave of Lazarus. He joined the sisters in their tears, so tender and sympathetic was His heart for others. But of Himself and His own personal sorrow and suffering, hardly a word.

We do indeed have certain indications how much it all was costing Him. He needed to "steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem," and to Calvary. He sweat "as it were great drops of blood," in dread Gethsemane, as being "made sin for us" became more imminent for Him. He even cried: "If it be possible, let this cup pass"; and on the cross: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" These were sure indications of the cost to Him. But of the expression of His own anguish of heart there is scarcely a word beyond that cry, uttered under the hot Syrian sun: "I thirst!" It is deeply significant that otherwise He gave hardly any expression in words of His agony of spirit:

The remarkable fact is, He could not! He could not utter the plaint of His sorrows, or it might have sounded like a complaint against God. He could not audibly express His suffering, lest He might seem to reproach His Father. So

it was foretold of Christ: "He shall not cry nor lift up His voice" (Isaiah 42:2). In the circumstances He could not!

Yet God the Father evidently wished us to be told of the infinite cost in sorrow and anguish to His Son. He desired that we, upon whom the ends of the age have come, should be able at this long distance, "reckon up carefully," and so comprehend more fully the "Man of Sorrows." And it is a further remarkable fact that the only way this could be done was by men giving expression beforehand to these sufferings on God's behalf. The writers themselves, strange to say, realized the problems, and "searched diligently what ... the Spirit of Christ did signify when it testified beforehand of the Sufferings of Christ." It was mainly through the Psalmist these revelations were made known, though Isaiah and others shared in this unique ministry.

Psalm 22 perhaps voices most completely His anguish of spirit. "I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not" (ver 2). "Be not far from Me." "I am poured out like water, all My bones are out of joint." "They look and stare upon Me." "Be not Thou far from Me ... O haste to help Me." Perhaps the most urgent and anguished of all is in Psalm 69: "Save Me, O God...I sink in deep mire." "Reproach hath broken My heart." "I looked for some to pity...but I found none." And Lamentations 1:12 sums it all up and expresses most completely the many complaints and cries of sorrow uttered on behalf of the Holy One by psalmist and prophet: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like My sorrow!" Contemplating such grief, what matters "our light affliction which is but for a moment?" A Man of Sorrows indeed!

Yet because He was God's perfect and representative Man, "the Last Adam," it was needful that He should clearly exhibit and exemplify the other emotions of the human heart. He could not be one-sided. There must be that even balance of mind and character, as typified in the fine flour of the meal offering (Lev. 2:1). So that, though He was supremely the Man of Sorrows on account of His redemptive work on the cross, yet joy must also needs find a large place in His heart and life. So it was divinely foretold of Him in Psalm 45:7, "God hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows." It had to be so! It was so! Blessed paradox, the Man who was supreme in sorrow, yet surpassed all others in joy—"above Thy fellows."

Now let us join the little company as they leave the Upper Room. It is the eve of Calvary. Many times in the past the Saviour had spoken of peace and love and joy in regard to others. Now He is on the way to dark Gethsemane. He is approaching the turmoil of His trial and death. He is to face the hatred of the very world of sinners, the pain of the Cross, the sorrow of His Father's averted face draws near. If at any time He might well have been preoccupied and sad and troubled, it was now! Yet with these three contrary emotions besieging His heart, turmoil and hate and sorrow, remarkable to say this is the very moment in His ministry when He chooses for the first and only time to refer to the feelings of His own heart. Here clustered in a few precious verses recorded by John, we hear about: "My peace" (14:27), "My love" (15:19), and, strangest of all, "My joy" (15:11). What a miracle of Divine grace and sufficiency! Yet though He only referred to "My joy" at this extreme time of approaching sorrow, there are clear

evidences all through His earthly life and ministry of the out-working of this joy. These can only be mentioned in outline.

(1) The consciousness of His Father's presence was ever His delight. Well had the Psalmist declared: "In Thy presence is fulness of joy" (Ps. 16:11). And that presence was ever His abode. So He declared: "He that sent Me is with Me; the Father hath not left Me alone." (John 8:29). And never once was this joy of communion broken save when on the cross He was made sin for us.

(2) The Psalmist also declared on His behalf: "I delight to do Thy will, O My God" (Ps. 40:8). And when that will was for God to reveal His wisdom, not to the wise but unto babes, we hear the glad refrain of the Saviour's heart: "Jesus rejoiced in spirit (Luke 10:21), and cried"—happily—"Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight!"

(3) Another often unrealized joy that is to be His, is the joy of ruling someday in righteousness. In Matt. 25:21 the servant is to be ruler over many things, and to enter into the joy of his Lord. For Emmanuel's coming joy will be to exercise beneficent dominion over creation that groaneth and travaileth in pain at present. Then, sorrow and sin and sighing will have forever passed away.

(4) Then there is His joy in answered prayer. In John 11:41 he cries "Father, I thank Thee," at the prospect of the deliverance of a friend from death. True, but a little while before He had "groaned" in spirit over the same man. Yet He had known what was to be the issue. He knew Lazarus was to live again, yet He wept. Yet He soon rejoices when the Father's time had come for Him

to raise the dead. Are we often able to utter that cry of joy over answered prayer?

(5) Then the joy of successful service is His, and is to be ours too. "Rejoice," He cries, "with Me, for I have found My sheep." Whose is the joy in the presence of the angels but His?

(6) And then when things are darkest His heart is buoyed up in hope, as a divine antidote to present distress: "Who, for the joy set before Him endured the cross." Thus anticipated joy was one of His emotions. It was legitimate. It had practical value in the difficult present. Is it not in that same anticipation that Paul joins the Saviour when he cries: "But none of these things move me...that I might finish my course with joy"

Truly, "in all their affliction, He was afflicted." Is it not equally true that in all His joys we are to rejoice? Of course it will not always be fine weather, nor shall we always have blue skies, as we seek to "fight the good fight of faith." We shall often have varied emotions. It was not extraordinary that Paul's songs in the night were preceded with stripes. It was only according to promise that the Thessalonians "received the Word in much affliction and joy in the Holy Ghost." "Weeping may endure for the night," but it is promised, "joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30:5). It was so with the Saviour. It was so with His servant Paul. It must be so in some measure with us. Yet, though circumstances may be full of sorrow, the heart may still be full of joy. We too, in some measure, must be "acquainted with grief." I believe each one of us also has a right to be "anointed with the oil of gladness." "The joy of the Lord is to be your strength."

“Humbled...Exalted”

“He humbled Himself...wherefore God hath highly exalted Him” (Phil. 2:8, 9). “Looking unto Jesus...who... endured the cross, despising the shame. For consider Him that endured...lest ye be weary and faint in your minds” (Heb. 12:2, 3). At once the practical application of this latter passage is evident. Having recorded the suffering of His Son, God commends this “consideration,” “lest ye be weary and faint in your minds.” How easy it is to be weak and faint in the fight for righteousness! God knows how many droop by the way. He knows the disappointments of life, the difficult circumstances; His own hand often bestows the sorrows, hence the warning. In 1 Peter 4:1, in the same connection of suffering, it is expressed more strongly: “Arm yourselves with the same mind.”

We have already considered something of the moral and mental sufferings of the Saviour, but the immediate context here is rather “the contradiction of sinners against Himself,” and the physical indignities and sufferings resulting to Him.

But how are we to estimate those sufferings? With what standards shall we compute them? We have various standards of human measurement, will they be adequate? Well, we estimate some things by size, but “He taketh up the isles as a very little thing,” and where are we? We have measurements of time, but with this timeless One “a thousand years is as one day,” and we sink back bewildered. Other things we estimate by color or purity; but “He dwelleth in the light no man can approach unto.” So all our human standards fall pitifully short when applied to the Son of God. Yet He has given

us the records of the Gospels by which we can realize something of the cost to Him of the incarnation.

(1) We might first examine where He was led, in that earthly life of His. This in itself seems a contradiction in terms, for how can God be led? He must ever be first. And yet such was the price to the Saviour of becoming incarnate, that He “at whose word creation sprang at once to light,” had deigned to put Himself at the disposal and in the power of men and women, often wicked men, just so long as it was His Father’s will. First of all, He deigned to lie in Mary’s arms, and humanly speaking to be dependent on that human mother for life and sustenance; no doubt legions of angels were guarding His life those days, but it was Mary’s arms that were around Him. Coming back from Jerusalem, “He went down to Nazareth and was subject to them,” a wonderful verb to be applied to Almighty God. It opens up vistas of the long, silent years in Nazareth, when at the carpenter’s side, He helped to earn the daily bread for the little family, “subject” to His elders.

Then, His ministry beginning, we read in Mark’s Gospel, “He was driven of the Spirit into the wilderness,” another wonderful verb to be applied to Him, implying not unwillingness, but utter subjection to the Spirit. Later, preaching one day in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16), His audience was so incensed with the truth and with His claims, that “they rose up and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill.” Thus wicked men were allowed to lay violent hands on the Son of God, and just so long as it was His Father’s will, He had to suffer them. But as no prophet could perish out of Jerusalem, the moment came when it was no longer His Father’s will for Him, and His majesty

flamed out, and “passing through the midst of them, He went His way.”

At last came the night of His arrest (Luke 22:54) when we read: “They took Him, and led Him, and brought Him unto the high priest”— again three remarkable verbs to be used about God. That night there followed the mocking and scourging of the sinless Son of God by wicked men, the spitting and the shame, the purple robe and the crown of thorns. At long last the pilgrimage of suffering was almost ended, and “they took Jesus, and led Him away” to “the place which is called Calvary.” There on a green hill, (still a green hill), “Our Lord was crucified, who died to save us all.” Thus ended His leading by men. Thank God the last glimpse Luke gives of Him He has resumed His only possible and proper place, and “He led them out as far as to Bethany.” So ends the unique spectacle of God being led by men, in gracious subjection.

(2) Then we might well consider what He was lent during His earthly pilgrimage. For strange to say He came into the world with resources so slender that continually He had (and I use the word advisedly) to be beholden to people, mostly poor people around Him, for the common necessities of life. This was by His Father’s and His own deliberate choice, for we are specially told: “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though He was rich (beyond compare), yet for our sakes He became poor.” Had we been having a son born into the world to die on a cross, we might have planned to have him born in a king’s palace, that he might have all he desired on the way to death. But this was not the plan of God. So Christ went through life a poor Man. There were evidently no savings from those years of toil in

Nazareth. He became deliberately poor. He remained deliberately poor, so poor that one day they borrowed from a fish the tribute money for Himself and Peter! Here are lines which express His extreme poverty on His shining way to the cross:

“They borrowed a bed to lay His head,
When Christ the Lord came down;
He borrowed the ass on the mountain pass,
That He might ride to town;
But the crown that He wore and the cross that He bore,
Were His own, the cross was His own.
He borrowed the bread, when the crowd He fed,
On the grassy mountain-side,
He borrowed the dish of broken fish,
With which He satisfied.
He borrowed a room on the way to the tomb,
The Passover Feast to eat.
They borrowed a cave, for Him a grave,
They borrowed a winding-sheet.
But the crown that He wore, and the cross that He bore,
Were His own, the cross was His own.”

These I think are moving words. They bring to our minds something of the cost of His poverty on His journey to the cross. They seem true. Yet when you come to think of it, they are just the truth reversed. The poet has taken poetic license indeed! For the bed and the ass, the bread and the fish, the room and the cave were really His own.

He had created them. It was men who had borrowed them! But the very things the poet says were His own, were not His at all, but ours! We had deserved the cross, and should have died on it. But in grace, He died on it in our stead, that we might go free.

(3) Lastly where He was laid. This again is a strange and a mysterious aspect of His incarnation and humiliation. As the Son of God, I can naturally picture him stilling the storm, for all power was His. I can see Him give the touch of healing, for was He not the Great Physician? Further I can picture Him raising the dead, for was He not the Resurrection and the Life? But I find it harder to picture this Mighty Timeless One laying Himself down each night to take needed repose in sleep for His tired body.

Yet many a time He must have rested after those long preaching tours in Galilee, "being wearied with His journey;" tired out, not with the labor of loving but of living. Let us attend then to the invitation of the angel: "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." First of all it was in the manger, prophetic meeting-place of man and beast. For as a result of man's sins, "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." And Christ came to bring peace to the disordered earth, and to set all right again. He lay then, in Mary's arms, and in the child's crib, this Mighty God. Moving indeed are the words of the poet:

"No room, no room! The inn is full,

Yea, over full;

No room have we for such as ye,

Poor folk of Galilee,

Pass on! Pass on!

For see, the place is packed.

We scarce have room for our own selves,

So how shall we make room for Thee,

Thou Man of Galilee?

Pass on! Pass on!

Christ passes on His ceaseless quest,

Nor will He rest

With any, save as chiefest Guest."

Then we find other strange resting-places. Once we read (Mark 1:13): "He was with the wild beasts, and the angels," a strange combination indeed which seems to express the utter cheerlessness of His earthly outlook. Again, one night they were on the lake, and "Jesus, in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow." But it seems the word only implies the leathern thwart of the boat. Probably His holy head knew little of pillows and comforts! Many a time He must have laid Him down on the grassy mountain side, where night found Him, or by the roadside behind a hedge, or in some little humble home of love that was opened to Him.

At long last He came to "journey's end." John tells us of it so graphically in chapter 19: "And Jesus...bearing His cross went forth into a place called...Golgotha...where they crucified Him." Come, see this place where our Lord came, and laid Him down to die. Follow Him in mind through those blazing hours of the forenoon, till at midday God sent the merciful darkness, and the sun hid his face, to screen the sufferings of God's Son from the impious eyes of men. At the time of the evening sacrifice

came the cry of the One who was both Victim and Victor: "It is finished!" How much can be read into those immortal words. At last man's salvation was accomplished, his sins and iniquities were for ever paid for. But it meant more to Christ in a personal way as well. At last the suffering and scorn were over. From Him at last was to fade for ever "the contradiction of sinners."

And so He died. As Matthew is careful to point out (27:50): "He yielded up the ghost," or, as the Greek is literally, "He dismissed His spirit." For let us ever remember, His was a voluntary death. The soldiers were allowed by God to crucify Him, they could not kill Him. He had specially proclaimed: "I lay down my life... No man taketh it from Me."

And then a wonderful and affecting thing happened. God the Father who had watched and shared every pang and pain of the death and passion of His Son, God then suddenly intervened and interposed an invisible and impassable barrier between that sacred form and the world of sinners around. It was as if He said: "Thus far and no farther; I have yielded My Son to your scorn and slander, I have allowed Him to be insulted and crucified. But now no more! He has accomplished salvation for sinners; the price of human sin has been paid in full. From henceforth no hands but hands of love shall touch that sacred form, no eyes but eyes of believers shall see Him in resurrection."

No more indignities, with one exception. We might wonder why, at first; for we read in John 19:34, "One of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water." Why did God allow

that last stab of hate from the world of sinners? Surely because it had to be proved to the world then and for ever afterwards that He really did die. Had He died of a broken heart as some suggest, His would no longer have been a voluntary death, for then men's sins would have killed Him, but they had no power to kill Him, for "no man taketh My life from Me." And now it was the end. No more indignities were to be allowed to that sacred form by sinners.

We know what was next in the plan of men, because centuries before Isaiah had foretold it in his 53rd chapter. Thus in the ninth verse, "And He made His grave." The Revised Version alters the English to the more correct reading: "And they made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death." And so accurate is inspiration that the word "wicked" is in the plural, no doubt referring to the two malefactors, while the word "rich" is in the singular, no doubt referring to Joseph of Arimathea.

So we know the further degradation which was next in the plans of men. For a common felon's grave was dug, no doubt somewhere convenient to the cross, and into it were tumbled the two poor helpless bodies of the malefactors, with their broken legs, and into it too would have followed the sacred form of the Son of God, had not the Father intervened. But God had another plan, and His plan prevailed. For He moved timid Joseph to beg the body of Jesus, and He further moved the heart of Pilate to grant his request. So we read: "And he (Joseph) took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre...hewn in stone wherein never man before was laid." Joseph had prepared that tomb for himself, God had prepared that tomb for His own dear Son, and

according to plan He occupied it, and laid in state till the resurrection morn.

In that sudden intervention of the Father on behalf of His Son we have a wonderful revealing and unveiling of that great heart of love. There we read all that the Father must have felt, as His Son went through with His dying for man, scorned and scourged and suffering.

Turning to the disciples we can hardly realize what must have been their feelings, that last dark Sabbath. How black was the outlook! Their Lord was dead, their hopes had vanished, their prospects were gone. They were sunk in gloom. No wonder two of them were "sad by the way." Then came the resurrection morning, and gloom gave place to glory, as they met their Lord and received His renewed message, "Peace be unto you."

It is recorded that after the battle of Waterloo, one of the first messages to get across the Channel from France to England was flashed across by heliograph. The first two words which came through were ominous: "Wellington defeated." Then the fog shut down, and the message was interrupted, and gloom spread as far as the message. A little later, the fog lifted and the message was repeated and ended, and the end made all the difference. For the message really was "Wellington defeated French Waterloo." So gloom gave place to glory.

And so it was that Resurrection Day. Gloom gave place to Glory!—the glory of the risen victorious Christ, who had conquered death and hell. Some day all believers will see the glory consummated in Heaven; meanwhile something of it is part of our present inheritance, for "the glory which Thou gavest Me, I have given them,"

cried the Saviour, in His High-priestly prayer. Are we exhibiting something of that glory on our way home? Is He a glorious Saviour to us? He longs to be. Lord, "show us Thy glory!"

"In the Midst ...a Lamb" (Rev. 5:6)

"That in all things He might have the preeminence." Thus Paul the Apostle in Colossians 1:18 describes the will of God the Father for the Son. But it is reserved for John the Seer to behold and describe the sight in Heaven where He received that preeminence. And in Rev. 5:6 we too can share that sight, and join in the song. Bidden by the Elder to behold the "Lion of Judah," we can imagine with what admiration and anticipation John the Jew turns, but he beholds instead "in the midst a lamb." This is indeed the central sight of Heaven, the climax of redemption. It is Coronation Day when Christ assumes a new title. He has many illustrious names before, "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Prince of Peace, the Mighty God." But the time had come for Him to be invested with a name which transcends them all. It is said that Queen Victoria of England never forgot that it was Disraeli, the great Jewish statesman, who through an act of Parliament bestowed upon her a new title, Empress of India, which has often been called the brightest gem in the crown of England. So in this scene in Heaven, described in Rev. 5, Christ is honored anew with the supreme Crown of Redemption.

Twice over, in verse six, the Holy Spirit stresses the fact that He was "in the Midst." For long centuries since the world at large became centred "in the Evil One," God's Son had been excentric in human hearts. But now by His exertions on Calvary He had regained His rightful

position in the hearts He had created, and here we behold Him central in position, central in affection, and central in the universal worship of Heaven. "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy."

Now in Revelation 4 the great ascription of praise centres round His creative might, and in the last clause we are given the reason for that creation:—"For Thy pleasure they are and were created." It is in keeping with this central purpose that in Gen. 3:8 we find the Lord God seeking pleasure in His new creatures man and woman, as they "heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden." Yet when He called to them He failed to receive the response He desired. For in the interval man had sinned, and become a rebel to God. He had in fact formed a new allegiance, and that with God's great enemy Satan, so that the world now "lieth in the evil one." Man was now entirely out of centre, excentric to God, in that the control of his being was centred in Satan. From then on God's activities were directed to one aim, to restore the lost centre of the human heart by making man excentric to the world and its god, and again centred around Himself.

(1) In the midst of sinners to purchase their pardon. The Chinese picture Confucius, the founder of their national religion, at the top of a deep well shouting down good advice to the poor sinner in the mire at the bottom, which in no wise enabled him to escape from his sad and lost position. With God how different! As the Saviour expressed in the parable of the Good Samaritan: "He came where he was!" (Luke 10:33). And so He did! For when He came to die as our Sin-Bearer and Substitute, there was not erected a single cross in solitary grandeur, where on the green hill the Son of God might die. Far

otherwise! Man, seeking to degrade Him crucified Him in company, and such company! "So "were there two thieves crucified with Him," "two other malefactors." But surely John's account (19:17) shows this was also by "the determinate counsel of God." For he records: "They crucified Him, and other two with Him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst" Indeed, men crowned Him with thorns to express their hate, and crucified Him between two malefactors, that their shame might extend to Him. Yet really the effect was just the opposite. For God crowned Him with glory and honor (Heb. 2:9) to express His approbation, and had Him crucified in the midst of sinners that His salvation might extend to them. "In the midst" of sinners, that He might begin to resume His rightful and needful place in the human heart, the focus and centre of their lives.

(2) In the midst of saints to ensure their peace. Then after the resurrection, "the same day at even," "came Jesus, and stood in the midst and saith unto them, peace be unto you!" Here is again a blessed significance in the term "in the midst." Having purchased the believer's pardon at the cost of His precious blood, He could not rest there. For pardon from sin is not a terminus, it is only the starting-point for a life in Christ. More than pardon is needed. For when man sinned against God and became a rebel, peace with God was lost for the race. So the Saviour died that peace might be regained as well as pardon purchased. These together form the legacy He bequeathed to all believers at His death. And, blessed fact, He rose again that He might become the executor of His own dying bequest; and having "made peace by the blood of His cross," He came that fateful evening to announce the tremendous fact to all believers.

But are all of us who have entered in by faith to peace with God actually enjoying this peace of God, in troubled days and anxious lives? For this peace of God is a further installment of salvation. It is meant for all. It is needed by all. It is meant for you. Yet it can only be ensured and enjoyed by a daily life of faith.

It is important to realize that though God does give an absolutely freehold title to Heaven to all His own, yet He only gives a leasehold of blessing for the enjoyment of salvation on the way to Heaven. And some of us have not been paying the rent! So we have been evicted from the needed shelter of the peace of God till we do! Let us then “bring all the tithes into the storehouse;” let us pay all our dues of love and devotion, and again prove our God, if He will not at once and again admit us into the safe haven of the “peace of God.”

(3) In the midst of believers to answer their prayers. “Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). This is an oft-quoted promise. It is usually applied to the memorial supper, and He is certainly present there. It has often been made the basis of a sectarian division,. But this verse is not an independent statement. It begins with a “for” which couples it on in application to the previous verse. It is really promised for the prayer-meeting! “If two of you shall... agree...as touching anything they shall ask, it shall be done for them” (ver. 19). So here we find the Ascended Saviour in the midst of praying believers to ensure answers to their petitions. And no wonder! For as we began by faith in a Saviour, we must go on to faith in a Father. “The just shall live by faith.” Such a promise is indeed the very character of the Church, the motive power of the army of God. Truly with

us “in the midst” is “the Lord our God to fight our battles,” and to answer our prayers.

(4) In the midst of the fire to succor His saints (Daniel 3:25), comes at once to mind in this blessed sequence of His presence. We not only need pardon for our sins, and peace in our hearts, and power in our prayers; we need as well, constant protection from the powers of darkness, for we are travelling through a world where Satan has great authority. We are a protest to his power. No wonder he sets on us, and sets men on us in enmity. Truly, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, yet the Lord delivereth him (not from but) out of them all.”

There was no evident need for the three Hebrews to go into the fire. God might easily have arranged for them to be absent with Daniel their leader, when the test came. But He wished a testimony borne to Nebuchadnezzar which he could not ignore, a testimony not in words only, but in deeds and practical deliverance. Again there was no essential need for the Son of God personally to have appeared and joined the Hebrews in the fire. He did not do so with Daniel in the den of lions, where the need was as great, and the deliverance as definite. But it pleased Him that for all time believers in their fiery trials should be able to remember the August Company the three Hebrews had in their fire; and that we might vividly realize that He is present just as really in all our fires of affliction. That “in the midst” was to be both typical of His love and prophetic of His care.

(5) “In the midst of the seven candlesticks...the Son of Man” (Rev. 1:13). Here once again He is seen “in the midst,” now of the churches to scrutinize their behavior, to peer down into the hearts and lives of His own. Unlike so many human critics God never fails to give approval

where He can; all that is good and pure He gladly commends. Yet He is too wise and kind a Friend to overlook our failings. Hence His eyes are "like a flame of fire." He gives pardon, He supplies peace, He grants power, but He does demand purity. "He sees, He knows," yet, thank God, He still "cares" and loves. Well (in the words of Isaiah), "What hath He seen in thy house," thy heart, Has He seen a divided allegiance, or doubtful pleasures, or worldly friends, and affections? Are there things tolerated which continually grieve His Holy Spirit? Oh, how costly to us, how grievous to Him!

Is there a "shelf behind the door," where self keeps its treasures and pleasures, that are reserved from Him? In the words of the old chorus, we had far better face the position, and let Him deal with it:

"The shelf behind the door,
Oh, tear it down and throw it out,
The shelf behind the door!
Don't use it any more!
For Jesus wants His temple clean,
From the ceiling to the floor;
He even wants the little shelf,
That's hid behind the door."

(6) In the midst of Heaven to receive their song (Rev. 5:6-9). At last the climax is complete for the Church. Sin has been dealt with and done away. Harmony has been restored in Heaven, and once again Christ is central. Surely it is with Divine intention that the phrase "in the midst" is twice emphasized in verse 6. Pardon and peace, power and protection, were necessary stages by

the way. In each case the Saviour personally provided for human need by taking up His position "in the midst." Once again equilibrium has been re-established in Heaven. Redemption is complete for all present. For them sorrow and sighing have fled away. No wonder that Heavenly host burst into song to signalize such a victory. In chapter four the elders were "saying," "Thou art worthy." In chapter five it seems as if the same elders singing on behalf of the Church could not forbear but burst into song, in this great future scene in Heaven. Yet need we wait till then? May we not continually anticipate their song, while on the way to Heaven? Have we not enough to praise and thank Him for? If once more Christ is really central in our hearts and lives, then we shall be blessedly excentric to the perishing world. We shall no longer desire its pleasures or share its ambitions.

"As by the light of opening day,
The stars are all concealed,
So worldly pleasures fade away,
When Jesus is revealed."

Do we long for Him to be "in the midst," "on the throne," "central" in our hearts and lives? Well, "now then do it." Then, "All hail the power of Jesus' name!"

1 Oswald Chambers.

The Cross

“A spectacle ...to Angels and... Men”

Writing about A. D. 54 to the self-satisfied Corinthians, Paul in his first epistle (4:9) is led to describe the lot of apostles in those darkening days. He says, “we are made a spectacle unto ... angels and ... men.” Thus in their fight against sin and darkness he emphasizes that they were seen and watched by celestial beings as well as by men. They were indeed being made a “theatron” lit., a theatrical spectacle, and that to all created intelligences. This is a most remarkable commentary on the “good fight of faith” all believers are called to engage in, for it is still in some sense true of us.

Yet that spectacle was but a faint shadow of a far mightier battle, and a still more remarkable “spectacle” which took place some twenty-one years before on the “green hill” of Golgotha, when God’s Son joined battle with the powers of darkness, and won a notable victory on the cross.

Now it is never possible to over-emphasize the cost of that cross to Christ, nor the need and result of that cross to man in salvation. But it is certainly possible to over-emphasize the term, “the cross,” when, as sometimes, it results in the practical omission of the Christ who died on the cross. Actually the cross is mentioned as a doctrinal position only eleven times; the death of Christ, which is really the central fact of redemption, is mentioned doctrinally ten times, while the Christ who died on the cross is mentioned in the doctrinal part of the New Testament some three hundred times. Let us be

careful not to abandon the balance of Scripture in our setting forth of the truth. Yet with this preliminary warning let us consider the far-reaching effect of the cross. For it has ever been found:

“Sweet the moments rich in blessing,
Which before Thy cross we spend,
Life and health and peace possessing,
From the sinner’s dying Friend.”

(1) God the Father is immediately concerned. For the Father who had planned this exhibition of His love and grace “before the foundation of the world” did now at length “make peace through the blood of His (Christ’s) cross” (Col. 1:20). Here the One making peace is not the Son who died, but the Father who willed that atoning death. For it was indeed in direct response to His desire, that the Saviour who cried, “I delight to do Thy will, O My God,” became incarnate, that He might die that death of shame. So He, “bearing His cross, went forth into a place called...Golgotha, where they crucified Him.”

God’s supreme purpose was by Christ to “reconcile all things unto Himself in earth.” But the problem of sin was not confined to this world, so the reconciling also included, in some un-revealed way, “things in Heaven” where rebellion had begun. It is noticeable there is no mention of the third sphere of Phil. 2:10, “Things under the earth” That underworld is some day to “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,” while having no share in the reconciliation of Col. 1:20. Thus two stars of wondrous magnitude shine out of the dark night of the cross—the

holiness and justice of God's throne, and the love and grace of God's heart.

(2) Christ ... became obedient ... even unto the death of the cross." This is the special aspect of the cross in regard to the Saviour in Phil. 2:8. For Christ came, not so much to preach the gospel, though He did herald deliverance to the prisoner, He came rather that there might be a gospel to preach. He came to earth with a strange purpose, so different from that of human beings who cling to life, and who go through life, bent on living. Christ came to earth bent on dying, because He was bent on delivering men from sin, which could only be through His death, a death that will be eternally remembered.

Statesmen today, frightened by the drift to barbarism and chaos, are seeking a remedy. One such ended his appeal: "Wanted, a Man!"— someone able to lead the nations out of their calamity. Someday, soon, a man will be revealed to the worldling as leader, but he will be the Man of Sin. But long before God had sought a Man. When that One came all was indeed hopeless for the human race, for "there was no man, there was none to answer." Then Christ offered Himself, the Just for the unjust. He was officially presented to the nation by the Roman Governor: "Behold the Man!"—God's Man. God could cry: "I have found a ransom!" So He hung upon the cross in darkness, physical and spiritual, and in apparent weakness and defeat. For there were no mighty works that day such as He had often wrought in Galilee. There was no evident display of power by the helpless Victim, though the rocks rent and the sun was darkened. And yet a mightier work than ever before was being accomplished in the unseen spiritual realm, for

there, enduring “even the death of the cross,” He became “a Prince and a Saviour.” “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift!”

(3) Satan’s connection with the cross is graphically described in Colossians 2:14 where we are told Christ blotted out “the handwriting that was against us, nailing it to His cross ... having spoiled principalities and powers.” For Christ was “manifested that He might destroy the works of the Devil,” and that destruction was accomplished by the victory won on the cross. The battle was for the possession of the human heart. The conflict raged around the human race. Yet far greater issues than the forgiveness of our sins were at stake. We have only glimpses of how the supremacy of God in Heaven had been challenged. We read significantly in Rev. 12:3 that “there appeared a great red dragon (Satan), and his tail drew the third part of the stars of Heaven;” whatever else that implies it surely pictures a tremendous following in rebellion. “And there was war in Heaven, Michael and his angels fought against the dragon ... and his angels.”

Yes; thank God, “that old serpent called the Devil” was overcome once and for all, was “spoiled” on the cross, and “the prey of the terrible” was delivered. Some day the oppressor will be “cast out of Heaven” and later on “cast into the lake of fire,” in God’s appointed time. It was on the cross however the victory was won.

(4) The sinner’s relation to the cross is stated in 1 Cor. 1:18. “The preaching of the cross is unto them that perish, foolishness.” For the natural man is color-blind to the things of God, and only the second sight of faith will reveal to him its power. Till then, the “preaching of

the cross" will seem "foolishness," and this, because the heart of man is so deceitful that he feels he ought, and is convinced that he is able, to do something towards saving himself. It seems "foolish" that he should be asked to receive as a gift what he is convinced he can earn and deserve by his own efforts. This is evidenced by the fact that all men's religions are religions of demand, man must improve himself, and acquire merit, and do something. "What must I do to be saved?" asked the jailer instinctively.

Christianity is unique in that it alone is essentially a religion of gift, God giving what man can never earn or deserve, but what he may freely receive. Is not this an evidence of the Divine origin of salvation? What human mind could ever have conceived that God's Son should come and die for His creature man, that He might give the eternal life man could never acquire otherwise? Yet how can the acceptance by faith of the sacrifice of Another, bring to my guilty heart peace? Only and just because God has promised it, and ever keeps His promises, that "the preaching of the cross...unto us which are saved...is the power of God," for deliverance from fear and sin.

(5) "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14). Having then been made free from the penalty of sin "through the blood of His cross," having once for all passed from death to life in Christ, have I any further relation to the cross? Most assuredly. Paul still found nothing to glory in save the cross. For the cross and what was effected on it is still to be the motive power and secret of liberty from the dominion of sin.

This liberty depends on the fact that in the reckoning of God we and all other members of the Body of Christ died on the cross, actually when Christ the Head died. We are now invited to live on the heavenward side of our execution! Judicially, in the reckoning of God we did die, and therefore are free. Experimentally we are invited by God to appropriate this position by faith, and enjoy the resulting freedom by a daily “reckoning” (“Reckon yourselves to be dead”!). We have to face the fact that the perpetual hindrance to all growth in grace and work for God still remains the first personal pronoun! The “I” in us, the flesh which transliterated spells self, must be kept out of action, and from controlling our lives, by this moment-by-moment “reckoning.”

Now “a Christian is one who is rightly related to Christ as Saviour in regard to the pardon of sins, but a spiritual Christian is one only who is rightly related to the Holy Spirit as regards power over sin.”² That right relation means that He must be installed in our hearts not merely as Guest but as Guide, not only as the Comforter, but as the Controller. It is true that all flows from Christ; He dealt with the sins of the unsaved by His work on the cross on earth. He now deals with the sins of the saints, restoring them when needful, and keeping them from sinning by His priestly work in Heaven. He now operates, however, through the Holy Ghost in our hearts.

We need ever to remember that though the link of union with Christ forged on the cross, for the believer is unbreakable, yet the link of communion with the Father is a delicate strand easily injured. God is always graciously seeking to strengthen that strand, that we may remain in unbroken communion. He does this

largely by carefully graduated exercises of faith, the “dumbbells of the soul/” Many of these come to us in our circumstances, whether of people or of things. It is said that an oak-tree grows through the power of the sun, but roots itself through the fury of the storm. The Christian grows through the Sun of Righteousness, but is rooted through “trials and afflictions.” Savonarola once said, “A Christian’s life often seems to consist in doing good, and suffering evil”! “Rejoicing in tribulation” was the Apostle’s triumphant claim, even while the “peace of God” was “keeping” his heart and mind.

So by the terms of Gal. 6:14 the world is crucified to us by the obedience of, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate.” The further and equally needful stage is when we can truly say, “We are crucified to the world,” and have no desire for its prizes, because the old nature which lusts after the world is being “reckoned dead” continually. God is prepared to enable us to maintain this attitude of reckoning and abiding, unbroken.

(6) Finally, in Galatians 5:11, “the offence of the cross,” describes the preacher’s relation to it, for it is not only “foolishness” to the worldling in theory, it is an “offence” to him in preaching and in practice. We shall never get beyond that “offence.” Men are prepared to admire our Saviour, and some honestly seek to “follow His steps.” Such an one came to the preacher after the service, objecting to the need of Christ as Saviour. “Why cannot I follow Him as example, He said men were to do so.” Turning to the passage in 1 Peter 2:21 the preacher said: “Very well, let us try to take the first step together. Verse 22 says, ‘Who did no sin/ can you take that step? Can you follow Him there?’” Sorrowfully the objector said, “No; I can’t make that claim; I can’t take that

step." "Very well; then you can't take any other steps in following Him till by faith you have found and trusted in Him, so receiving the Divine nature; with that alone you will be enabled to please and follow Him."

The reproach of the cross is its implied accusation that we are sinners under condemnation, unable to extricate ourselves from our lost position, and our need to be converted, to be "born again." In late years some earnest seekers for God have been attempting to eliminate the offence of the cross by omitting all reference to it and the Scriptural terms which describe our lost estate. It is to be "life-changing" to a standard of "absolute purity, absolute honesty," etc., which are all impossible except upon an intelligent trust in a Sin-Bearer, so becoming "partakers of the Divine nature." Moral reformation may come from our personal efforts, but moral regeneration only from trust in the Saviour.

The cross then is the test to which all must come. None can remain indifferent to it. All must be affected by it either in condemnation or salvation and glory. It remains most surely the only basis of our position "in the heavenlies." For the present, we who form the Church are to be a spiritual body for the expression of the Saviour's love and grace on earth. Some glad day the Church will be the spiritual Bride for the manifestation of His glory in Heaven. So may I ever "Survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died."

"Peace be unto You" (John 20:19)

It is good often to "stir up" our minds by "way of remembrance" of some of the great underlying facts and blessings of our salvation, even though we "know them." So let us roll back the centuries, and betake ourselves

with the disciples to the “large upper room” (Luke 22:12). This was the “anogeon,” the private upper room where the family was born and lived, and where the doors could be “shut for fear of the Jews.”

How glad the disciples must have been that this had been granted for their use, as the result of the Master’s request, rather than the “kata-luma,” the lower public room, or “khan,” for which He had actually asked. What a night of turmoil and noise and flashing lights it must have been, out in the streets of old Jerusalem. For in addition to the crowds always in the capital at Passover time, there was added all the excitement over the arrest and crucifixion of the great Jewish Prophet from Nazareth. Who could tell when His followers might not be arrested to be dealt with? No wonder the doors were shut “for fear.”

Then there happened that gracious appearance to the assembled disciples which was to set the seal upon the fact of the resurrection, and bring gladness to them and to the whole world of believers afterwards. What words would He choose in which to announce His victory over sin and death and hell? What words would best dissipate their fears? Well, He chose the old Jewish salutation of “Shalom” (peace).

How and why had this become the national greeting of the Jew? Perhaps because the salutation we give to each other represents our uppermost desire for them. The practical Anglo-Saxon says: “How do you do?” because he is always doing things. The polite Frenchman with his care for deportment, greets, “How do you carry yourself?” The ancient Greek with his love for sunshine and gladness had as his greeting, “Rejoice!” But the Jew

had been placed in the perilous little land of Palestine by the deliberate choice of God. His land had become the battleground between mighty Egypt in the South and successive empires in the North. So the greatest need for Palestine was for peace, and for the Jew it became the national greeting and desire each for the other.

But of course the Risen Saviour imported far more than that into His greeting that night. He gave no doubt the usual Jewish salutation, but it was no longer merely a kindly desire for them. It was now the announcement of a tremendous and accomplished fact. For through Him, God had just “made peace through the blood of His cross” (Col. 1:20). Now He was glad to be able to announce the fact in this appropriate salutation. As a proof of it “He showed unto them His hands and His side,” and a week later invited Thomas actually to thrust His hand into His side. Commenting on this symbolic action, an ancient writer has this to say: “Christ allowed only His wounds to be touched after His resurrection. Hereby we perceive that we can be united to Him only through His death.”

His greeting, then, was “Peace be to you!” How then had this peace been procured which was now being proclaimed? In the operations of God something had to antedate peace, and that was righteousness, for that must ever be God’s order. Indeed it is thus expressed in Romans 14:17, “The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost,” for God had somehow to reinstate man in righteousness before He could proclaim to him His peace.

A sinner “minus his sins” is not a Christian. More than that is needed, for salvation which leads to God’s peace

is more than subtraction. There must be a Divine addition, God adding to man His righteousness, putting it to man's account as it were, for a Christian is not merely a pardoned criminal.

The law of the land may indeed pardon a criminal, in view of extenuating circumstances, and so not pass sentence upon him. But this does not in any way remove his guilt. Man's law may indeed decide to overlook the guilt, but such a thing is impossible to a Holy God. It is morally essential that God should remove the guilt, and He arranged to do so by laying it upon His righteous Son, who bore it in our stead. So, in view of that vicarious sacrifice we sinners can be reinstated; not pardoned merely but justified, accounted just, with all the righteousness of Christ put to our account and credit. Then, God's peace follows as a Divine sequel.

Now what actually happened at the "fall?" What did man lose that God was at such pains to restore him? We are told (Gen. 2:7): "God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Heb., *nephesh*). This is reiterated in 1 Cor. 15:45: "The first man Adam became a living soul" (Gr., *psuche*). That soul represents the man's central personality, his ego, in which is centred his will, the executive of the man. This soul was endowed by God with a body (Gr., *soma*), which makes him capable of world-consciousness; but God also gave the soul a spirit (Gr., *pneuma*), which made him capable of God-consciousness.

However we are told that now he is "dead in trespasses and sins," dead that is, as regards his spirit nature (*pneumaticos*). For though that spirit still remains, it is now inoperative towards God, like a radio set which is

out of action. The machinery is there, but it cannot function. God now states that all capacity to understand the things of the Spirit, which are “spiritually discerned,” has been lost, “neither can he know them” (1 Cor. 2:14). Man has thus become damaged in his spirit, so that it is no longer of use for its designed purpose of holding communion with God.

Man has therefore to fall back on his soul (*psuche*), and is now described as “natural” (*psuchichos*), and no longer spiritual (*pneumaticos*). He now depends on his soul for his highest achievements, for he cannot rise higher than its level. On the other hand, through his damaged spirit he can sink lower, through the continued operations of “the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” For that nature can still be influenced by Satan, who at the fall infected man with his own rebellion, and gained access to the human heart.

We all came into the world in the wake of a great disaster, sin; and God’s answer to this disaster is to make all those who will believe on His Son, and accept Him as their Substitute and Sin-Bearer, “partakers of the Divine nature.” It is with that new nature, which is wholly good, we are now again able to enjoy God-consciousness. Such a man is now able to receive and discern the things of the Spirit, so that it has been truly said, “A Christian on his knees can see further than a philosopher on tip-toes!”

The conclusion of the matter is that there were three separate factors in “the fall.” (1) Sin was committed —“Thou hast eaten” (Gen. 3:17). (2) Man was condemned by a righteous God— “Unto dust shalt thou

return" (Gen. 3:19). (3) As a further result, separation from God was enforced—"So He drove out the man" (ver. 24). Yet such was God that no sooner had He enforced this inevitable separation and banishment, than He graciously began to make for man, a way back to God, providing the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament, and the Saviour in the New.

God's salvation is so complete and suited to the need that Paul is able triumphantly to ask three unanswerable questions in Romans 8, God's summary of salvation. Thus: (1) "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" (ver. 33) for there is now no guilt. (2) "Who is he that condemneth?" (ver. 34) for there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. (3) "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" No one, for positionally we are now "in Christ," members of His Body, with an indissoluble union. So as far as position goes there can be no separation, though many things may be allowed to separate us from the full enjoyment of that love.

Now this peace of God is to operate in all circumstances of life. The promise of Psalm 91 still applies in detail. In verse 13 we are told: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder...the dragon shalt thou trample underfoot." The lion you hear coming with a roar, like many troubles in life whose coming we know beforehand. God says we shall tread upon them, and not be affrighted by them. The adder has bitten you before you know it; many troubles attack us unperceived. Yet we may triumph over them too. The dragon is the most fearsome of all! We do not know what it is! It is a creature of the imagination, and there are likewise very many imaginary troubles which often put God's people to flight. Yet He

promises to keep us from even the fear of them, and to maintain us “in quietness and confidence” all our days. Oh, these craven hearts of ours! How often we are like the man who said: “All my life I have been surrounded with many and grievous troubles, yet nearly all of them have never come near me!”

Thank God, through the acquired habit of faith in Christ, we may continually “be careful for nothing,” as in “everything” we make known our requests unto God, for “the peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” I once asked a large manufacturer of engines how it is that engine-bearings now last for so many thousands of miles, when only a few years ago they had to be continually adjusted for wear. “Well,” he said, “if any two metals are in rubbing contact, however hard and polished they are, there must be wear. But,” he said, “we have learned of late years how to continually maintain a thin film of oil between the two surfaces, so that they do not actually come into contact at all, and as long as that is so, there will be no wear!”

Just so, surrounded as we are by a world that is in opposition to God, we Christians shall be exposed to the wear and tear and difficulties of life, day by day. Yet there may be maintained between us and all these disturbing and wearing circumstances of life, the unbreakable calm of the peace of God, ministered by the Spirit. Just so long as that is so, we may be safeguarded from the fret and wear and worry of the world, and so “last out” and not “wear out.” “Now the Lord of Peace Himself give you peace, always, by all means!”

“The God of Peace”

Luke the Physician in the beautiful prologue to his Gospel records a gracious declaration of the Spirit. It is that Christ, “the Dayspring from on high, hath visited us...to guide our feet into the way of peace” (1:79). It was peace with God that primal man lost at the fall, for enmity as well as sin had entered his heart, and for these he was driven out of Eden. The whole after-revelation from God is mainly occupied with the making again of a “Way of Peace.” This was done by the One who so graphically declared: “I am the Way...no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.”

Years later as the result of the supreme sacrifice of the Son of God on Calvary, the writer to the Hebrews exhorts us to “draw near” again to God, by a “new and living way” (Chap. 11:20). Here he is inspired to use a special word only twice found in Scripture. For the word “new” in the text is a translation of the Greek word “prospatos,” which literally means “newly-slain” (Young). Thus it is literally a “newly-slain and living way.”

We are therefore to infer, not that this is a way later than Moses’ Law, but that it is a newly-slain, and therefore a recently made way. In confirmation of this thought, John peering into Heaven (Rev. 5:6) for the Lion of the tribe of Judah, still sees “a Lamb as it had been slain” (sphatto). What a wonderful combination, “a newly-slain yet living way!”

“Newly-slain” brings to mind Luther’s delighted exclamation when first the truth of justification by faith was revealed to him. Ascending the Scala Sancta in Rome on his knees to acquire merit, this great truth

suddenly burst upon him. Rising to his feet he cried delightedly, in his new-found peace and joy: "Why, Calvary seems as if it were only yesterday!" And that is a profound truth. As a historical event we human beings with our limitations of time and space, date Calvary 1900 years ago and place it upon the Green Hill. Yet as a moral event, it has no date! Actually Christ was slain in the mind and plan of God "before the foundation of the world." Thus morally the event is as near to us as it was to the dying thief.

It is significant that one of the most illustrious titles bestowed upon the Saviour long before His birth was "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). Well it became Him! Well it described His ministry towards man! Ere He died He had said: "Peace I give unto you." Then as a crowning act God "made peace through the blood of His cross."

Now it is a remarkable fact that no fewer than six of the Epistles close with a promise or prayer about the God or the Lord of Peace. Thus it seems as if peace well described God's supremest achievement on man's behalf, and these passages beautifully summarize that work.

Perhaps 2 Thess. 3:26 forms a simple summary of all the rest. "Now the Lord of Peace Himself give you peace always, by all means," or, more literally, "in every way." The reference here is not to how the peace was made but how it applies in daily life. There are four main ways in which a Christian may lose the enjoyment of this dearly-purchased peace, and God exhorts that all these should be guarded against.

(1) 1 Thess. 5:23 may well be considered first. "The very God of Peace sanctify you wholly." Here we have to

remember that the word translated “sanctify,” does not primarily mean “make you holy,” though the result is to be holiness. The root word “hagios,” 250 times translated “holy,” literally means “separated,” or set apart for a purpose, consecrated to that purpose. In itself the word does not imply any moral qualities, though it may lead to them. The women of pagan temples were “hagios,” set apart for their nefarious life!

This prayer therefore literally means “the God of Peace separate you wholly,” evidently from all within and around that defiles. This implies a moral separation from the “world” and its lusts, and a renunciation of all known sin. It involves a letting go of all known weights and doubtful things, that we may be “preserved blameless.” God promises to guide us in these matters. Someone was asked whether a certain doubtful thing would be harmful if not given up. The terse answer was: “No harm if you don’t want to win!” So if we are continually to go on pressing “toward the mark for the prize,” we shall have to allow God to sanctify us wholly, to separate us from all that grieves His Spirit.

(2) “The God of Peace shall bruise Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:20). Surely it is deeply significant that in the closing verses of the Roman Epistle, God’s greatest treatise on human sin and its remedy, there should be this remarkable and only reference to the great author of sin, the enemy of souls. There has been much in the Epistle on human sinfulness and its penalty; of how it was borne by God’s Son; of the flesh and its perplexing problems; and of how the citadel of the human heart can be guarded by the Holy Spirit. But Satan, the great first cause of all this sin and sorrow, is never mentioned till these closing verses. Is it not because our main problem

is the overcoming of the sin in our hearts, and not the overcoming of the enemy; for he has already been overcome by the only One capable of doing so, and we fight from the entrenched position of being “in Christ.” God will “bruise him;” we are only told to “resist” him. We shall be well able to “stand against him” if we put on all the defensive armor provided by God, so that “having done all” we shall stand. In this closing promise to “bruise Satan under” our feet, we surely have a reiteration of the prophecy uttered in Eden that the Seed of the woman (Christ) shall bruise his head. Here is a further reassurance that in spite of all they were suffering, the victorious outcome was sure, and that with them was the Lord their God to fight their battles.

(3) “Finally brethren...be perfect...be of one mind, and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2 Cor. 13:11). Here the God of Peace is to give us peace with each other! After many other needed and practical exhortations to the Corinthians, here is one of the most needed and most practical. “Be perfect.” This is a translation of the most interesting verb, “katar-tizo,” eleven times used in the New Testament. Dr. Griffith Thomas says it is a surgical term, in a technical sense, which signifies the replacing of a joint after a dislocation. Of course it never means perfect in the sense of sinless, but means “put into adjustment.” Paul has had occasion to use it before in his first letter to the Corinthians (1:10), “That there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together” (katartizo). For how can the Body of Christ (of which all believers are members) function harmoniously and effectively, if we are only concerned to be adjusted to the Head, yet are content to be dislocated from each other? Truly all

the members suffer! How can we expect the Holy Spirit to operate in power through us when often we are so dislocated and estranged from each other? Oh, the warriors of God who go limping when they should be leaping!

(4) Now we come to what is perhaps the most beautiful closing prayer of any Epistle, Hebrews 13:20: "Now the God of Peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect...to do His will." Here "perfect" again represents the unusual verb "katartizo." So the literal text is, "The God of Peace ... adjust you thoroughly to do His will." For here is the greatest and most continual and most important problem in the Christian life; how to maintain a habitual yieldedness to the will of God. For us, that will is expressed by God's Holy Spirit who, if He is allowed, is well able to keep us from stumbling and sinning. Yet inevitably, if my will is consciously and continually dislocated from the known will of God, I can run no race and win no prize.

That was evidently the trouble with Jacob of old. All the time he was wrestling with God his will was opposed to the Heavenly Wrestler, and was out of joint with the will of God. At length the time came when there was no option but for God to put Jacob's thigh out of joint, which left him limping permanently for life. But it was well worth it at the price. It was a thousand times better to have a dislocated thigh, than a dislocated will. It always will be! Now, when God so dealt with him, it brought him to the end of himself, and in place of wrestling he began clinging with holy boldness: "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." We shall never

be out of the will of God, when we so cling and so claim. Alas, that often God having tried gentler measures to bring us to the end of our resources, that He may bless us, has to dislocate us physically or materially that we may become and remain adjusted (katartizo) to the will of God. Then walking in the Spirit we need not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.

Here then in these closing verses of the Epistles which cluster around the God of Peace we have the four main secrets of a happy Christian life, a life of peace and power and fruitfulness. (1) The world kept at a safe distance by an insulated life; (2) the evil one “bruised” under our feet and unable to affright us; (3) a continual adjustment to our fellow-believers; and (4) a continual adjustment and yielding to the will of God. How then are these happy results to be brought about? By our own efforts? No. “The God of Peace ... make you perfect to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight.” Be very sure He will do the “working” if only we will go on doing the “allowing.” For God does not compel us to yield, though He does constrain us to do so. It is noticeable that the New Testament verb is not “paragello,” command (about seven times in the Epistles), but “parakaleo,” entreat or beseech, one hundred times in the New Testament. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present (yield) your bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God!”

“In His hand” (Joshua 5:13)

How revealing is the hand! How it reflects the life! For what is habitually in a man’s hand largely represents his

life and thoughts and activities. The hand reveals the heart!

Thus when God met Moses in the desert, His question: "What is that in thine hand?" was not for God's information, it was rather for Moses' illumination. God could see what was in His servant's hand. He rather wanted Moses to realize what was in his heart, and what actually constituted his life. There might have been a monarch's sceptre in that hand, but "by faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." But now, long years after, all that was in the man's hand was his shepherd's rod, or staff (the same word), with which he had led "the flock to the... desert." It was as if God said to him: "What is now in your life, you who were brought up in a palace, you who once had visions of delivering My people? Why are you merely occupied with 'those few sheep in the wilderness?'" Later, through grace, that shepherd's staff was to become "the rod of God," and Moses was to change his occupation from guiding a flock of sheep to guiding a nation for God. The change of what was in his hand was to become symbolic of the change in his heart and life.

And hands in the New Testament are just as illuminating. Let us betake ourselves to Galilee, in "the days of His flesh," and climb the winding street in Nazareth. Let us turn in at the carpenter's shop, and question the owner: "Joseph, what is that in thine hand?" It would have been a plane or hammer, for he was a worker in wood. How little Joseph realized there was growing up in his workshop One who would later take His turn as "the carpenter" of Nazareth, but who was destined later to become the Great Carpenter of

Souls. He like Moses would change His occupation and turn from the tools of trade to the souls of men.

Let us now climb out of Nazareth, and descend to the Lake of Galilee, hung like a great big blue raindrop in that thirsty land. Passing through Bethsaida we might have come upon two toilers by the Lake. Let us stop and question them: "Peter and John, what is that in your hands?" They would have said, "A net, for we be fishers." That net represented their lives, the toil that filled their thoughts. Later, they too were to change their livelihood, and become "fishers of men" and learn to deal in eternal values.

Let us now turn up from the Lake into Capernaum, and passing through "the receipt of custom" ask one sitting there: "Matthew, what is that in thine hand?" He would have answered: "Gold is in my hand, I am the tax-gatherer." But he, too, was destined to be called by the Saviour, and thenceforth to change his occupation. He was to learn a new scale of values and learn to lay up "gold tried in the fire" that he too might become rich throughout all eternity.

Then we must take ship across the blue Aegean, land at Corinth, and climb up to the generous home of one Gaius the "host of the whole Church." There about A. D. 58 we might have found seated in his guest-chamber one Saul of Tarsus, now the great "apostle to the Gentiles." Let us question him: "Paul, what is that in thine hand?" He might well have answered, "'The pen of a ready writer,' with which I have just written to Galatia, and am now writing for God to Rome." How changed the occupation of the hand that now held the pen and continually enriched the world. Once it had held

“letters” from the High Priest, to bind “any of this way.” But under the blessed compulsion of the Son of God, the persecutor had changed his occupation and become the preacher, by lip and pen.

In the adjoining guest-room I think we should find Paul’s travelling companion, Luke the Physician. “What is that in thine hand?” let us ask him. Once it had held the surgeon’s knife, but he too has turned from bodies to souls. At times he, too, handles the pen for God, to the world’s permanent enrichment, but mainly he is busy over the surgery of souls; blessed calling, blessed preoccupation!

One last visit, this time to a woman at Joppa by the sea. Let us see what is her business. “What is that in thine hand, Dorcas?” “Why, my needle. Once it was used for self, now it ministers to the saints, and satisfies my heart and their needs. I sew for the Saviour.” So hands show hearts.

Now let us turn to the Saviour Himself, and ask Him reverently: “Lord, what is that in Thine hand?” For that mighty hand has held many things, and performs many ministries committed unto Him by the Father; like everything else about Him, the answers will be both important and illuminating to us.

(1) First, “In the hand of the Lord there is a cup... He poureth out of the same... the dregs...the wicked...shall drink” (Ps. 75:8). Essentially the hand of a Holy God must hold a cup of judgment for sin, for “He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.” That dread cup is filled from “the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of God.” Some dread day He will hand that cup to the wicked, and not one such shall escape that draught of death

when in the course of the ages Christ becomes “the Judge of all the earth.”

(2) Had that been the only cup held by His hand, these words had never been written, nor read by believers. But, thank God, we can read further in Matthew 26:39 of another cup He held and drank in dread Gethsemane, the cup of anguish to Himself. For in the plan of God and of salvation: “They gave Me gall to drink” (Ps. 69:21). Thank God, “That bitter cup, Love drank it up, Now there’s but peace for me.”

(3) But the cup He drank that dark night involved far more of physical suffering for Him. We can realize how much more by the question in Zechariah 13:6: “One shall say unto Him, What are these wounds in Thy hands?” Then He shall answer, “These with which I was wounded in the house of My friends.” Many moving things could be said of that strange reception by His own nation, when in place of giving Him a crown they nailed Him to a cross. Men crowned Him with thorns to express their hatred. God at the same time “crowned Him with glory and honor,” to express His approbation and love.

(4) As a result we can confidently turn to Ps. 116:13, and receive from that pierced hand that which He tenders to all who will believe on Him and “take the cup of salvation.” What a happy description of God’s remedy for sin! “A cup of salvation,” that cheers and rejoices and sustains. No wonder we can “call upon the name of the Lord” in joy and thanksgiving.

(5) Here then is Divine and perfect provision for our needs, yet in a world of violence and sin, we need also protection, and such is indicated in Joshua 5:13 where

Joshua beheld "a man with his sword drawn in his hand." For the loving Saviour of the "gracious words" of the Gospels, is also the warrior Lord. The Son of God goes forth to war! That sword is described as "drawn," and it will never be sheathed "till all the ransomed saints of God are saved to sin no more." It ever protects His own, and pursues the wicked.

(6) But privileges carry responsibilities, and we turn further to Amos 7:7 and find still another "ministry" of that mighty hand. God specially calls attention to it with a question to Amos: "What seest thou?" "And the Lord stood with a plumbline in His hand." Now a plumb-line is needed to make evident the crookedness of a wall, and we shall ever need God's sure plumbline, the Word of God, in daily operation in our lives to discover our shortcomings and failings that God may amend them. Daily may we use it!

(7) The consummation of it all comes surely in 1 Cor. 11:25: "This cup of the New Testament in My blood." Here as the result of these many and various operations of God's hand, fellowship and intimacy are re-established between God and man. Because of His cup of woe, there is ever for us a cup of consolation and communion. On our part may there ever be a growing appreciation of its obligation and privilege!

(8) Now let us turn the searchlight of the Word on ourselves. "What is there in my hand?" 1 John 1:1 beautifully describes the first need of our hands and hearts. Here the aged John speaks of "handling the Word of Life." The verb used here is an interesting one. It is rendered "feel after" in Acts 17:27. That is ever the first stage of finding a Saviour; a feeling after Him in the

dark. But light soon breaks on the seeking soul, and there follows a very real and tangible experience of Him, of knowing Him. As the Saviour invited in Luke 24:29: "Handle Me (same word), and see that it is I." Again the hand is the route to the heart. So His mighty hand holds me eternally, as in John 10:28, while my feeble hand of faith handles Him in daily experience, as in 1 John 1:1.

(9) But shall such hands be idle? Never, in the will of God! In 1 Tim. 2:8 one of the most difficult and neglected yet precious of ministries is stressed for the believer: "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands." "Again "uplifted hands" are surely tokens of praying hearts. Is this a real and regular ministry in your life? Have you the great privilege of such "holy hands?" Have you a heart ever hungry for others that must find relief in prayer for them? "Lord, teach us to pray!"

(10) But Luke 9:62 also stresses the constant and universal obligation upon every believer: "No man, having put his hand to the plough." The inference is that every believer, every true disciple must handle the plough of labor for God, some plough, some labor. Some service is called for from all. There is some definite and regular contribution each must make to the kingdom of God and the Body of Christ. Have you yet found your appointed ministry? Are you making "full proof" of it? Yet how many hands one notices, that "hang down." They have long since abandoned the plough, the service of God. Oh, the loss, the sorrow to man, to God!

There are many indeed who have come to the condition of the man in Luke 6:6. What was his malady? It was a chronic one. He had a withered hand. How descriptive!

A palsy had taken him, slow, unperceived in its onset, yet fatal in its consequences. He was now “not able.” It was his right hand too. The best of his talents were now useless, the best of his possibilities were now impossible. There are many withered right hands of believers today. They have life, but not strength, or skill for service.

What is the remedy for such a withered hand? Is there still a remedy? Is it not too long-lasting, too late? Well there is still the Saviour available, “able to save to the uttermost.” There was one impotent man thirty-eight years in this sad condition, yet that proved no difficulty to the same Great Physician. Thirty-eight years or thirty-eight minutes must be all the same to Him. Do we really think we are beyond His skill?

Mark now the Great Physician’s treatment of this withered hand. Back of that withered hand was a withered will, an unwilling heart. In any case the procedure is highly significant. The Saviour addresses Himself to the hardest part of the miracle first. He addresses the man’s will, in the first command: “Stand forth in the midst.” To do that no change in the hand was needed, only a change in the man’s will. Yet many today facing just such a dread disease, and in like sad condition are really “unwilling to be well.” “Wilt thou be made whole?” was the Saviour’s strange question to the other cripple (John 5:6). It hardly seemed to need an answer. Yet it is precisely the same problem today with many of His own. Many do not want to be well, they might have to work then! They are like professional cripples.

Now we need to be careful here. When it is a question of healing of the body, it may, or may not, be the will of God. Some of His very choicest saints have been called to go through life in frail bodies. He can heal, but is it the will of God? But when it comes to spiritual maladies, it is always the will of God we should be well and strong. There is no need for delicate members of the Body of Christ. It is never His will that “sin should have dominion over us,” or that we should be impotent spiritually.

Happily, this man was different to so many professional cripples. He was willing for the Lord to operate on him, so “he stood forth in the midst.” Then came what to us seems so difficult, the healing of the hand. Was it difficult to God? Well, evidently not, for the second command came without a pause: “Stretch forth thy hand.” And as the cripple wonderingly, tremblingly, seeks to obey, strength is given in answer to faith (as it ever is), and the hand comes forth whole as the other. That, I believe, is ever the Divine sequence —first, a willing mind, then a glorious deliverance. Still as of old “the power of the Lord is present to heal” (Luke 5:17). Oh, believe it!

Return to God

“Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11). Here is a plain expression of God’s purpose towards us in creation. Yet how soon human sin destroyed any pleasure God might find in man. There could be only one result: “So He drove out the man” (Gen. 3:24). This was the outward visible consequence of sin and its resulting estrangement from God. Yet no sooner had God enforced

this separation and exile from Himself than all His redemptive energies were directed to one aim, to restore man to communion to Himself, to reinstate him in His favor, and to draw him back into His heart and life.

John the Apostle, inspired historian and expositor of the love of God, reveals in his Gospel a beautiful and progressive restoration of this privilege and communion with God, culminating in the sacred intimacies of the upper room. Thus he begins with:

(1) Christ as light in darkness (John 1:9), lighting “every man that cometh into the world.” For light is the first essential in a world of gloom. In our first glimpse (Gen. 1:2) of the world we live in, we are significantly told “darkness was upon the face of the deep,” darkness that was physical. And spiritual darkness descended upon the race when man was blinded by sin. So John tells us thirty times of the “Light that lighteth every man.”

(2) Christ who is our life.” Then in John 3:3 he describes how at the new birth, life from above may be imparted to the “dead.” How important is this revelation to us who were dead in “trespasses and sins.” This is not merely an improvement or quickening of the human life we received from our parents. The “Gift of God which is eternal life” is indeed a different quality of life altogether; it is life from another world, by which for the first time we are made “partakers of the Divine nature,” and become for ever “children of God.”

(3) “Living water.” But to sustain this new life, adequate provision is made by God. Water is needed continually, so in John 4:14 Christ promises His own perennial supplies of “living water... springing up into Everlasting

Life." Are our souls parched and dry? Or are we drinking deep and often of this life-giving stream? We shall ever need to.

(4) "Bread from Heaven." Then in John 6:51 we have the needed complement of water, when our Saviour proclaims: "I am the living bread which came down from Heaven... He that cometh to Me shall never hunger." Yet He advocates a continual hunger and thirst after righteousness! For He has contracted ever to satisfy it! Light, life, water and bread, all are present and general necessities of life, all are freely provided by God.

(5) But guidance is needed for God's children in an alien world. So in John 10:3, 4 we are told of the Good Shepherd and His care and guidance of the so-foolish sheep. This is no impersonal provision, such as light or water or bread. We come now to an essentially personal relationship with a living, loving Shepherd. It betokens a restored intimacy and contact with the very Son of God. "Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah!"

(6) Then in John 12:32 this growing nearness is further emphasized and expressed by the Saviour's words and intention: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me," and this, not through a shining example but by a sacrificial death. He is indeed God's divine magnet to draw to Himself all those who by virtue of the new nature can now respond to His attraction. And He is ever drawing, drawing, drawing His people to Himself. Yet how feebly we sometimes sing, "Draw me nearer!"

(7) At last we come to the upper room, and there the Lover of our souls opens His arms to enclose us in a long embrace. Matthew, Mark, and Luke give us but fifty verses between them on the doings in the upper room.

Thank God, John, years afterwards, is allowed of God to draw aside the curtain and usher us into the intimacies and privileges of that sacred place. He fills five whole chapters with loving details, which enrich the soul and reveal the Son of God. And among the many other sayings of the Saviour, John records a magic formula of our Lord seven times repeated, which ushers us into the very Holiest, the Heart of God. It is found in the simple words: "I... ye also." In its use it embraces all that is needful in the believer's life, in its sequence it leads him up to Heaven and Home.

(1) Let us begin with life. "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). This is no mere bestowal of independent life. A human parent is able to impart life to his child, which is then independent of the parent. It is far otherwise with the believer. For him, eternal union has been re-established, and actually now "Christ is our life" (Col. 3:4). If a large nerve of the human body is cut, part of the body is severed from the brain, no impulses can now reach it. But join the two ends of the nerve together, and in a wonderful way the central nervous system sends out an extension of itself down each of the many minute fibrils of the nerve, each reaching its appointed place, so that without any resulting confusion, union and life are re-established. At the fall sin severed the human members from the Head, but by virtue of the Divine surgery of the Cross, the members have been again brought into living union with the Head; so that, though invisible, there is now an extension of the very life of Christ into the heart of every believer. Thus Christ could declare: "Because I live, ye shall live also."

(2) "I...ye also," of love. "God is love," and God's new life in us must express itself in love, not only to Him but to

one another. So He commanded (John 13:34): "As I have loved you, ye also love one another." Here is a Divine standard set up for our love, "As I ... Ye also." For we are to love one another, not with our own poor puny human love but with the love of God "which is shed abroad in our hearts." Now He knew full well that many of His children would differ largely from each other in their interpretation of some Scriptures. Yet if they are fellow-children of God they must still love one another, and such love cannot really be in exercise without opportunities of contact and fellowship. "Little children love one another," urges John.

(3) "I ... ye also," of humility. "If I then your Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." (John 13:14). Only as we really love and know one another, and seek each other's good and well-being, can we be kept unselfish and humble. For "love seeketh not her own...is not puffed up." Now, sad to say, a "strife among them...which...should be greatest," had intruded itself even into the upper room and the Saviour's farewell discourses. Yet how often such a strife has intruded into our holy things, how often jealousy and self-seeking have marred our "remembrance" of the Lord! God help us to really esteem others better than ourselves.

(4) "I...ye also," of unity. In John 17:21 the Saviour is praying to His Father about the disciples, so the pronouns are changed, but the blessed formula is the same, the embrace is as close: "As...Father...I (am) in Thee, they also may be one in Us." What a desire for us! Here again our Saviour surely foreknew the future and the hearts of His own. Was this to be a vain and impossible ideal? Was this prayer to be unanswered and

unanswerable for true believers who “meet” differently, yet belong to the same Lord? Surely not? What rich blessing comes when we meet simply “all one in Christ Jesus!”

(5) “I... ye also” of sanctification. “I sanctify Myself that they also might be sanctified” (John 17:19). Here again our Great Exemplar “goeth before.” He, the Sinless Son, was separated from all evil, and He wants us also to be separated from all known evil, with a “conscience void of offence.”

(6) “I...ye also,” of service. John 14:12 is a wondrous statement: “The works that I do shall He do also, and greater works.” And the reason: “Because I go to My Father.” They were to exchange His presence for His omnipresence. They had walked with the Son; soon He was to dwell and walk in them through the Spirit, and become the motive force of their lives.

(7) “I ... ye also,” of Home! “I will come again ... that where I am ye may be also” (John 14:2). Here is the supreme fulfilment of the plans of God. Here we are come to “journey’s end.”

“The wanderer no more will roam,
The lost one to the fold has come,
The prodigal is welcomed home,
O Lamb of God, to Thee!”

So the Apostle John has traced the pilgrim’s progress of increasing nearness to God till at last he lands in the Celestial City.

How well Bunyan’s pilgrim expresses it: “I see myself now at the end of my journey; my toilsome days are

ended. I am now going to see the Head that once was crowned with thorns. I have loved to hear my Lord spoken of, and where I have seen the print of His foot on earth, there have I coveted to tread also." So after he had said: "Take me, for I come to Thee," "he ceased to be seen of them... So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side." God grant us each such a steady growth in grace and nearness, that we may have a like "abundant entry into glory:"

2 Dr. L. S. Chafer.

The Paraclete

“Grieve not the Spirit” (Eph. 4:30)

In John 20:21 we read: “Then said Jesus... As My Father hath 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.”

A little later at Pentecost this promise received its evident fulfillment, and so dawned the new age of the Church, so was ushered in the new era of the Spirit. The Saviour’s action and words were deeply significant and intentional. He whom they had known and loved and followed was going away. He who had died and won Heaven for men was returning to that Heaven and the Father.

So before He went He solemnly committed them to the Holy Ghost with whom each one of them would have to deal, the One who was to be the executive of the Godhead on earth, and who as such, was to be honored and obeyed. Christ indeed was to be their life, but that resurrection life of His which they all needed and would continue to need, would only be available through this one Divine channel. His life could only be enjoyed by the aid and through the ministry of One Person, the Holy Spirit. This they must realize once for all, and never forget. For them and for all believers there were to be two great Persons supplying life, and power, and victory—Christ Himself, the one source of that life, and the Holy Spirit, the only One who could and would manifest and communicate that life—and with both Persons they

would ever have to do, as well as with the Father in Heaven.

Yet in the Christian Church today, in quarters where the deepest truths are taught and the purest ambitions toward God are cherished, there is a real danger lest One of those great Persons should be set forth to the exclusion of the other; lest in rightfully exalting Christ, the Holy Spirit is unconsciously ignored and so grieved.

Today much of the teaching about the abundant life in Christ, and the way of power and victory over temptation and sin, seems to be more and more along the lines of what is called "identification with Christ." Verses such as Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live"; and Col. 3:3, "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God," being made the ground and the way of dealing with the old nature, in order that here and now it may become blessedly true that "Sin shall not have dominion over you."

These terms and conceptions are completely scriptural; they do give the doctrinal basis by which we are to overcome; but stated thus continually, and only thus (as with many teachers), the Holy Spirit is practically unmentioned, His work and ministry unintentionally ignored, and His personality lost sight of. If this were the whole presentation of deliverance from sin found in the Scriptures, then all would be well; but an examination of the Epistles shows that it is certainly not the whole truth. Therefore the omission of the ministry of the Spirit cannot please the Saviour, and must be hurtful to the believer.

Without doubt, "great is the mystery of godliness" and of the truths, great and far-reaching, which we are called

to set forth to believers. And it does seem, particularly today, that we need special Divine guidance and wisdom in “rightly dividing the word of truth” to give each Person of the Godhead and each doctrinal aspect their right and proportionate and Scriptural emphasis. For instance, the Saviour is mentioned in the doctrinal portions of the New Testament some three hundred times, the Holy Spirit no less than one hundred and fifty times. Do we mention their names in this proportion, so that for every twice we mention the Saviour we refer to the Holy Spirit at least once? To ask the question answers it. Except for what is often doubtfully referred to as “the guidance of the Spirit,” He is hardly ever mentioned at all, and this from the mistaken idea it might take away from the glory of Christ. In support of this idea the text is quoted: “He shall not speak of Himself,” where the context shows the meaning is, “He shall not speak from Himself,” or of His own volition, but “Whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak.” The Saviour stresses the same truth about Himself in John 12:49: “I have not spoken of (or from) Myself, but the Father... gave Me a commandment what I should say and what I should speak.” Each at the time spoke under control.

Let us now turn to the Epistles wherein are set forth the liberties of the child of God. It is deeply significant how in each case, after the special truth of the Epistle has been set forth, the Holy Spirit is brought in as the Divine Agent through whom that truth may be applied and accomplished in the believer.

Thus in Romans the main subject is freedom from sin; in chaps. 3-5 Christ justifies the believer from its penalty. In chapter 6, through identification with Christ in His

death and resurrection, and by a double reckoning (ver. 11), the believer is set free from the power of sin. Yet let us hear "the conclusion of the whole matter," In chapter 8:2 we are finally told: "The law of the Spirit (of life in Christ Jesus) has set me free from the law of sin and death," and in this chapter the Spirit is set forth as the active liberating Agent no less than nineteen times. His ministry is making effective in the believer all that Christ has done for the believer, in liberating from the power of sin.

In First Corinthians we find the clever Corinthians, with their great head-knowledge, seeking after wisdom, yet knowing little of the deep things of God. Then the splendid destiny of the believer is set forth, "in Christ," who only can be unto them "wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." All this was to become possible. Yet it was quite impossible to the natural man. "For eye hath not seen nor ear heard ... the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." How then were these wonders to be known and possessed? The answer is in chap. 2:10, 11: "God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit search-eth ... the deep things of God" and of Christ. For "the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God...which things also we speak...in the words...which the Holy Ghost teacheth." Here then the Spirit is seen revealing and teaching the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

In Second Corinthians Paul's apostleship is in question. Was he sent of God? Could they believe his revelations? Was his message authentic? Well, God had sealed him and given him the earnest of the Spirit in his heart, (chap. 1:22), for after he believed he was "sealed with that Holy Spirit" (Eph. 1:13). That is another of the

Spirit's functions, and the Corinthians too, were to be "epistles," "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God" (chap 3:3), who was able to give them liberty and change them into the same image (chap 3:17,18). So here the Holy Spirit seals and delivers and transforms the child of God.

In Galatians the deep-seated conflict between the flesh and the Spirit is shown to be the reason for their fickleness and bondage, and confusion of law with grace. Here again it is the Holy Spirit who takes up the conflict on the believer's behalf, and "lusts against" the flesh. So in Galatians the Spirit is set forth fighting on the believer's behalf.

Passing to Ephesians, we are there shown our wonderful position and privileges in Christ, which we might and ought to occupy here and now. But how can this wonderful prospect be realized? Well, because of the death and resurrection of Christ, "through Him we... have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (chap. 2:18). We therefore need to be continually "filled with the Spirit." Again, all that Christ has bought for us must be effected in us by the Spirit, who here gives us access to the Father.

In Philippians we have the Joy Epistle, written by a man in prison and in peril of his life, who is yet able to cry: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always... making request with joy." How did he attain to this height? He was Nero's prisoner, yet he was the Lord's "free man." He had unshaken confidence that all should "turn to my salvation through ... the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ," the kingdom of God "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17).

These then are some of the doctrinal positions, all of which are to be ours. Paul with his keen legal brain, inspired by God, has laid bare the underlying principles. He has shewn us in how many guises the Holy Spirit works in the believer. But these are not to be disguises! He indeed will not speak "from Himself," but will take of the things of Christ and reveal and impart them unto us; but He is not to be ignored or forgotten.

Let us go back to the inspired description of those early years to see how the whole matter looked to the early Church. In the Acts of the Apostles, which might well be named the Acts of the Holy Ghost, how does the inspired historian, Paul's constant companion Luke, describe the general impression produced upon the early Church? "The Holy Ghost said" (Acts 13:2), is the refrain of the whole book. He is clearly recognized as the mighty Executive of the Godhead. He loomed very large in their daily thinking and living. Does He loom as large in our lives? In our thinking is He but an influence? One of our Solomon Island native teachers said he thought of the Holy Spirit "all the same as wind that blows all about!" For our own sakes, and for the sake of those we teach, the Holy Spirit must mean much more to us than that. He must not only dwell in us, He must fill and control us if God's work is to be done in us and in our people. God is waiting to continually verify His word: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." Is that really true in our daily lives? And if not, why not? Is it because we have grieved Him by tacitly ignoring Him? Oh, may we allow Him His full ministry in our lives, that He may without hindrance work in us to will and to do of God's good pleasure.

Let us clearly remember that truth over-emphasized becomes error, doctrines designed by God to be helpful become hurtful. A plank in the floor when in its proper place makes a firm foothold; when lifted out of the floor, out of relation to the other planks, it becomes a stumbling-block. The Word of God is not bound, neither must the Spirit be. We must continually cry to God to give us "the spirit ... of a sound mind," that we may "rightly divide the word of truth," and rightly set forth God's promise of liberty. We should not think it taking away from the honor of the King of England, were he to send the Prince of Wales, his son, to represent him. Neither let us think that it will take away from the glory of Christ, to honor and recognize and refer to the Holy Spirit He has sent to represent Him to us and reveal Him to our hearts. "Grieve not the Spirit!"

The Apostle To The Gentiles

The “must” of God’s Will

Coming north from Galilee, and at last descending from the sun-baked lower slopes of snowy Hermon, Damascus bursts upon the traveller’s gaze, the oldest city in the world. There centuries ago, on the high road near this great Gentile capital, Saul of Tarsus, a Jew, fanatic and patriot, was literally commandeered by the Voice from Heaven to become the great apostle to the Gentiles. There the Saviour identified Himself with His suffering saints with: “Why persecutest thou Me?” It is remarkable that the very verb used by God “persecutest” (dioko) is the same used later by Paul writing to the Phillipians, “I press toward (dioko) the mark of the high calling of God.” But what a blessed contrast! In his earlier days Paul had been pursuing Christ as His most implacable enemy, from now on he was to pursue the Son of God as His most devoted follower and friend. But when “he came near Damascus,” clearer than his sight of the city became his sight of God. For there he saw “a light from Heaven above the brightness of the sun.” In later years he referred to it as, “I could not see for the glory of that light” (Acts 22:11). It seems to have taken him two years in Arabia to regain his sight and to gain his new perspective of the Scriptures he had learned from his youth. But on the Damascus road it was that he became a child of God by the new birth, and received his call and commission to be God’s servant from then on. And in the third sentence he heard that day from heaven there sounded the compelling word he was to know so much

of in all his after life: "It shall be told thee what thou must do." And that same word needs to come much into our lives as well.

(1) This same little peremptory word "must" came early into the Saviour's life. His first recorded sentence contains it: "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" So He cries to His parents; and this was indeed the truest keynote of His whole earthly life and ministry. For of Him, the Creator of all things, it was truly said, "Even Christ pleased not Himself," but, as He explained, "I do nothing of Myself...for I do always those things that please Him." And as "the disciple...shall be as his Master," into Paul's Christian life too, there came at once this same commanding word: "What thou must do."

Yet in this lawless, pleasure-seeking age, such a word, such an idea, becomes increasingly unpopular and distasteful; the self in us rebels against any idea of control or compulsion; we do not like to be "under authority," and duty seems dull and intolerable! How much pleasanter to do only what we like, what we want to do! Yet how fatal! For if this tremendous "must" of the will of God has not and does not come early into our lives, to control our actions, and guide our steps, we shall be like rudderless ships, and must make final shipwreck of our lives.

(A) Indeed we shall find this "must" of the will of God a wonderful comfort and safeguard once we are yielded to it. It will solve all our problems, and settle all our plans. We who know not "what a day shall bring forth" need the guidance and help of the "One who knows the end from the beginning," and we may daily have it. Too often

we fight against the evident will of God for our lives, till at last we have to yield; then we resign ourselves to it with a sigh. That was not the way David felt and lived: "Oh, how I love Thy will, O my God!" Nor was it the way Madam Guyon wrote from behind prison bars:

"Thou sweet beloved will of God...

In thee I hide me and am still!"

But this may still become a profound spiritual fact in our lives too, for, as soon as "faith has cried a joyous Yes, to every dear command of His," the responsibility is His also, and no longer ours. "He knoweth the way that I take," and "He who has thus made" will most certainly also "bear," and if He leads *us into difficult ways, why, "When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold!"

(B) And God's "must" is the most tremendous driving force in life. It may drive us from the comforts of the homeland, and many amenities of life. It will buy many a ticket to the foreign mission field. It may thrust us out into very far-off lands and to lonely mission stations. It may bring us to face and bear very great responsibilities such as we would never have faced alone or at home. Yet when that will of God drives us to some far-off destiny, we shall always find the Saviour has got there first, He ever "goeth before," so that though "I dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there... Thy right hand shall hold me." So though at times we may seem to stand alone against the foe, yet we stand with God, and we shall find His blessed compulsion will introduce us to blessed conquests.

(2) Yet there is a further deeper note in this "must" of God. "The Son of Man must suffer many things," proclaimed the Saviour at Caesarea Philippi. This was of

course inevitable to Him in a world of sin. And this too must needs be reproduced in all His true followers. Prophetic was Ananias' message to Paul: "I will show him," said God, "how great things he must suffer for My name's sake." And for us? Each one of us, with John (Rev. 1:9), must be their "companion in tribulation" even as we share in "the kingdom and patience of Christ." We must not think it "strange" when in some humble measure we too become partakers of the sufferings of Christ. Yet let us not tremble or "faint." We shall ever find that the joy outweighs the sorrow, the peace overbalances the pain. Though Christ "must suffer," and we with Him, thank God, He also "must reign," and we with Him also. But here and now by His grace may we each be able humbly to experience and explain "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich...O ye Corinthians...our heart is enlarged!"

(3) "Other cities also." But there is a third implication of this small but imperative word. We must follow, we must suffer, and we must still and ever advance! Thronged as the Saviour continually was with the needs, the sorrows, the sinners around Him, He ever looked farther afield. There were "other sheep" His heart longed for. So He cried: "I must preach ... to other cities also." So in ever-widening circles the truth must be proclaimed. The best way to defend is to attack, to advance. And how this urge of the unreached took hold upon His servant Paul! "Woe is me," he cried, "if I preach not the gospel." So, "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth to those things which are before," he cries: "I press towards the mark!"

And as there were "other cities" and "other sheep" in the Saviour's time and in Paul's ministry, so there are in

the world today. God still commands an advance. His “must” must be shown in the thrusting out of new workers whatever the times, however dark. He knows full well the difficulties. Jesus “Himself knew what He would do,” of old. He still “knows,” and cares and will undertake for His own. In His care we are safe.

Seeing “Visions” (Acts 2:17)

As one writes these lines one sees again so clearly the blue rolling Pacific. And there rise before one’s mind three long blue bars on the horizon, the three great islands in the Eastern Solomons near New Guinea, where God has been working so graciously in recent years. Their many bays and mountains are now thronged with ten thousand converts. But what grave and growing responsibilities such a family of God entails upon the little band of missionaries! How beset they are with “the care of all the churches,” with fresh problems and dangers which continually arise and increase, and the “many adversaries.” Indeed, “who is sufficient for these things?”

And in answer one’s thoughts fly away to the great Apostle to the Gentiles. How would he have fared today? What would have been his confidence, his resources? Well, he was but a “man of like passions as we are.” Our problems would have been real problems to him, and his spiritual resources were no greater than ours. He had a whole Christ to draw upon, and so have we. And so his experiences may be repeated in our puny lives. Not perhaps his experiences of suffering and hardship, for he was peculiarly made “a spectacle to the world;” but his experience of God may be ours, for these were part of the common heritage of “all the saints.”

In his remarkable missionary labors Paul had seven special revelations of God and of the will and mind of God. All these I believe He is prepared to repeat to us also in our day and generation. These seven were some of the "visions" promised to "your young men" in Acts 2:17 which have never been annulled. And together they seem beautifully to summarize the resources and safeguards which are still open to all God's servants.

(1) The certainty of the sight of Acts 9:4 was the first of these remarkable experiences, where, to one "born out of due time," Christ appeared to Paul on the Damascus road. Christ had said to His followers (Acts 1:8): "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me ... unto the uttermost parts of the earth." Now a man can only be a witness of what he has seen. So Paul "saw" the Lord that day. And ever after, that was his strongest argument to convict and convince his hearers of the truth. "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1), he cries, to the clever Corinthians. So, every missionary, every "sent one," must first by faith have "seen" his Lord and know for certain he has seen Him. The certainty of this sight will always be stronger than any argument, for "seeing is believing." And today men want, not theories but, realities and certainties. And knowing that we have thus "seen" Christ and do know Him, becomes the most positive and certain fact of our existence. Every missionary who has not "seen" the Lord clearly and unmistakably needs a return ticket to the home-lands! It is characteristic of the apostle that following his question: "Who art Thou, Lord?" on hearing the Saviour's voice, his next unhesitating question was rightly: "What wilt Thou have me to do, Lord?" Would that we were as prompt in obedience!

(2) The clearness of His call (Acts 13:2) is only second in importance to his sight of the Saviour. Missionaries essentially go, and go continually, into the unknown, as far as health, or support, or life itself are concerned. They often know not what a day may bring forth. For they will come repeatedly into "wits' end corner." It may seem so often that they have made a mistake. Like Moses when he cast his rod upon the ground, and it became a serpent, their step of faith may seem to reap only disaster. So they must needs have large reserves of faith in God. And their impregnable resource will ever be, to know clearly and unmistakably, "So they being sent forth by the Holy Ghost" (Acts 13:4). Then when trouble, perplexity, or seeming disaster come, it is God's prerogative to deal with the trouble and to uphold His servant. Then "one with God becomes a majority" when it is quite certain that the one is with God; that He has sent; He has made or allowed the difficulty, and He will bear. Each sent one must be convinced then, that, "Christ the Son of God hath sent me Through the midnight lands;

Mine the mighty ordination

Of the pierced hands."

Then all will be well, and the storms, the troubles, the burdens, and perplexities become merely "Heavenly hammers for forging our crowns."

(3) The consolations of suffering. "A man...caught up to the third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:2). This was Paul's third vision chronologically. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward" —that is the lot of all, believers and unbelievers. But it is often the privilege of the Christian that he gets his share of trouble, life's discipline, which

we all need, in God's service, rather than in his own life and affairs. This was largely the experience of the apostle. In 2 Cor. 11:33 he had been recounting his "labors more abundant," his "stripes above measure." It is a long and moving list of all that he suffered for the gospel. And then, at the end, one last item occurred to him: "Through a window, in a basket, was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands." What an unusual piece of missionary work! And what an ignominious exit! "Let down!" Yet does God ever "let His servants down?" Well, He sometimes allows men to let them down! But a man with such an escape and such an experience is likely soon to qualify for Paul's next experience: "Caught up to the third heaven," to hear "unspeakable words" and to gain a knowledge of God never to be forgotten. Such then are the consolations of the gospel, and our feeble sharing of "His sufferings." And as we look back over years of experience in work for God, the times of greatest extremity will continually be found to have been times of God's opportunity and His greatest nearness. Consolations indeed!

(4) The completeness of the guidance in Acts 16:10: "Forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach ... in Asia" is Paul's fourth vision. He is turned aside from province after province his eager heart would have occupied for Christ, as "the Spirit suffered them not." For Paul must be launched into a great forward movement, launched into the continent of Europe! How easy it is to miss the way in life. How irretrievable are some of our mistakes! Yet for God's servant clear guidance is promised and provided for: "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way;" and so "I would have you without carefulness" or anxious care becomes blessedly

possible and practical, when the way is chosen for us by One who knows “the end from the beginning.” For He only, is able to steer the little bark of our lives past the shoals and perils of life into our “desired haven.”

What a blessing and rest to have all life’s problems solved for us, all mistakes safeguarded, and to be assured that “He knoweth the way that I take.” Of course this peace of problems solved and dangers safeguarded in advance, implies that we are willing to be guided, that the “government (of our lives) shall be upon His shoulder,” and shall daily be kept there.

But having been shown the way, God’s way, we must respond to the showing. Paul “immediately endeavored to go,” when the Spirit directed. That, should be the normal attitude of every believer. Having seen the vision of the needs of the heathen, having heard the command: “Go ye,” each of us is duly bound to “endeavor to go.” Only a few are qualified to go in body, God will stop most of His children going in person, but surely if we have the “mind of Christ” we shall feel bound to go at least in “purse” and in prayer. It seems to me that loyalty to Christ will result in prompt obedience, in at least an honest “endeavor to go” in person as well.

(5) The confirmation of God’s will is seen in the next vision. For visiting Corinth after the rebuff at Athens, in Acts 18:9, 10 again comes a vision in the night: “Be not afraid, but speak ... for I am with Thee.” It has been truly said that the “stops” of a good man are ordered by the Lord, as well as his “steps,” and it was so here. For this hurrying firebrand of the gospel must now pause in his urgency to ever preach Christ in the “next cities,” “and he continued there a year and six months.” But

Paul had the Divine assurance that he was in the will of God in doing so; and we too are promised as definite guidance: "I will guide thee with Mine eye" (Ps. 32:8).

(6), (7) The comfort of God's presence is assured in the last two visions. Before the Jewish Sanhedrin when Paul was in danger of being "pulled in pieces of them," and he must be rescued by the soldiers, "the night following, the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul." Later, on his promised voyage to Rome in the storm, Paul testifies: "There stood by me this night the angel of God, saying, Fear not, Paul." How gracious these two interventions, how steadying these two reassurances must have been to that battered messenger of God. And such messages of comfort and promises of protection seem strangely appropriate today in the changing conditions of much of modern missionary service. As the storm-clouds gather in many of the great mission fields, China and Africa and the East, and missionary lives become increasingly unsafe, here is a "very present help in trouble." We are indeed "immortal till our work is done," if we keep inside the will of God. But hearts are very human, and danger at times is very imminent, yet still God is both omnipotent and very gracious, and I feel sure we can still claim the guidance and enjoy the protection of the "God of Elijah," the Lord of Paul, in our very present dangers and difficulties and anxieties. Paul, with Elijah, was a man of "like passions as we are." Let us then dare with Peter (2 Pet. 1:1) to exercise "like precious faith," faith that is very precious to God, faith that will make God increasingly precious to us.

The Believer

“My Expectation is from God” (Psalm 62:5)

My expectation!” How the words ring down the centuries out of David’s troubled life! For here was a man who might easily have become a cynic or a pessimist after his scurvy treatment by King Saul. But happily, David had long learned the useful habit of getting his eyes off men and on to God. Like Elijah who followed him, he had looked into the face of famine and then had calmly looked into the face of God, and he could never forget the experience. The result was that he could remain not only unmoved by present distresses, but positively aggressively expectant not only of present relief but of still greater blessing.

In this confident psalm, as was his custom when he was liable to feel depressed, David as it were detached himself from his own soul, got it out opposite to him, that he might expostulate with it and exhort it—a very useful and salutary habit! And just at this time he is led to ring the changes on the word “only,” from the only expectation of his enemies to cast him down, to the only rock of his salvation, the source of his safety, to hold him up. Yet far more than mere passive security, his ardent soul goes out in sane and eager expectation in God for a further advance in blessing.

And such expectation is an attitude of soul towards God which is neither easy or natural, but which needs to be deliberately cultivated, for it is both God-honoring and God-compelling. Such expectation is more than mere passive trust, is deeper than honest desire, and higher

than hope in the abstract. It outruns all of these, for it is positive, aggressive, and Divinely ambitious. And I am sure it is an attitude of mind towards God which should be deliberately cultivated and steadfastly maintained by all of us. We are so liable to transfer to the spiritual realm those disappointments which so often come to us in human affairs, and to become pessimists towards God.

Now this same attitude of “expectation” toward God is carried over into the New Testament. At once there comes to mind the Saviour, who at the right hand of God is described as “expecting” till His enemies become His “footstool.” But here the word used is different to that applied to men, and rather has the sense of waiting, for the word “expectation” in itself, as we use it, implies uncertainty as to the future, and, thank God, there is no uncertainty as to His future or the finality of His dominion.

But in Luke 3:15 we do have a very beautiful state of mind described: “For all the people was in expectation,” a state of mind aroused by God. Then, it was as to the first advent of the Son of God. Today, thank God, in many quarters there is a similar expectation as to His second advent. Yet—may I say?—even more vital to the soul than the second advent is the present advent of the Saviour into our hearts in fulness and blessing.

Perhaps our present and rightful expectation in God might well be summed up in the declaration once made in public by Mr. Hudson Taylor. His emphatic words were these: “There is a living God, He has spoken to us in His Word, He means what He says, and can be depended upon to do all He has promised.” To many that

may seem a slender charter upon which to found our faith and base our lives and destinies. Yet history has long declared that it is “no vain thing” to trust in the living God, and we may safely explore His faithfulness in our day and generation.

Now it is an interesting fact that the three cardinal Christian virtues of faith, hope (or expectation) and love, everywhere pervade the Old Testament. Thus in the early ages we find Abel slaying his lamb “by faith.” We find Job surrounded by the ruins of his fortune singing still in “hope,” and we find the “love” of God permeating the pages and the lives in the Old Testament. Again, when we come to the Epistles, “Now abideth faith, hope and love,” which run like a refrain through these messages of God, to lighten human hearts and change human lives.

Yet when we come to the Gospels, though faith and love are again in constant operation, faith being the entrance door to salvation, and love the enjoyment of it, yet hope, as a noun is never once mentioned. The reason for its omission is as simple as it is blessed. In the Old Testament men were hoping for Messiah’s coming; in the Epistles we are hoping for His return; but in the Gospels believers had Him in their midst. And the Lord Jesus Christ is Himself the Hope, the only hope of His people. Before He came and after He went, there was constant need for the exercise of hope for Him and in Him. But “can the children mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with them?” (Matt. 9:15). For “what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” (Rom. 8:24). Indeed He “is our hope,” so that while He was present with His people on earth, hope was centred in Him and was satisfied, and was no longer in operation. This

remarkable omission of any mention of "hope" in the Gospels is another happy reminder of how for us, everything centres in one Blessed Person, our Lord Jesus Christ.

But now He is gone, as to bodily presence, and in His absence hope must again come into active operation. And so the noun or verb reappears sixty times in the Epistles, from "the consolation and good hope," which results in our "rejoicing," to the confident "hope in God," "which maketh not ashamed" and includes the future "blessed hope" of Christ's return.

For if faith is the upward attitude of the soul, and love the outward, hope, or expectation, is that forward attitude which reaches out to those things which are before and anticipates the promises. How blessedly different to the poor worldlings who are ever "without hope and without God in the world!"

So we have thought a little of the Psalmist's expectation of coming events, and of the waiting people's expectation of God's visitation and blessing, which is still in the hearts of God's people today. But there is one more "expectation" which needs to be found in our hearts as well. It just expresses the Apostle's outlook. And so eager is his desire for "this grace also," that a special intensive form of the word has to be used to express his feelings, found nowhere else in Scripture: "apokaradokia," my "earnest expectation" (Phil. 1:20). And what was the object of this most eager expectation? "More worlds to conquer" for the gospel? More provinces to evangelize or churches to found? More hundreds of converts to win for the Saviour? More immortal epistles to write for the permanent enrichment

of the Church for all time? No; something even more personal and precious than any of those great privileges.

Paul's supreme expectation was simply in the words of Scripture: "That Christ shall be magnified in my body." And what is the purpose of a magnifying-glass? To be seen itself? Far otherwise. It is to make some object more visible. And that was exactly Paul's earnest expectation, not to be seen or noticed himself, but to help to make the Saviour more visible to men and women around. The astronomer's glass brings the heavenly body nearer, and so would Paul bring this Heavenly Visitor nearer to the ones He had come to seek and to save. Surely this is a very safe and pure ambition. It might not indeed fit in with modern "publicity methods" which so seem to exalt the man, the servant. For today he wants to be in the picture! He is doing the work, he wants a little of the glory! Well, so did not Paul. For the cleaner the lens and the better it does its work, the less it will be seen, and that was just the wise ambition of God's great servant.

Now this same very great privilege and service is open to the very humblest of His own. For it depends not on brains, but on hearts, loving hearts. Many of our lives have to be lived among "common things," but if this grace of "magnifying" Christ becomes ours, they need never be "commonplace." Gracious Lord, may the self in each of us be so lost sight of, that Christ, and only Christ, shall be seen through the little lens of our lives, and that we may ever and effectually magnify Thee to the needy world around! And do Thou ever enlarge our "expectations" in Thee, and for Thee!

Faith is the Victory

“This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). That statement of course cannot stand alone. It is a great declaration of a great truth, yet as it stands it is really only a half-truth. For faith in itself has no virtue or value, it may be even the most hurtful delusion unless the object of the faith is the right one.

Yet this one-sided statement of truth finds its most beautiful complement and consummation in the Saviour’s own declaration: “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). So it is really and only our faith in a risen and victorious Saviour which can in any sense overcome the world which “lieth in the evil one,” and so is ever antagonistic to God.

“Have faith in God” (Mark 11:22) must therefore become our watchword and war-cry. But how to have faith in God, how only to ask in accordance with His will? For all His promises, though essentially “Yea and Amen” in Christ, are yet conditional upon being “according to the will of God.” It is here the faithful are liable to errors and mistakes. For faith often must be directed to expecting the impossible, for, “All things are possible to him that believeth.”

And here we are liable to error in two directions, and to run from one extreme to the other in our adventures of faith, to have fainting faith, on the one hand, and to have foolish faith on the other, to expect too little or too much. And we have to learn by experience, by God’s grace, to steer a middle course, the middle course not of compromise, but of the centre of the will of God. To turn neither to the left hand nor to the right.

These two opposite dangers are strikingly brought out in our Lord's first two temptations. When in Matthew 4:2, having fasted forty days, "He was afterwards an hungered," the tempter came and said: "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Now we know that He who (chap. 3:9) had just claimed to be able "of these stones to raise up children to Abraham" could equally with a word have commanded "stones to be made bread." What then was the temptation of the evil one to Him? Was it not that He should take Himself out of His Father's care, abandon His position of dependence, and provide for Himself, as if He could no longer depend on His Father's love and wisdom to provide for Him.

Had He done this (which, of course, as the sinless Son of God He could not do) faith would thereby have given place to fear and panic. And just so the constant temptation to us, in the difficult places our loving Father's will brings us into, is to doubt our Father's love and care or ability to deliver us, to "faint" in our faith, and instead of leaning on God to lean instead on "the arm of flesh."

The second temptation to the Saviour was: "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down, for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee...lest...Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." That protection from Psalm 91:11 was undoubtedly a promise given by God, and apparently for just such a time as this. Yet as it was not just then the will of His Father, that He should cast Himself down, the promise was not therefore available and did not apply. So had Christ followed out the suggestion of the evil one (which, thank God, He could not do) He would have been giving way not now to

panic but to presumption. He would have been presuming on the promise of the keeping power of God, as we Christians so easily and so often do.

It is so easy and natural for us to form our plans for God, relying upon some convenient promise which seems to apply, when all the time such plans are not the will of God, and so such promises are not available. In other words we are presuming, having presumptuous faith, and then we wonder why God has not answered our prayer and honored our faith.

Between Italy and Sicily lie the Straits of Messina, narrow and stormy, scoured by tides and swept by squalls. To add to the danger and peril of the ancient mariner with his frail sailing-ship, on the Italian shore frowns the menacing rock of Scylla; while equally dangerous on the Sicilian shore is the dreaded whirlpool of Charybdis, guarding the Straits. The anxious mariner in seeking to keep clear of the rock Scylla was likely to be engulfed in the whirlpool of Charybdis on his other bow, and vice versa.

And herein is a parable of the life of faith. For surely to all of us, called to deal in faith in God there is the danger of feeble and fainting faith on the one hand, and, avoiding this, of foolish and presumptuous faith on the other. Who then is sufficient for these things? Who can avoid these dangers? Thank God for the exactly applicable promise of Isaiah 30:21: "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." Thank God, He has not given us the spirit of fear, but of "power, and of love, and of a sound mind," a sound mind to discern the will of God. So as we walk

“softly” before God we may be kept from extremes and errors, from panic and presumption, and kept safe and steadfast in the middle way of the will of God, and so may triumphantly reach His desired goal of faith.

If then “assuredly gathering” what is the will of God, and having great and precious promises which do apply, and will prevail, we must ever “obtain” these promises by the reckoning of faith. For “obtaining” a promise is more than mere praying or asking, it is asking in faith, and believing to obtain, asking and receiving in fact.

This is graphically brought out in the first Bible record of a man “believing God” (Gen. 15:6). Here faith laughed at a human impossibility and cried, “It shall be done!” By the “law of the first mention” of a word in the Bible, great importance attaches to this text. Here the relations between believing by man and imputing by God, are first and finally settled.

The word used here for “believing,” as indeed right through the Old Testament is the Hebrew word (in English spelling) “Aman.” It is similar in meaning, and almost exactly similar in form, to the better-known Hebrew word, “Amen.” Now with most people the use of the word Amen at the end of a prayer is almost like a postscript, a further earnest petition, “May it be so,” in regard to what has been audibly asked before. Yet this is not at all the real force and meaning of “Amen.” The word uttered after a spoken petition is not a further prayer to God, but rather a respectful command: “Be it so,” in the sense of “It shall be so.” So faith in this sense of Amen is “an affirmation and an act which bids eternal truth be fact.” And we are graciously invited by a loving Father to do just this in prayer, “concerning the work of

My hands command ye Me" (Isa. 45:11). So Abraham "amened" God in regard to His promise in regard to Isaac.

Thus the Hebrew "Aman," translated "believe," and the Hebrew "Amen" not usually translated, are both humble yet confident affirmations of belief that what we have asked of God is in accordance with His will, and therefore we have "received" the petition. ("What things soever ye desire ...believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" Mark 11:24.) This may seem all a great mystery, yet it is really the coping-stone of an act of faith, asking, believing, and receiving, affirming that God has answered, and maintaining that position in simple faith.

And this great principle of affirming faith is frequent in the "faithful." Thus, faced with as great a miracle as Abraham, Elizabeth (Luke 1:45) believes and affirms (in regard to Mary), "Blessed is she that believeth, for there shall be a performance of those things told her." So Elizabeth "Amened" God, in regard to Mary's promise of a soil. So too With Sarah who laughed first in unbelief (Gen. 18:12), and later laughed in confident faith (Gen. 21:6). She too "received strength" through faith. She "believed," but went further when she judged (or affirmed) Him faithful who had promised (Heb. 11:11).

Finally Paul in the storm, assured by the angel of the safety of all on board, a seeming miracle, confessed (Acts 27:25), "I believe God" and then followed by "Amening" God, "It shall be even as it was told me."

Here we have then an important principle that in the use of those weapons that alone are "mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds," we need to do more

than ask, we must ask and believe, and still further, take our stand, and stake our all, upon God doing what He has promised to do. So we can quietly and confidently join the apostle in "Be of good cheer; I believe God," and it shall be so. This is indeed "faith triumphant." Lord, increase our faith."

God's Life Assurance (Ps. 11:3, 4)

In Psalm 11 the writer puts a question which is very much to the point today in these times of war. He asks, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" For the world's foundations are being destroyed before our eyes, the foundations of life and liberty and society. Today in a way unthinkable a generation ago, foundations we thought established for all time are being dissolved before our eyes, and the State claims the soul as well as the body of its subject. The foundations of peace laid with such care twenty years ago, have gone; and might, not right, seems to rule the world. The natural cry as a result is: "What can the righteous do?" Now, in verse four, comes a strange statement in the Psalm which partly explains this strange and ominous outlook for the believer. The Lord's "eyelids try the children of men." Many a time we must all have pictured to ourselves the eyes of God "beholding the evil and the good," and watching His children in their daily lives and activities for Him. Have we ever pondered the functions of the eyelids of God? This is of course metaphorical language, for God is a Spirit; yet this remarkable statement is intended to convey something very definite to us. How can God's eyelids try men? Surely the inference is that as we look up in our need and danger and perplexity and cry to

Him, God appears unseeing, He seems inattentive to our cry, because His eyes are veiled to our need. He does this with the very definite and gracious purpose of the “nevertheless afterwards.” But in spite of this seeming inattention, and lack of sight, and therefore knowledge of our fears and needs, yet all the time we are reassured: “His eyes behold the children of men.” Thank God, too, there is more than that: “His throne is in Heaven,” He is omnipotent, and is always seriously concerned about each humblest believer and his every need.

Now this most interesting question: “If the foundations be destroyed?” has been deliberately faced by the business world. For in modern life a rather wonderful system of insurance has been developed, by which men, warned by disasters in the past, have sought to insure themselves against loss and damage in an unknown future. Thus men insure their lives against death, their houses against fire, their goods against theft, their cars against damage. Thus in this life the “children of this world are in their generation (often) wiser than the children of light;” they realize the wisdom of safeguarding the future as far as possible.

But there is one factor such men are unable to insure against. For insurance companies often specially exempt themselves from paying for damages resulting from what they call “an act of God.” But in these uncertain and perilous days this is just what we need to be, and may be, insured about most of all. For God has not left us in darkness; He has foretold “wars and rumors of wars,” “men’s hearts failing them for fear for...those things coming on the earth.” So we must be prepared, and being forewarned ought to be fore-armed.

Of course, Christians do not need or want to be insured against these acts of God; for, as children of God, we have His special promises and protection. No; we need not be insured against them but to be assured about them, so that when they do occur, our faith may not fail, and our position of trust in God may not be abandoned in panic, but rather that “in quietness and confidence” in God, we may still find our strength and realize we are still “safe in the arms of Jesus.” How can we get this “all-in” policy from God then, which will cover all our risks, and meet all our needs?

Well, the basis of all assurance and reassurance about our unknown dangers and difficulties is summed up in two clauses of our Lord’s departing words: “All power is delivered unto Me,” and “Lo, I am with you alway.” For God still controls the world, and is able to safeguard and comfort His own. These two sentences from Matthew 28:18, 20 have a very special value and application today in these perilous times.

Yet in reassuring ourselves about difficulties and God’s power of dissolving them, we must always remember that His plans are larger than ours and often quite different to ours. He is often indeed “the God of the unexpected.”

This is well and strikingly brought out in the case of the three Hebrews in Daniel 3. Their insurance against the king’s wrath consisted in three successive clauses of faith: (1) “Our God is able to deliver us from the furnace.” I trust all of us, in view of past deliverances by God, can quite confidently say that. (2) “He will deliver us out of thy hand, O King.” That too was their confidence. From their then-permitted viewpoint, they

believed God would do so. We, too, are often equally convinced God is going to deliver us, and that, too, in the way we have planned for Him.

Yet if that had been the limit of their confidence and their faith, it would not have sufficed these Hebrews. But they had in reserve a last and final insuring clause in the “insurance policy” which saved the situation. They were able to go on valiantly with a declaration which was absolutely invincible. (3) “But if not, we will not ... worship the golden image.” So then, and ever since, a quiet confidence like that took them right past second causes and men, and left them dependent on the only and first great Cause, God. They were insured indeed! And exactly so, we may be today. We too may be called to this last great stand of faith.

For, after all, God did not deliver them—did not deliver them from the furnace, because He willed to do an ever so much greater thing. He willed to deliver them in the furnace, and thereby accomplish a number of important things.

So these three high officials ignominiously “bound” “fell down into the midst of the burning fiery furnace,” which was not very pleasing to the flesh, but was mightily pleasing to God. For on the terms of such a faith and obedience “yielding” their bodies to God, that they might not yield their wills to the king, wonderful things began to happen.

God, who had seemed unconcerned before, was evidently most deeply concerned. (1) He caused the flames to burn with a wonderful discrimination, so that though their bonds were consumed in an instant, not “a hair of their head was singed” nor the smell of smoke

passed upon them. He can still control the flames of every sore trial and affliction. And have we no bonds? Can they not be got rid of in other ways? Well, often God tries other ways, but because of our unwillingness, may have to have recourse as a last resort to fire.

How many bonds are liable to entangle us with things below. How many of God's children have been bound to the world; so preoccupied with material things that they have had little time left over for God, or longings for the Saviour's return. Yet He so wants us to be ready and expectant! That is why a good many bonds have been burned in recent years of disappointment and disillusionment. Many have been banker's bonds, which have become hardly worth the paper they were printed on. God has been reminding us, "Here we have no continuing city," though many have been seeking to make one. Truly indeed.

"The angels from their home on high
Look down on us with pitying eye,
That where we are but passing guests
We build such strong and solid nests:
While where we hope to dwell for aye
We scarce take heed one stone to lay."

(2) In the furnace they had a marvelous interview with the Son of God. Perhaps as they were being bound, they were glad that Daniel was out of it all, away perhaps on some distant embassy! He at least would escape. And he did! But he missed more than the fire, for he thereby missed that never-to-be-forgotten meeting with the Son of God, which was no doubt the outstanding event of these Hebrews' lives. Is it not so sometimes with us? As

we look back from the “nevertheless afterwards,” when calm has come again after trial, do we not realize that then was the time of God’s greatest nearness and imminence, and our greatest privilege.

(3) The King’s word was changed, and no doubt his heart as well if we may judge from the proclamation he made. Is this not a very proper way of convincing the doubter? When God delivers us, protects us, and in the middle of the fire enables us to “continue,” is it not the very best, the surest, proof to the worldling that God is able to save to the uttermost, and is a “very present help?”

Thus there were three blessed results from the fire, all won by their triumphant “But if not,” that invincible statement of their final belief and trust in God. Is it not this same last uttermost faith which characterized the great believers who live and triumph in the Bible?

(a) Just so at the supreme crisis in Abraham’s life, to his sinking heart (Gen. 21:7) came Isaac’s wondering embarrassing question, so hard to face, so hard to answer: “Behold the wood...but where is the lamb?” What could his father say? Only this, “God will Himself provide a lamb.” That was what he hoped, he believed. “God will surely provide, but if not, you, Isaac, will have to die.” Abraham did not actually say that. But he did more, he lived it, and so went on in absolute trust in God, as the knife was upraised, believing, as the New Testament tells us, “God was able to raise him even from the dead.” Not for nothing was Abraham finally called “the friend of God.”

(b) Job too, in sore afflictions, is able still to cling and cry, “He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath

tried me I shall come forth as gold!" That was his earnest expectation, but absolutely safeguarding it was his reserve "But if not," "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Thus he too was Divinely guarded against the unexpected.

(c) Great-hearted John the Baptist joins this confident company. He sends from prison his perplexed question, "Art Thou He which should come?" As if to say, Thou art not doing what we expected; we see no kingdom being set up. Yet the quavering question, "Art Thou He that should come?" is followed by a statement confident with invincible faith: "But if not" "we shall look for Another." "We believe and are convinced the promised Messiah is coming. We shall find Him, we must follow Him. Art Thou He?—for if not we shall go on looking for Another which is He." So John has the same safeguard from his human expectations, and has ultimate reliance on God.

(d) Finally there appears One greater than Abraham, than Job, than John, One who in His mysterious prayer in the garden makes use of the same invincible formula of faith in God. "Let this cup pass," He cries, "but if not" "Thy will be done." The prayer we cannot fathom, but the plea we can repeat, and so be forever safe in the will of God. But the fact that the Divine Son of God thus puts His imprimatur upon this great revealed principle is an indication how urgent it is that we His children should learn to ever leave the result with God.

Yes; this "But if not" is indeed an impregnable phrase of equally impregnable faith, which places the believer beyond the reach of man or of second causes or of surrounding circumstances, and safely delivers him for

ever into the hands of God. It is a “strong habitation indeed.” Ever let us use it!

“Praying with all perseverance” (Eph. 6:18)

God in His wisdom has ordained that man shall be one of the essential links in the chain of Divine blessing. He who might have had “more than twelve legions of angels,” has yet chosen the weak human instrument without which His power often cannot be manifested and available. This Divine mystery is still further deepened when we come to the realm of prayer. Often in Scripture it is revealed that God has determined on some action or blessing, yet still He waits till the human intercessor, with the lever of faith and prayer, has set in motion these Divine actions and blessings.

There are accurate accounts preserved for us by God, of such successful intercession by many of the greatest men of the Bible. And there are two of Abraham and Elijah which are in startling contrast, and which are recorded in such detail that they are evidently to be deeply instructive for us “upon whom the ends of the world are come.”

Of course faith as a motive force is very much discredited among men in these days of “many inventions” in the material world. Yet Christians must still live up to their old Bible name of “believers.” They must still set their watches by the Sun of Righteousness rather than by the clocks of men. They must still maintain their attitude of “looking unto Jesus” for deliverance and blessing. We need not be particularly concerned in “thinking with the great thinkers,” for their theories change from day to day; but we need to be tremendously concerned about “believing with the great

believers" in a living God who changeth not, in order that, as with faithful Abraham, it may be "counted unto us for righteousness."

(A) In the case of Abraham indeed we are given the example in Genesis 18:25 of an unsuccessful intercession, yet the whole passage is fraught with spiritual lessons.

(1) Abraham was granted the privilege (which indeed is still open to believers today) of being in the "inner circle" with God. We read in Psalm 103:7: "He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts to the children of Israel." Moses, then, was admitted to that inner circle, while the Israelites saw only the outward acts of God. To Moses were made known the principles upon which God acted, His motives and His desires. So it may be with the humblest believer if he will only consult the Word as to things "which shall be hereafter." And so it was, then, with Abraham. "Shall I hide from Abraham," asked God, "the thing which I do?" And evidently God decided He would not do so, because "Abraham shall become a mighty nation." So straightway He revealed to him the urgency of judgment for Sodom.

(2) Twenty-five years before Abraham had been allowed of God to rescue his disinherited nephew, Lot (Gen. 15:2), from the four heathen kings who had taken him captive; but it was only to bring him back again to Sodom. And now at this fresh danger to the nephew whom he still loved Abraham steps into the breach again. "Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" he asks of God. That was just what God did not do, as the after events showed. But here again we are reminded of the Lord's own words: "Ye are the salt of

the earth” (Matt. 15:13). The righteous are designed by God to be a restraining force on the wickedness of the world around; but—wonderful fact!—they are also a restraint upon the judgments of God. For “the longsuffering of God” still “waits,” not only in mercy to sinners, but also on account of the presence of the saints (1 Peter 3:19).

(3) Then Abraham begins to plead for the doomed city, and makes request again and again, and evidently with God’s full approval. He does not, as with Paul in regard to the “thorn,” meet with immediate refusal by God, but is led on from request to request, from faith to faith, till Sodom’s reprieve depends on the presence of only ten righteous persons within it.

(4) And that would have gained the day, had only Lot like Moses been “faithful in all his house,” or had he like Abraham commanded “his children and his household after him” (Gen. 18:18). For it seems clear that had Lot won for God even, and only, the members of his own household, wife, and sons, and married daughters, and their husbands, as well as the two daughters who alone escaped with him, there would have been the required ten righteous. Reading the Bible account indeed there seem to be no righteous at all in Sodom. Yet we are told in 2 Peter 2:8 that “just Lot...that righteous man...vexed his righteous soul, with their unlawful deeds.”

(5) Yet surely these ten verses giving us such details of Abraham’s intercession with God, are to instruct us, to encourage us to go on asking, “making our petition large.” For it evidently pleased God that His servant should pray and persist. And how many times did he pray? Just six times. Six is the human number of

incompleteness, the number that just falls short of seven, which is the Divine and perfect number of completeness. So Abraham exercised faith in God six times, and just failed in accomplishing the deliverance and “obtaining” God’s promise of mercy. “All nations of the earth” were to be “blessed in him.” Yet Sodom just failed to be included. In fact, this great believer prayed “with perseverance,” which did not quite persevere. For pleading, “Wilt Thou ... not spare the place?” six times only, Sodom was destroyed, even though Lot and his daughters were saved out of it.

(B) A successful intercession. In contrast let us turn to Elijah. He, great man of God though he was, does not find a place in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews among the paladins of faith, though his miracles are referred to. Perhaps this was because he had earlier been “mentioned in despatches,” in the Epistle of James years before.

(1) There (James 5:17) his natural character and his spiritual exploits are described in striking contrast. “He was subject to like passions as we are,” and we watch the prophet, running in panic “for his life.” We see this heroic figure seated under the juniper tree of depression, so natural, so human! Yet he was a “mountain-peak man” indeed, who “prayed earnestly” and effectually, and it was done.

Our first introduction to him is when he stands and cries with the voice and the fiat of God: “There shall not be dew nor rain these years but according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1). From this verse it might seem that he was merely voicing a declaration of God. But James 5:17 takes us farther back. He shows us that Elijah’s previous

praying was the reason of this judgment. So distressed was the prophet by the deadness and apostasy of his people, that he felt nothing but a long drought over the land would break Israel's spiritual drought. So he prayed "earnestly" (literally, "prayed with prayer") that it might not rain, and so, deliberately, inspired by God, plunged himself and the nation into three years of desolation and ruin.

(2) Then follows in chapter 18 the great spiritual crisis of the nation, when God flamed out upon the sacrifice, and the people cried out at last: "The Lord He is the God!" The false prophets of Baal were slain. Yet even before the people had thus publicly acknowledged Him, God had answered, and seeing the time was ripe and the people prepared, had promised Elijah the rain. And is He not waiting for the right conditions and the public acknowledgment of God before He delivers the nations today and gives victory and peace? God bring us to our knees as a nation before the dictators have to!

(3) And now follows Elijah's second intercession. Here the spiritual order was reversed. In bringing the drought, evidently Elijah had prayed believingly, and God had then authorized him to declare to the people, "There shall not be rain." But here God moved first, and in chapter 18:1 declared to Elijah, "I will send rain." And then follows Elijah's intercession. So that though God had promised the rain, it was still needful for Elijah with the key of prayer to open the windows of heaven that the rain might fall! How many, many promises of God, in like manner, wait for our praying, for our releasing! What a definite and blessed ministry it is to "turn God's promises into facts" by prayer!

(4) So Elijah went up again to the crest of Carmel, to seek the promised rain from God. How eagerly he waited! How expectant he was! Yet his face was “between his knees.” He really had no need to see with his eyes, for he had the “second sight of faith.” After a period of prayer, that he might pray, “watching thereunto” (Eph. 6:18), he said to his servant, “Go now, and look towards the sea.” But the report from the blue Mediterranean was “nothing.” Again and again the prophet prayed, sending the servant for a report each time. So he prayed (like Abraham) six times, and still there was nothing. Yet still he persisted, and, thank God, at the seventh time, and not till the seventh time, faith saw its reward: “Behold, there ariseth a little cloud ... like a man’s hand,” and in no time the heaven became black with clouds, and there was “a great rain.”

(5) Now surely there was some deep purpose of God in delaying the cloud, the answer, till the prophet had prayed and sent seven times. Surely there is an even deeper purpose in detailing so carefully this persisting in prayer, just as God must have a purpose in detailing Abraham’s failing in prayer to “obtain.” Surely it is that we might learn to pray “always ... with all perseverance.”

Often in God’s service we must be “bowed” before Him in far-reaching intercession, as was Elijah, “his head between his knees,” crying to God long after the answer has been purposed in the mind of God and is on its way. Often, as with Daniel (10:12), “from the first day” “thy words were heard,” yet we knew it not, and surely God cries in these days of national emergency, “Ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers, keep not silent!”

Someone has wisely said, "In great crises and problems and needs, act faith even when you do not feel it." God does not say "See," but "Look." If we will give the look of faith, He can soon turn it into sight. Continually God needs to test our faith and keep us waiting. It is only that we may continually prove His faithfulness. God help us then to learn to pray "with all perseverance," not like Abraham six times, and falling short of the answer, but like Elijah praying and persisting seven times, and so letting "patience have her perfect work" and fruit, in mighty deliverance by God.

I remember telling our Solomon Island converts how bulldogs (unlike their half-starved curs) once they take hold can be almost killed before they will let go. One of those God-illuminated native teachers caught the idea like a flash, and prayed a little later, "Oh, God, make us bulldogs in prayer!" May He do the same for us in the homelands!

The Sequel

Suppers with the Saviour

(Rev. 3:20; Song of Sol. 5:3; Mark 14:3; Luke 24:30)

Let us turn first to the supper proposed by the Saviour, in the midst of the message to Laodicea (Rev. 3:20): "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him." This invitation is usually applied to the knocking of the Saviour at the heart of the sinner needing salvation, and no doubt it is legitimate to so use it.

But surely it is primarily addressed to the believer; it is a promise which belongs to us. In the corrupt Laodicean church, "when the church had departed from faithfulness, God throws back individuals on the Word of God for themselves" (J. N. Darby). So here an individual believer is addressed. Exactly so it is in the message to Thyatira (chap. 2:18) where, when the church is condemned for evil doctrine (vers. 20, 22), He turns to a believing remnant (ver. 24), "You...as have not this doctrine," with His admonitions and promises. So, primarily, in chap. 3:20 the Saviour is addressing an individual believer.

This is borne out by the immediate context. It is believers who in verse 18 are counselled to "buy gold tried in the fire," lest they be saved only "so as by fire." The "white raiment" recommended to them is surely not the imputed but the imparted "righteousness of Christ." Again, in verse 19, "as many as I love." This love is not the general word for love for sinners, "agape," but the

rarer word, "phileo," "love of a friend," which God can only have for those who are no longer "enemies by wicked works." Finally, "and chasten," applies only to believers. Sinners are not "chastened" but punished. Believers only are "chastened"; this is to be remedial, not penal.

This promise, then, is to believers, and it is so precious and important that we need to make quite sure that it does belong to us! What then does this "knock" at the door imply? Surely, that it is not the loud knock on the outside door, the summons to salvation. Such a knock on the outside needs to be loud. No; it is rather the gentle knock of One already inside the house, an invitation on the inner door for further access and intimacy; the call to communion. He is in, He longs to come further in. He already is in the hall, thank God, but He needs to come in to "the large upper room furnished" for Him in our hearts.

Yet how often only limited access is afforded to Him by the believer. He has come in at the new birth, but He is not wholly admitted into the new life. He is still merely a Guest, not a Guide and Counsellor and Lord. Is not that what He really desires in ver. 20? He has bought us, He longs to enjoy us, that we might enjoy Him. Yet how often there are doors in the believer's home and heart still shut to Him, keys not yielded to Him, rooms to which He is denied access. Do we knowingly and deliberately shut Him out of parts of our lives? Well, it will cost us dear; for "if He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all." And how grievous the results to Him, to us. "Grieve not the Spirit," He gravely admonishes us, yet is there any surer way to do it? Oh, let us cry:

"Come in, Oh, come! The door stands open now!

I know Thy voice, Lord Jesus, it is Thou!"

"And He went in to tarry with them."

And what is this meal that He specially desires to share with us. It is not the midday meal. That we eat when the day is but half-done; it is to sustain us for labor; then, too, we are rightly occupied with tasks He has set us.

"No time for rest till sinks the setting sun." But supper, the evening meal, we eat when at last we are at leisure, and our daily task is done. Night falls and shuts out the distracting world, and shuts us in to peace and quiet. Activities have come to rest, and now at last He can find "a heart at leisure from itself." He seeks to sup with us in unhurried intimacy and communion. As usual it is a mutual affair; first, He sups with us of our providing, and then He "girds Himself," and we sup of His royal bounty.

A story is told of a man lately bereaved of his wife, who looked to find some consolation in his young daughter. But as the days went by she took to withdrawing herself into her locked room, and from his company, to his pained surprise. This went on some weeks, when one day she proudly came to him with some needlework she had been making for him in her simple love. He received it with gladness, but exclaimed: "It was you I wanted, not your work!"

(2) Now let us turn to an Old Testament counterpart of this heavenly knocking (Song of Sol. 5:2). Here the bride exclaims: "I sleep, but my heart waketh; it is ... my Beloved that knocketh saying, Open to Me." Here again these two are not strangers. It is the bride who speaks, the Bridegroom who knocks. This seems so similar to

the knocking in Rev. 3 that it confirms the fact that there a believer is in view. The simple serious lesson to be learned from this earlier knocking in the "Song" is that there the bride was unprepared for the desired communion, and missed the interview, for when she opened at last, "my Beloved had withdrawn Himself." Is that not sadly possible today? May we not attend the supper and miss the Saviour? We may partake of the loaf and miss the Living Bread, for the repast may become merely a ritual. Ever, "let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that Bread." God grant it!

(3) But in Mark 14:3 we have the happy supper at Simon's, for John 12:2 reveals it was a supper. Here we have a contrast to the bride in Solomon's Song. For Mary was not caught unawares. Far otherwise! She was prepared, for she alone realized the Saviour's coming death and the need of it. What commendation from the Saviour when He revealed: "She is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying." Happy preparation! Blessed foresight! Other women loved Him, and "very early in the morning came unto the sepulchre bringing the spices which they had prepared" (Luke 24:1). But they came too late. The priceless privilege had passed. Never more would that sacred form lie in the tomb; never the opportunity recur of pouring out their love and devotion on the body of their Lord. For, "He is risen," cried the angels. And is it not like that today? Some day "He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe." But in this, His day of rejection, there is for us a privilege which will never recur in Heaven of pouring out the alabaster box of our lives at His feet, of bestowing upon Him the

spikenard of our love. Then, He called it “spikenard very precious.” He still estimates it as high.

(4) At Emmaus (Luke 24:30). Then came the resurrection morning when the Saviour was occupied fulfilling the twenty-third Psalm, while as “the Great Shepherd” He tenderly cared for His frightened fast-scattering sheep. What interviews He had that day with one and another! How in the early morning He graciously dealt with the women’s fears and tears, as He made them to “lie down in green pastures.” Later in the day He “restored the soul” of impetuous Peter, in gracious privacy. Then, while all Heaven waited for Him, He journeyed with two sad-hearted folk to Emmaus. Psalm 23 had promised: “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,” and so it was. For, leaving Jerusalem by the Damascus gate, the two disciples had already passed dread Golgotha, where three days before their Saviour had died, and with Him all their hopes. As they passed below the hill it was indeed “the valley of the shadow” they traversed. But soon, according to promise, “Jesus Himself drew near and went with them,” which soon caused their hearts to burn within them. And though He used His “rod” upon them with, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe,” yet also with His “staff” He comforted them as “He opened to them the Scriptures.”

And now the day draws in, and the travellers seem to have come to “journey’s end,” “the village whither they went.” Emmaus stands at the head of the valley of Ajalon, and looks out on to the distant blue Mediterranean and the westering sun. There, centuries before, the sun stood still in Joshua’s day, and a mighty victory was won. Now in tranquil evening, the Sun of

Righteousness stands still with these two wondering followers, and we are given a gracious glimpse of the Saviour's heart. Here He adopts the same kindly attitude of expectation, as in the knock on the heart in Rev. 3:20. There, He might well have demanded admission; at Emmaus He might well have asked for sanctuary from the on-coming night, for "it was toward evening." But no; "He made as though He would have gone further." Blessed make-believe! Strange hesitation! Of course, as once before (John 6:6), "He Himself knew what He would do." But though He has the adoration of angels, He still stoops down and seeks the song of a loving heart, He desires communion with His own. But it must be spontaneous love, and a willing welcome. He desires the invitation to come from us, to the home, to the heart. He seeks it still!

Thank God, He got it that evening! For "they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us." Blessed, wonderful constraint of God by man! The only other time this verb is used it is in similar circumstances when Lydia, the first Christian convert in Europe, constrained the Apostle Paul to come into her house (Acts 16:15). Evidently love begets hospitality!

Now on that memorable walk to Emmaus, by the evident will of God, the eyes of the two were "holden that they should not know Him." What was the reason? Why were they denied the conscious companionship of the Saviour during those precious miles to Emmaus? Was it not that they might at once begin to practise a walk of faith and not of sight? Again, as soon as their eyes were opened (ver. 31), He vanished again, certainly not to tantalize them but to teach them. For is not the clue to this apparent mystery of their "holden eyes" and the with-

holden Saviour contained in their testimony: "He was known of them in breaking of bread" How did they know Him so quickly then? Cleopas must often have seen and probably touched the Saviour's hands that stretched out to the loaf that evening. But those hands were now tell-tale hands. They told so eloquently a tale of redemption by suffering. For the scarce-healed wounds, shown a week later to Thomas, must have told their tale and revealed their Lord. Their eyes must have been "holden" by Divine intervention; they were suddenly opened by the same. For that rushing revelation of Himself came in "the breaking of bread" by the wounded hands. This is surely a prophecy of the same intimate revelation of Himself intended when we "eat the Lord's Supper."

At that memorable evening meal host and guest got strangely mixed. They had asked Him in; they had provided the food. Yet He took the bread, their bread, and Himself provided the blessing. He must do so still. Human hands may lay the loaf on the table, the Lord's Table. Human lips still "give thanks" for the bread. Divine Love takes the loaf and invests it with eternal meaning, and endues it with eternal blessing. Blest supper indeed! Blest Saviour! Well may we cry with Bunyan's Pilgrim:

"Blest cross, Blest sepulchre! Blest rather be,
The One who there was put to shame for me!"

"He blessed them" (Luke 24:51)

"While He blessed them He was parted from them."
Thus the perfect life of God's Son, which began with, "Glory to God in the highest," when the angels sang in the fields of Bethlehem, ended with blessing to man,

even the lowest, when the Saviour departed. "Glory to God, blessing to man!" What a link between Heaven and earth! How the Saviour's outstretched arms on Calvary drew God and man together in a loving embrace! These were two of the outstanding features of His perfection and grace. He ever lived to bring glory to God, so that He could say truly at the close, in His great high-priestly prayer: "I have glorified Thee on earth, I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do." Thus the glorifying of the Father on earth was finished. The blessing of men, which flowed from Calvary, was but begun, and ever since has been an increasing and never-ceasing stream.

Of course the blessing of God does not appeal to everyone. It does not appeal to the worldling. It did not appeal to Esau. For "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him." God's blessing seems too unpractical, too intangible, too supernatural, to appeal to the heart of the natural man. He lives for material things, which he feels able to see and touch and enjoy. For him "there is a way that seems right unto a man," but he does not realize that "the end thereof are the ways of death." Men who live for "things" may get them in abundance, for God may allow them their request, while yet He finds needful to send "leanness into their soul." He has designed human hearts for Himself, and He will not have them satisfied with mere things; He reserves that right unto Himself.

Yet how safe, how satisfying, how different, to all else is the blessing of the Lord. "It maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it," says the proverb (10:22). We could well do without a good many things we have come to look upon as essential to life, but there is one thing we

can never afford to do without, and that is the blessing of the Lord. And, thank God, there is no need for the humblest saint ever to go short of it!

Blessing is one of the greatest and most wonderful of the attributes of God. The importance of “blessing” is proved by the fact that it is one of the great words of the Bible and as noun or verb it is found there almost five hundred times.

Sometimes we find man blessing God. In this case he is not seeking to impart blessing to God, but rather, because of God’s rich abundance poured out, the man’s soul rises up in thanksgiving to call God blessed, as did David in Ps. 103, and many another psalm of praise.

At other times we find men blessing other men on God’s behalf. So when Isaac blessed Jacob all the blessing he called down upon his son was founded on God’s covenant and promises, and came from God. So, too, again, with Melchisedec and Abraham. Even Baalam the hireling prophet is allowed to be the medium of God’s blessing to Israel.

But in general it is God Himself directly who blesses man. He is ever bent on doing so. Indeed, He cannot refrain Himself from anyone who is in a condition to be blessed. God is love. That is His character, His being, and love must give; a God of love must ever be a God of outpoured blessing. Thus when we turn to the creation record in Genesis, we find at once that no sooner has God formed His creatures than His heart overflows in blessing toward them: “And God blessed them saying, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters...and multiply in the earth” (Gen. 1:22). So our first sight of God is as a bounteous Giver. Then having created Adam in His

image, His heart of love again overflows to His new creatures, man and woman: "And God blessed them and... said, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." For the ruin of the first creation must be healed, the scars must be covered. Again when God had ended His work which He had made, He rested on the seventh day, "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it." It is deeply significant that each preceding day of creation had an ending. But no ending is mentioned in connection with the day of rest, because for the soul rest is to have no end, any more than the blessing which accompanied it.

Here, then we have a revealing of the heart and character of God. He created, but that He might bless. His blessing was inevitable. It had to find an outlet and object, and that object was man. He has never changed. Such is always the One with whom we have to do. Are we making it possible for Him to bless us in the full measure in which He desires?

Now it is ominous and important to notice that when God's commands are broken and His laws disobeyed, as at the fall, He has no option but, in place of universal blessing, to impose a far-reaching curse. There is evidently no alternative, no middle course open to Him. Men are either qualifying for, and enjoying God's rich blessing, or He must frown upon their plans and restrain them with a curse. Thus, quickly following His pronouncement of blessing in Genesis 1 He is constrained to announce in Genesis 3, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake." Thank God, man was not cursed. The serpent and the ground were cursed, and both for man's sake, for his discipline. Yet man could still be blessed on God's known terms.

Then we come to the Flood, God's purge of the world, when a new beginning was made under Noah. A new covenant was declared, and from it again blessing flowed, a "flood" of blessing which quite cancelled out the previous "flood" of judgment. Again the same formula was repeated for the third time: "And God blessed Noah, and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Gen. 9:1). And so rich is that blessing that when the cloud is mentioned for the first time in the Bible, prophetically it has a bow in it already, to be a sure promise of God's benediction and protection.

Then comes the call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1), with still a new covenant with men. Is it not in keeping with the character of God, and a principle of His dealings with men, that at once a still greater blessing is pronounced? The word is used five times in two verses, to fully express the purpose of God. It contains indeed one of the most remarkable and far-reaching predictions in the Bible, a prophecy that has often been the despair of statesmen, a promise that has become a law of nations. Speaking of Abraham, and the people to spring from him, God pronounces: "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee." Thus again blessing and cursing are strangely intertwined. "Behold the goodness and severity of God, on them which fell, severity, but unto thee, goodness" (Rom. 11:22). God closes with a prediction of the Saviour through whom alone it was possible for blessing to flow from God to man, "And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

The whole beneficent purpose of God toward men is well-summed up in the priestly benediction authorized

by God to be pronounced by Aaron and his sons, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee: the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace" (Num. 6:24-26). Blessing and keeping, sunshine and grace, the seeing of His face, and the enjoying of His peace, are these not a supreme description of blessing at its best? Who of us can afford to live as to come short of it?

Then there came to earth the Saviour, to confirm to men the benediction of God. He came to die; He came also to bless. When He came it was not for individuals only; His benison was far wider, His love far larger. He came to bless whole classes, so He names them richly in the Beatitudes. How appealing they are, how compelling their need! For it is the poor in spirit, the meek and those who mourn who have arrested His love, while it is the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted who have access to His heart. So He opens Heaven's storehouse to the poor in spirit. They that hunger and thirst after righteousness have free access to the "treasures of darkness": and though the world resist the meek, Heaven cannot, and so they inherit the earth. And those that mourn? Why, they have for their consolation, "the God of all comfort!" What a Saviour!

The Old Testament had closed on a gloomy note: "Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:6). The New Testament was to close in glowing grace and glory: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all," for just before is the statement: "There shall be no more curse" (Rev. 22:3). Where then fell the curse foretold by Malachi? Not on the earth, but on the Saviour as He hung on Calvary, for God had foretold:

“Curseth is everyone that hangeth on a tree” (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). That was just the death designed by God and men for the Saviour.

“He bore the curse; alone He bore the load;

For us He drank the cup; Jesus the Son of God. He bore the curse.”

Let us conclude now with three special benedictions of the Saviour ere He returned to Heaven.

(1) The blessing of giving. Somewhere on His earthly journey to the Cross our Lord announced a principle and voiced a blessing which might have been forever lost to the Church but for the Apostle Paul. In Acts 20 we are told of the affecting farewell he took of the Ephesian elders on the beach at Miletus. There the apostle’s heart was wrung with the sorrow of parting, “knowing that they should see his face no more.” There he stressed to them his manner of living, “coveting no man’s silver.” As his final appeal to them to “have the mind of Christ” and to care for the poor and needy, he quoted a sentence long before uttered by the Saviour, and never so far recorded in Scripture. These were “the words of the Lord Jesus... ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’.”

So he rescued from oblivion words not yet included in the written Word of God, which really voice the whole motive of Christian and missionary effort, the virtue of giving rather than receiving; the principle of “doing without” on earth, that we may “lay up treasure in Heaven”; of “letting go” things here, that we may keep them forever hereafter. Thus the deep truth of the words:

“Measure thy life by loss instead of gain;

Not by the wine drunk, but the wine poured out."

Truly the selfish believer is his own worst enemy; any one "wrapped up in himself, makes a very small parcel!" He will gain small blessing and little final reward.

Yet, "there is that scattereth, and it increaseth all the more." Christ Himself came to give a new emphasis to life; He came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister." We are to have "the mind of Christ" and share His blessing of unselfishness. May God teach us all this new spiritual arithmetic, the subtraction here really means final and heavenly addition.

(2) The blessing of trusting. Again, in the upper room the Saviour announced for all time another spiritual law for the Christian which really earns him his name of "believer." Dealing with doubting Thomas (who by the way has had many descendants), He announced: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." The world's law (continually broken) is, "See and understand before you believe," but this is reversed in the spiritual realm where it ever is, "Believe before you see," and you will see later on. This had to be so, because the salvation of God is a revelation from above. It could never have been conceived by the mind of man; it had to come from the heart of God.

The Word of God makes it quite clear that we are utterly unable to do anything towards the saving of our souls, or the cleansing of our sins. Revelation asserts that these could only be accomplished by the free gift and grace of God in answer to our cry of faith; thus salvation is only "by faith;" we are "justified by faith," we have "access by faith," indeed, "the just shall live by faith," for

“without faith it is impossible to please God.” The “faith way,” then, is God’s way.

Faith, or believing God, will lead us into many adventures; it will lead us through many dark tunnels, when hope may seem almost extinguished. But tunnels are always on the main line and lead somewhere. The dark tunnel of some difficult experience that we must go through in faith, will always emerge into further smiling valleys of blessedness and the knowledge of God. It mightily pleases God and is wonderfully profitable to man, that continually we should be called to trust God in the dark where we cannot “see,” that “nevertheless afterward” there should be “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.” May God lead us into the full blessing of believing!

“Faith is the eye, whereby our sight
Out-distances the starry night;
The shining way the saints have trod,
Triumphant to the feet of God.”

(3) The blessing of departure. Now the Saviour was going, returning to His home and His Father. Let us then join the little company, and go with Him and His disciples “as far as to Bethany.” What will His parting portend to them? What will He do or say? In His life He had already blessed everyone who could be blessed. He had just blessed the whole world of believers through death, His death on Calvary. What will He do on departure? Well, He had kept back one final blessing still, a departing blessing. He must still surprise us with His love and bounty, even at the last. So, “He lifted up His hands and blessed them, and...was parted from

them." How typical, how in keeping with His character and love!

This, indeed, was but the last act of a life-long habit, a life-long attitude of ever enriching men. That last blessing is still descending through the "windows of Heaven" upon every contrite heart. Are you being "greatly refreshed" these days, dear fellow-believer? Have you had a new blessing from God, just lately? Is your heart being "greatly enlarged" these days with blessings which are to be "new every morning?" Or is God's blessing largely passing you by, so that your heart is somewhat parched and dry? Well, really and truly, "Blessings abound where'er He reigns," Is He really reigning in your heart and mine? Then in that case we need "never know when drought cometh." For truly, "Jesus, Thou art enough, The mind and heart to fill;

Thy patient life to calm the soul,

Thy love its fear dispel.

Oh, fix our earnest gaze

So wholly, Lord, on Thee,

That with Thy beauty occupied,

We elsewhere none may see."