Gospel Words

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First Series

A Series of 4pp. Gospel Tracts by W.K. for distribution after preaching.

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1 The Gift of God

“If Thou Knewest the Gift of God.” John 4:10.

(B.T. Vol. 18, p. 346.)

The woman of Samaria knew it not, nor did the Jews a whit more; nor does the natural man in Christendom. It is wholly beyond the heart and mind till renewed from above. The heathen could not but regard their deities as the projected image of themselves, of like passions and lusts, envious of man’s complete happiness. Had men known them to be as they really are, demons availing

themselves of man's guilty conscience to set themselves up as gods and turn away their votaries from the true God, they would have understood that demons could only reflect the hatred and malice of the devil.

God is love, as well as light. In Him is no darkness at all; but being love He sent His Son to shine in this world darkened as it is through sin. Nor is this all the love He shows, but rather the beginning of what is infinitely superior to every difficulty and want. God is not demanding but giving, and only this, as regards eternal life and redemption. Both are His gift in Christ. Thus only, must He be known by the sinner, not as a receiver but as the Giver. It would be beneath His majesty to take any other place; it denies His nature, falsifies the truth, and leaves no room for love.

This was not at all manifested under the law. There man is prominent. "Thou shalt not do this," "Thou shalt do that." Man was by it required to do his duty to God and man, in order to prove that, being fallen, he could not; and so force him, if he bad a conscience as to his own state and faith in God's word, to look to another, the Messiah, as all the saints did from Adam downwards. But the law, as it made nothing perfect, so it fell in with the natural thought of man that all depended on him, on the obedience he should render to God. As law, it excluded grace; and therefore those who saw nothing beyond the law stood on their own merits, not on the coming Messiah. All taught of God whether under the law or before rested their hopes on Christ, not on themselves. Therefore man as he is may admit the reasonableness of the law, as he doubts not his own competency to fulfil it; but, grace he hates and understands not. The gospel flows from God's love in

Christ to the world. It is not a call for man to love God, but the revelation that “God so loved the world.”

The Samaritans were only heathen who adopted somewhat of Jewish elements and were darker still than the Jews. But the True Light was that which, coming into the world, sheds its light on “every man,” not on Israel only, but on any, be they the vilest. This is the moral glory of Christ, as also of the gospel, God’s testimony concerning Him and His work.

The woman who came and found the Lord sitting at the well was just the one to prove the virtues of grace. In truth He was there to find her as she was, and to bless her according to the riches of grace for ever. It was not the time when women came to draw water. She was alone, and might well in her circumstances shun the society of others. She had ardently sought happiness in the flesh and had not found it. She could not now but feel herself degraded, despised, and wretched. But here was One yet more alone in the world He had made; with a heart toward all to bless them, but the loneliest Stranger through man’s selfishness.

But grace sought her. “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.” He sought her wholly ignorant of Him, He perfectly knowing her, as He knew and knows all men. Bent on giving her “living water,” He asks a drink, as one wearied with the journey; for indeed though true God He was not less really man. She was astonished that a Jew would so humble himself. Ah! had she known that He was the Lord of glory; but this was as unknown to her as to the princes of this age, who crucified Him. No doubt He was athirst, but He sought an avenue to her

heart and would not work a miracle for Himself. He would give the best gift, and have her learn that every good giving and every perfect gift comes down from above from the Father of lights.

Are not you as dull and dark as she of Samaria? Do you really know “the gift of God” any more than she did when the Lord accosted her? Do you believe in Him as a giver, and not an exactor? He is giving eternal life in Christ to every needy soul that hears the Shepherd’s voice, as the Samaritan did. It is therefore without money and without price. It is wholly independent of the demerits it finds. Who could be more depraved than this sinful woman? God in the gospel is a giver of His best. What more blessed than eternal life? What more necessary to enjoy God and please Him, to serve and to worship Him here and in heaven?

This is Christianity. There may be and there is much more; but less than this is not Christianity. Beware lest you rest on some external sign, which your unbelief exalts into an idol to your extreme peril, perhaps to your utter ruin. Eternal life is inseparable from faith in Christ. “He that believeth hath” that life, and none else. Therefore is it of faith, that it might be according to grace, as every eternal blessing is. For God will not give up His love and glory as a Giver. When you have received life in Christ, He loves to accept your little offerings and to graciously put honour on that which lacks it. “Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations,” said the blessed Lord to His feeble disciples. Why! to every other eye it was He Who deigned to continue with them, to sustain and uphold them in all pitiful love: else had they too gone back and walked no more with Him.

Yes! Jesus our Lord alone vindicated and set,out in attractive brightness the grand essential truth, so new to mankind in all states and ages, “the gift of God” — the truth that every soul needs to face and learn for itself, — that God is the Giver and will be nothing else to sinful man. Our pride likes it not: rich or poor, high or low, we want to earn of Him, and are unwilling to be debtors to nothing but mercy in Christ. “If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? “is the feeling of the heart now, as truly as of Naaman the Syrian. May you, if yet unblest, give up “Behold, I thought,” and, believing in Christ, be enabled to say, “Behold, now I know.”

2 Who it is that saith to thee

“And Who It Is That Saith To Thee, Give Me To Drink.” John 4:10.

It is not only that God reveals Himself now as a Giver, but a Giver of what the sinner needs for earth and heaven, for time and eternity; and He reveals Himself in His Son. The glad tidings He sends are concerning His Son; but His Son became man on behalf of man, His Son Jesus Christ a propitiation for our sins, that there might be a perfectly righteous ground for God to justify the believer, however evil and guilty he might have been before.

And so the Lord Jesus, the lowliest of men could not disguise the all-importance of His person when speaking to the woman of Samaria. She wondered that a Jew would condescend to ask a favour of a Samaritan. She was at an immeasurable distance from suspecting that in the humble Jew the Creator was before her eyes; and this too that you or any other might “hear and live.”

But so it was, and so it must be, if God was to be glorified in the salvation of sinners. Of this she had as yet not the remotest conception, any more than the natural mind in Israel, or even in Christendom. The truth no doubt is confessed in the ordinary creeds; but people in general assent without heart or conscience. They repeat what their forefathers repeated; they believe what the church believes. So the Jews believed in Jesus when they saw the signs He wrought in Jerusalem at the first passover of which the fourth Gospel speaks (John 2); they believed on evidences as much as, or more than, the mass of the christened in our land or any other. But it is written that “Jesus did not trust Himself unto them, for that He knew all men, and because He needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man.” He knew that man in his best estate is altogether vanity, for all is said when he is pronounced a sinner, as all are. Now Jesus, God Himself, cannot trust sinful man. The real question is, will sinful man trust Jesus? Man is best — indeed is only aright — trusting God by believing in Jesus, in Jesus come, not merely to work signs but to save sinners at all cost to Himself, a sacrifice to God for them.

Therefore does the Lord present to the Samaritan this great truth, without a miracle, and far beyond miracles. “If thou knewest.. Who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink.” This she was as far as possible from knowing, any more than the grace of God. But He was there to make known the truth; and He is Himself the truth, and became man that it might come in divine love to man. Could there be asked a better proof that “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” than the one here afforded

to her, and through her to any needy, guilty, soul on earth? For as creation throughout has divine design, and not a single thing happens day by day without our Father, so is scripture written with divine adaptation to every soul that reads or hears, that they may know what God is to a sinner, which can only be known perfectly in Jesus, the image of the invisible God.

Oh! have you weighed these words for your own soul? If you despise them now, learn from His lips that he who rejects Him and receives not His sayings “hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). You know that you are a sinner, utterly unfit to sit down with Jesus in the presence of God. Where then must your portion be if you reject the Saviour Son of God? Whose sayings are comparable to His for light and love, for God and man? Very likely you think yourself far better than the poor Samaritan He was addressing, in order to reveal God and win her to God, that she might not perish but have everlasting life. You will scarcely say that you are so much worse that His grace to her has no voice for your soul. She was at that moment living out of all moral relationship, indifferent to God’s known will. If grace did not produce what it can never find in a single sinner, it would indeed be all over with every one of us. If we are all guilty and lost, as scripture declares, it is in vain and unwise comparing ourselves among ourselves. We need a Saviour, and we find the only adequate Saviour in Him Who, as the Jews with murderous hatred said, made Himself equal with God (for He was God); Who became flesh — man; Whom, absolutely free of sin, God made sin on the cross that we might become God’s righteousness in Him.

And Him, in this mystery of His person, we believe in and confess, to have the blessing. “If thou knewest… Who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink.” If thou knewest that He, the Eternal no less than the Father Who sent Him, emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, coming in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death — yea, even the death of the cross. All this the Samaritan could not yet know; but He was on the way to death, come to do God’s will. For without the offering of Christ sacrificially His will was not done and no soul could be saved. His asking of such a one as the Samaritan was no small, no obscure, sample of that humiliation which culminated in His cross. Hence the bearing of His words to her, “If thou knewest… Who it is (there is the glory of His person) that saith to thee, Give me to drink” (there is the grace of His humiliation, as far as could be then).

On Him thus revealing God, her soul, in due time learning the wonderful wisdom of His ways, rested that day. How is it with you who have heard more of His glory and of His grace than she then could? May you believe, as she believed. If you despise Him and refuse His words, you must see Him on the great white throne of eternal judgment and prove God’s truth in your perdition.

WK.

3 Living water

“Thou Wouldest Have Asked Of Him, And He Would Have Given Thee Living Water.” John 4:10 (B.T. Vol. 18, p. 375.)

The Lord proceeds to lead on the woman and inspire confidence in her heart; and the Holy Spirit records it for others who were to hear His words when written: for they surely are spirit and life, words of life eternal. As yet she was spiritually dull and dark. She saw not the True Light, she believed not yet on Him in Whom is life, the light of men — guilty but favoured men. Had she known God as the Giver (not exactor, as all hearts naturally conceive), had she believed in the glory of Him Who had humbled Himself to save (of which she had a sample in His asking of her a drink of water), she would have asked of Him, and He would have given her living water.

For the blessing of the grace of life to a needy lost sinner (and so it is with every child of man) is no question of self-effort or even self-sacrifice, of a charm or a rite, but of faith in the Son of God to Whom the word of God boars witness. On the one hand, “what is born of the flesh is flesh,” and sinful man, Jew, Greek, Samaritan is dead before God. On the other hand, life comes solely to us in the Light of life, it is in Jesus the Lord. Hence said He (John 5:24), “he that heareth My word and believeth Him that sent Me hath life eternal, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.” The Lord therefore, Himself the quickening Spirit (1 Cor. 15), said not a word to her of baptism; nor did the disciples any more than the Lord baptise her in fact. Whatever the importance of baptism, to impart life is never attributed to it once in all scripture. “He that believeth,” says the Lord (John 6:47), hath life eternal;” and so in substance often, and never otherwise. “I thank God,” says the apostle Paul, “that I baptised none of you but Crispus and Gaius, lest any

should say that I baptised (or, that ye were baptised) unto mine own name.... For Christ sent me not to baptise but to preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 1:14-17). "In Christ Jesus I begat you through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15). So James 1:18, and 1 Peter 1:23-25, and 1 John 5:1. The divine testimony is uniform and full, clear and conclusive.

But the word was not yet mixed with faith in the Samaritan's soul. Else self-judgment had been produced, and such a sense of sin in herself, and of goodness (if not yet salvation) in Him, as would have drawn her to the Son of God in earnest. To be saved the individual soul must meet God now, and meet Him about its sins: otherwise it cannot evade Him in the person of the Son of man, the Judge of quick and dead, on the great white throne. Then it is too late. Judgment is irreparable and everlasting perdition. To hear Christ's word, to believe God Who sent Him, is to have life, eternal life. This was exactly what the sinner needed, but had not yet. If His word had penetrated, she would have asked of Him, and He would have given her living water.

But it will be asked, What of the church? what of the sacraments? Now it is a notable fact that in the Gospel of John, where eternal life is pre-eminently set out, not a word is said of either. There is always harmony in divine truth. The church, baptism, and the Lord's supper, are fully treated in the apostle Paul's Epistles, to say nothing of the inspired history in the Acts. But nowhere does scripture connect eternal life with the church any more than with the public Christian institutions. As everything is ordered aright in scripture, so are souls inexcusable who fall into so grievous an error as to stake life eternal on church or sacraments. It is contact with Christ by

faith, it is His word applied by the Spirit, that gives life in the Son of God. Christ is the way, the truth, and the life.

Faith therefore is always individual, even if a thousand believed at the same instant out of a multitude listening to the word of God. The church does not preach, but a servant of Christ or as here the Lord Himself; and when the soul accepts it not as the word of men but, as it is in truth, the word of God, it effectually works in such as believe. Its earliest effect is deep anxiety before God and calling on the Lord. “Thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.”

“By grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”

Eph. 2. Such is the blessed standing and assurance of the Christian in due time. Nor is it otherwise now than it has ever been, though far greater light and privileges be now enjoyed. “For therein [i.e., faith] the elders had witness borne to them,” or obtained a good report, as the A.V. says. Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. There was not, there certainly cannot be, another Saviour; and by God’s word and Spirit He was always received. Righteousness, as the apostle proves, was reckoned to Abraham himself in uncircumcision. He was circumcised afterwards, as a seal in the flesh. He believed God long before; and this was reckoned to him for righteousness. It is the same now in principle, when souls are baptised, not circumcised.

Salvation like faith is individual. From first to last one must come to God believingly, for without faith it is impossible to please Him; with genuine faith ever is genuine repentance. We judge and condemn ourselves

when we truly believe Him, and trust His grace in giving His Son. “Already are ye clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” John 15. We are born of water and of the Spirit. The truth thus sanctifies; which a ceremony never can, nor a body, were it even the church, however important and of immense moment in other ways. “He that disbelieveth shall be condemned,” i.e. damned, even if baptised by Peter or Paul.

In believing God’s word the soul hears and answers the call of God. All the blessing may not be at once; but the Lord is confided in and the heart goes out to Him Who came to die for us, for our sins. “Thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.” And in truth it is not only life in believing, but the Holy Ghost subsequent on it, that peace and joy might be full, and God’s love be shed abroad in the heart. The gift of the Holy Spirit is more than life, however blessed life may be. It is the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father. It is the Spirit not of fear or bondage: but of power and love and soberness.

Dear reader, have you got this blessing? or do you still lack it, like the Samaritan at first?

4 A Well of water

“In Him a Well of Water” John 4:14.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 9-10.)

To the unrenewed mind there is nothing so foreign as grace. God’s grace to a sinner seems to a moral man making light of sin; and therefore the higher his idea of divine holiness, and the greater his reverence, the less is it credible. The sinner himself regards it as too good to be true. Only when we stand convicted in our own

consciences before God, revealed as He is in Jesus, do we believe it; and only as we walk by faith, are we enabled to use His grace without abusing it. Nothing so needful to the sinner, nothing so blessed to the saint, as grace unless it be the God of grace in Christ, the source and fulness and display of it all in the Only-begotten. Here the woman of Samaria was at first bewildered, though struck and attracted by the wondrous Man that brought God so near her in compassionate love to meet her sin, misery, and want. She answers the expression of infinite grace with the difficulties she considers insuperable. “Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: whence then hast thou this living water?” Art thou greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?” (vers. 11, 12.) It was but natural thought and natural religion; wholly inadequate for man’s case, now that he was sinful and an outcast from God; and how much less adequate for God, dishonoured and disobeyed, unknown and disliked, because He must judge sins? What then must become of the sinner? How can he save himself?

Jesus spoke of another well incomparably deeper, of which as yet she had no comprehension. Jesus had yea, — was — everything to draw with; Jesus has and gives the living water. He is the Son of the Father, and entitled to give the believer eternal life, and, more than that, the Holy Spirit as the power of enjoying it in fellowship with the Father and the Son; and all this on earth now, in spite of what we naturally are, by virtue of His redemption. He is both the life eternal and the propitiation for our sins. He had the living water as the Son; He could and would give it to the poorest sinner

that believes the gospel as the Saviour of the world, fruit of His sufferings unto death of the cross, and of His resurrection.

“Greater than our father Jacob”! ay, immeasurably greater than Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; than Moses, Aaron, and Samuel; than Noah, Daniel, and Job; than all the saintly men and women that ever were; than Michael and all angels and principalities, to say nothing of powers. For He is God, the eternal Word, the Only-begotten of the Father. He is therefore divinely competent as He is absolutely reliable. And He is full of grace and truth — the very thing that lost man has not and can find nowhere else. Could the law, truly of God as it was, save the guilty? It could only condemn; and to this. an awakened soul sorrowfully but humbly and thoroughly submits. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which is lost. Is not this grace, the saving grace of God?

But no one receives it who doubts the full glory of Christ’s person. For indeed there is otherwise no sufficient basis before God for sinful man. No mere man could dispense the living water. The Samaritan saw Jesus wearied with the journey, sitting just as He was at the fountain; and she heard Him to her surprise ask of her to drink, though then she judged Him but a Jew, though she could not but feel increasingly as He spoke how extraordinary He was. Come of woman indeed He was to save lost man, come under law to redeem those under law, that either and both might receive sonship as a gift of God’s grace, and not this only but the Spirit of God’s Son sent out into their hearts, crying Abba, Father. This could only be because Jesus is the Son of

God, as no other is or could be, though by grace every believer is truly child and by adoption son of God.

Hence, that the faith should be of divine source and character, the necessity of believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (1 John 5:1, 5). As yet, the Samaritan was in the dark, though moved and drawn by His gracious ways and words; and so she understood not His words no less plain than marvellous. God's grace was no more believed than Christ's person, and thus the blessing was to her inscrutable. Yet to her unbelieving and unintelligent question the Lord replies with what, when she did believe, would prove a truth full of comfort to man as of goodness from God. "Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of the water which I shall give him shall never thirst. But the water which I shall give him shall become in him a well [or, fountain] of water springing up into eternal life" (vers. 13, 14).

The Lord thus explains more clearly than ever how the living water is the great supernatural gift man needs. The water of an earthly spring, however good, like every natural boon, lasts but for the moment. It quenches thirst, only to recur soon and constantly, as is the nature of all things seen and temporal. The soul, immortal as it is, needs more to satisfy, as God delights in giving when He is looked to in felt want. But here the Lord vouchsafes what satisfies the believer and God Himself, what forms a blessed and permanent and intimate relationship with the Son and the Father. It is not only eternal life, as in John 3, but the Spirit of adoption given, and therefore said to become in him, the believer, a fountain of water springing up into eternal life. Not only are creature things no longer an object of desire, but a

fountain of divine refreshment is within through the indwelling Spirit, Who ever leads the believer to worship by His own power, to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and to have no confidence in the flesh. It is not holy longings only as of old, but present possession and enjoyment by virtue of Christ come and redemption. It is inexhaustible and leads the soul to the sources on high.

My reader, have you thus found rest and everlasting joy in the Son of God? The Holy Spirit is given, now that His atoning blood is accepted for the believer, to glorify Him. It is as free as air, but only to faith in Christ. "Whosoever"! Forsake not your own mercies; despise not God's grace. Receive Christ, believing on His name: and all is yours for ever. For God Who calls is faithful.

5 Go call thy husband

"Go, Call Thy Husband." John 4:16-18.

It is the way of grace to speak and act in a love beyond creature thought to one that deserves only blame. This had the Lord Jesus shown thus far to the Samaritan. In every way He is the image of the invisible God. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Nevertheless grace alone suffices not; for man is fallen, evil, and hostile to God without knowing it aright if at all. Now his ruin morally must be known if he is to be saved and blessed. He must therefore know himself as well as God, and himself in God's presence as God sees him. How can this be? Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. And He is "full" of grace and truth. Grace and truth came by Him; and both shine as none can deny,

through His person and words on the Samaritan. She felt already in a measure His grace; but truth enters through the conscience in order that both grace and truth should be really known in the soul. Therefore, when the woman betrays by her dark request in ver. 15 (“Sir, give me this water that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw”) that she was still outside the marvellous light of God, “Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband and come hither.” It seems abrupt and at first sight strange. It was the direct path to her conscience and divinely wise. For grace cannot accomplish its purpose, God’s purpose of love, till man is brought to see and own the truth of his own state. Then only can one appreciate the truth of what God is in the holy mercy that saves the unholy through Christ our Lord; and righteously too, for sin must be judged as it deserves.

The woman was still walking like the rest of the world in a vain show. From this the Lord delivers her. “Go, call thy husband, and come hither.” “I have no husband,” she answers quickly. “Jesus saith unto her, Thou saidst well, I have no husband; for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband. This thou hast said truly” (ver. 18). How overwhelming, yet how gracious! Not a reproach in His mouth, but He Who knew all men drew from her, by a word of His, the confession of her actual state of sin and shame, and set before her such a sketch of her life as testified to her conscience, that in her case at least all things were naked and laid bare to His eyes with Whom she had to do.

Her answer proves that His words had entered her conscience, and that her soul fell under them. There was no effort to parry, no attempt to excuse, no seeking to

hide or escape from His presence. On the contrary, she stood there a convicted sinner and owned, not merely that He spoke truly, but that she perceived Him to be “a prophet” (ver. 19). It was the word of God living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. She was manifest in His sight, but by the grace now applied, however humbled to the dust, content to own what she really was and to receive from Him as from God’s mouth. For His is not man’s word, but, as it is truly, God’s word, which also works in every soul that believes.

Thus divine light must act on the soul now, in order that for it all things may be real before God. Hence where His word enters, discovering a life of sin and self, yet in full grace on God’s part, the soul bows to God in confession. There is moral reality truly begun, however little developed in detail. How wondrous is God’s intervention in Christ, as worthy of Him as suitable and cleansing to the sinner! It is the washing of water by the word, as says the apostle, speaking of Christ’s love to the church all the way through. And this the woman here proves.

So it ever is. The message of God to sinners (and all are such), when by grace received, deals with the conscience and not merely with the affections. Repentance ensues no less than faith, repentance by God’s word judging all within, and faith in receiving God’s word and God’s gift from without. This now is fully revealed in Christ; and He is life, “ Christ our life.” For the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining, and in Him we have redemption

through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, and consequently the seal of the Spirit. For it is of God that the soul, repentant and believing, should know grace and truth, beyond even what the Samaritan could then bear. Nor does any falsehood more dishonour the gospel than the dim religious light or rather darkness, which would plunge souls and even believing souls in uncertainty, and belie the God of all grace as if He begrudged the blessing to the contrite spirit.

Listen not, dear reader, to those enemies of the cross of Christ, who are so blinded as to teach that our Lord practised reserve about His own precious work. It was He that announced, even before His Galilean ministry, that the Son of man must be lifted up (that is, on the cross) that whosoever believeth on Him may have eternal life; and that God so loved the world, the sinful, guilty, Christ-rejecting world, as to give His Only-begotten that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have eternal life. It was He, that in its course and in the presence of incredulous and blaspheming scribes, would have a most crowded company to know that the Son of man hath power, yea rightful title, on earth to forgive sins — a title assuredly not less since He died and rose, and has all authority given Him in heaven and on earth, saying to His servants, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all the creation. It was He Who even before this lovingly rebuked the aspiring or murmuring twelve, who were in danger from vain-glory, with the words, “The Son of man came not to be ministered to but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” That Satan would stick at nothing to cloak from needy souls such words of grace is as certain as that the Holy Spirit was sent at Pentecost, among

other ends worthy of God, to empower those that preach the gospel unto all the nations, beginning from the city wherein our Lord was crucified.

It is thus that the soul meets God, not in truth only but in grace; it is in His Son, Jesus Christ. “This is the true God and eternal life.” It is after the sin, but before the judgment, that the dead may hear and live — believing, have eternal life and come not into judgment, but have passed from death into life. Less than this is not the gospel of God — is not Christianity — as the Holy Spirit has revealed it.

W.K.

6 Worship of the Father

John 4:20-22.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 41-42.)

When the conscience is awakened, the need and the duty of Worship are felt. So we see of old in Naaman when cured of leprosy by the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 5:27). Yet the difficulty is great for souls, as men differ in nothing more, and too often plead this patent fact to excuse themselves from all concern. Not so does the Samaritan now at least. He Who had told her the truth and brought her conscience before God could surely solve the dilemma. Directly therefore after owning Him as a prophet, she presents the case. Divine authority must clear up what was contested so stoutly. And she is the more bold to ask after the wondrous persevering grace she had experienced.

“Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship, Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the

hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what; we worship what we know, for salvation is of the Jews" (vers. 20-22).

A venerable antiquity has a strong hold on human feeling, and especially in religion. Even a Samaritan could go back a long way and boast of succession. "Our fathers... in this mountain." It was a serious thing virtually to condemn their race and ancestors! It is more serious still to leave God out of a question which He has the right to answer. The Samaritans after all never had been a great nation. Yet what great nation ever had God so nigh to them as Israel had their covenant God Jehovah whensoever they called on Him? But did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as Israel heard, and live? They alone were His chosen nation, as Jehovah is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath: there is none else.

Therefore the Lord Jesus could not but allow the plea for Jerusalem as against "this mountain" of Samaria. The Samaritans worshipped that which they did not know. The Jews were used to worship that which they knew; and this on a firm foundation, because "salvation is of the Jews." Theirs are the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the law-giving, and the service, and the promises; theirs the "Fathers" in the best sense; and of them as concerning the flesh is the Christ, Who is over all, God blessed for ever, Amen. He as the woman's seed, as David's and David's Lord, Son of God (Ps. 2) and Immanuel, had been evermore the One to Whom Israel looked and on whom faith rested; and this Himself here vindicated.

“Salvation is of the Jews”; in that line only is the promised Seed in Whom dead and risen shall all the nation be blessed. For if the promise be to the Jews, pre-eminently to their Messiah, never was it for them alone, but that the grace of God might bless faith wherever it wrought, and so in particular where need was greatest and man could least boast.

So did the Lord now deal with the woman, guiding her to boast only in the Father, the only true God, far from the vain confidence of man; and assuredly Samaria had nothing better than others. The truth comes not by succession. Natural descent is no guarantee, any more than human priests or sacred places, still less scribes and lawyers. Jerusalem was proving itself as far from the Father as Gerizim; for His Son was “rejected by men,” and by none so bitterly as by the Jews. This gives occasion to the richest display of grace in the gospel; and the Saviour announces it more fully than ever before, not to Nicodemus who heard much but to her of Samaria who heard far more. “Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father.”

That hour is now come. When the crucified Lord died, the veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom. This solemn act on God’s part ratified the Saviour’s sentence. The place of worship is changed from earth to heaven. The earthly people refused, even to the death of the cross, the Lord of all the earth. But He is no less the Lord of heaven; and on high God has highly exalted Him Whom not man only but His own people chiefly cast out, and thus proved their own evil and ruin to the uttermost. This is just the moment for God to prove His own good; for through that very death

of Christ propitiation was made for sins. Thereon the Holy Spirit was sent down to proclaim God's glad tidings to guilty sinners; so that the vilest may be forgiven by the faith of Christ and His blood, yea become thereby sons of God, free and called to worship the Father. Even the babes or little children of God's family know the Father (1 John 2:13), and are capable of worshipping Him, not as Jehovah now, but as Father.

Nor is any other worship now acceptable. For God is thus fully revealed: the Only-begotten Son Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. The partial measure of Judaism has passed away, no less than Samaritan pretension or any other. Grace and truth came through Jesus; and the testimony of the Holy Spirit is to Him as the sole way to the Father.

My fellow-sinners, renounce self, renounce man; for all sinned, all are lost, and are seen to be so when the true light shines as it does now, as truly as in the day of judgment. This, however true, would be the saddest news, were it all. But the Son of God is come and has given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. If we believe in Him, our sins are forgiven us for His name's sake. For this is He that came by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because He is the truth. The Son of God is the Son of Man Who came to seek and to save that which is lost.

Say not that you are too bad for Jesus to receive and bless, and bring you to God. You are indeed too bad for anyone but Jesus, Who has assured us that "him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." Fear not then

to cast your soul on His grace just as you are. Beware of Satan and his ministers who would persuade you to make yourself more worthy before you believe on His name: there is no surer way to put Him oft and lose your own soul for ever. Undoubtedly your sins apart from Jesus deserve perdition; but Christ and His death have infinitely glorified God as to sin, so that the door of salvation is open to you or any other that believes in Him. Then and not till then will you worship the Father. There is nothing higher in heaven; yet you on earth begin that worship, which is of heaven and will never end.

7 The Father seeking

The Father Seeking Worshippers. John 4:23.

(B.T. Vol. 18, p. 314-5.)

This chapter shows God’s grace and truth in dealing with a sinner by Jesus His Son; and the sinner not convicted only, but brought to worship the Father in the relationship of a child, to worship God according to His nature as a saint. It is the revelation in short of Christianity; and this the more impressively, because the one thus blessed on the spot was just before a wretched guilty woman of Samaria, saved to worship Him Who is God and Father in spirit and in truth.

Doubtless men ought to worship, as they ought to obey and love God. But their state unfits them: they are sinners, in their sins, and alienated from Him. As they are, to take the place of worship and of obeying the law is to deny their ruin. For it is too late to talk of your duty when you are all wrong and lost, as His word declares, in order to bring men to repentance. Again, it is worse

than vain, “in the hour that now is,” to pretend to worship our God and Father unless we are genuine worshippers. The apostle adds, that the worshippers, having been once purged, or cleansed, have no more conscience of sins (Heb. 10:2). Adam, now that he had conscience of his sin, hastened to hide from God when he heard His voice in the garden. So would all unpurged worshippers, if they heard His voice today. It is no question of sincerity, but of salvation; cleansing by the blood of Jesus is absolutely requisite. Impossible to worship Him in spirit and in truth, till we know Him by faith as revealed by and in His Son; and we never know Him thus till convicted of what we have done and are by His word as the Samaritan was.

Nor are any so guilty as those who seem so near in Christendom. Christening or a catechism does not purge the conscience. The servant who knew his lord’s will, and made not ready nor did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes (the heathen), shall be beaten with few. God is not mocked: evil unjudged and unremoved cannot escape His judgment; and none are so far from Him really as those that hear the gospel and despise it, unless it be those who profess the Lord’s name hypocritically, or such as from a bad conscience become apostates from Christian profession.

For there is grace enough in Christ to meet and save the vilest, as this chapter proves. Hear Him, “wearied with His journey,” sitting at the well, and asking a drink of the sinful woman, to win her heart to God’s love, to awaken a just sense of her state, to give her faith in Himself, and in fact to make her a true worshipper. And the Father, as He told her, is seeking such: wondrous

truth! not they seeking Him, but He them. Sinners, convicted and believing, are made true worshippers. They contribute nothing but their sins. Grace does and gives all that is of price. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, all take part. The sinner has but to abhor his sins and submit to be blessed by God's grace. No wonder, that the result is immense, as the work is; but it is of faith that it may be according to grace, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, Whose is the glory and the dominion unto the ages of the ages, Amen.

And this is "the hour that now is." Have you yet listened to the Saviour Son of God, as did the Samaritan? Then you too are a true worshipper, bound to worship God in spirit and truth, not formally like a Jew, nor of course falsely like a Samaritan. Yea, if a simple-hearted believer, you are entitled to adore Him evermore as Father; for you are a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Grace does not find in any sinful man what pleases God; it creates and confers all that pleases Him, when it has brought us to confess that in us, that is in our flesh, dwells no good thing. Naturally I am a man, a wretched man that needs a deliverer; and this is none other than the Lord Jesus, Who went down below man's sin and God's judgment that we might be set free in His righteousness, yet all in pure and sovereign grace. For grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our. Lord.

But have you owned your sins, your life of sin, as the Samaritan did when convicted by the word of Jesus? Or will you hide your sin like Adam and set yourself as far as you can from God? Oh the infatuation! Do you not know that you must be made manifest another day

before Christ? For He is the appointed Judge. What will it be with you then? Assuredly everlasting perdition, unless you have all out with Him now and here. But repenting, and believing God's love in Him, you become the true worshipper that the Father is seeking. So the Samaritan became that very day: why should not you today? Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. The mountain of Samaria can bring you no blessing, nor can Jerusalem, or those that follow in the wake of either, remove your curse: none but Jesus can avail, Who became on the cross a curse for all under curse. But He is all-sufficient; He is the Giver of the living water. The water that He gives the needy one that asks of Him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up unto eternal life. Such are the true worshippers that the Father seeks; and they only then worship God in spirit and in truth.

"To him that worketh the reward is not reckoned as of grace but as of debt; but to him that worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness." It is God reckoning righteousness apart from works; yet it is the only principle that produces good works as its fruit. Oh let not the pride of unbelief blind you to your truly lost estate; but may you turn to God as you are, a poor lost sinner, and find in the grace of Christ all you want!

Then and thus, met with the free-giving of God, and sealed of His Spirit, as one resting solely on Christ and His finished work, your heart will go out in praise and adoration. This is to be a true worshipper; and such is the Father seeking to the praise of His Son, Whose things the Holy Spirit takes and declares to us who believe. As the Son glorified the Father, so does the

Father glorify the Son on high; and the Spirit glorifies Him here below and bears witness of Him. Are you a witness of Jesus, God's Son, the Saviour of the world — ay, of a poor unworthy Samaritan? Or are you, alas! a witness of yourself or of other men? Such are not those to be saved. The saved are true worshippers.

8 Worship in spirit and truth

John 4:24.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 57-58.)

God never accepted in His worship the efforts of man or the imitations of self-will. But He gave a system of beautiful and instructive forms to Israel, who had His law till Christ came to Whom they all pointed, and, Who superseded all by a fulfilment which more than accomplished all. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes. The law, having a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things, can never, with the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, perfect those that approach. Else would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshippers, having been once purged, have no longer conscience of sins?

Totally different is the standing of the christian through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Who came to do perfectly the will of God. "He taketh away the first (i.e. Levitical offering) that He may establish the second (i.e. God's will), by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:9, 10.) Yea more; "for by one offering He hath perfected for ever (uninterruptedly) them that are sanctified" or set apart to God (ver. 14).

Our Gospel here views Christian worship from another point of the highest importance, the need and blessing of eternal life in Christ and of the consequent gift of the Spirit that dwells henceforth in the believer. The Epistle views him as in himself at a distance from God, needing propitiation, and his conscience to be purified from dead works to serve religiously (or worship) the living God. Both blessings attach to faith. They are the portion of the believer only. For Christ is his life; and his sins are forgiven for His Name's sake; and the Holy Spirit seals him as having believed the glad tidings of his salvation.

Thus pardoned, furnished, and blessed by grace, the Christian draws nigh to God, instead of standing far off like a Jew; he is exhorted to approach with boldness, as may well be, since it is "unto the throne of grace" (Heb. 4), to enter into the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, a new and living way which He dedicated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh. There alone is a Great Priest over the house of God. All others are human pretenders over their own society, even if they have ambition enough to claim the whole of Christendom, or all the world. In this respect an apostle or a prophet takes common ground with all the faithful; for the blood of Christ is equally efficacious for all that believe. It perfects them each and all before God, and this here and now; so that all various efficacy of that blood is excluded, whatever the different positions in the church the sovereign will of God may assign as He does (1 Cor. 12:28), and whatever the differing place in glory, as we know from Matt. 25:14-22, Luke 19:15-19, 1 Cor. 3:8, and elsewhere. But the inspired word to all brethren is, Let us approach " with a true heart in full assurance of

faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an' evil conscience and, our body washed with pure water."

And what is worship but thanksgiving and praise? Thanksgiving for what God has done in Christ and gives freely to us who believe; praise for what we know by His word and Spirit He is, not only to us, but in Himself, His majesty, holiness, truth, goodness, mercy, love, and delight in us, the eternal self-existing One, now revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?

Dear reader, do you know the only true God? Do you know the Father? From 1 John 2:13 we learn that the little children, the babes of God's family, know the Father. But Only he that confesses the Son has the Father also. God is no party to His Son's dishonour. "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." Faith is the operation of the Holy Spirit by the word. But to worship we need, besides, the gift of the Spirit, which is received when we rest on Christ's redemption; as in the O.T. oil was put where the blood (not merely the water) had been. Indeed as we see in Lev. 8, though Aaron alone had the oil without blood (12), Aaron's sons as well as he were sprinkled with the oil and the blood after the blood sprinkling (23, 24).

Is it so with you? Are you resting by faith on the sacrifice of Christ? Then you are anointed also; you are sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption — the redemption of the body, as you already have in Christ redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of your offences.

See then that you worship the Father in spirit and truth. We have in the N.T. the clear impression how the believers worshipped since redemption. No doubt there

were at first the effects of their old religious associations. But the fresh grace and mighty truth of a risen and exalted Saviour led them out surely if slowly. And the Lord's Supper became by His institution the central symbol and ever recurring observance every Lord's day at least. Nor did the now sent and ever abiding Spirit fail to work in the assembly, not only in teaching, and exhorting and edifying but in singing, blessing, and giving thanks. Flesh might deceive and intrude; but the holy responsibility of all was to worship in spirit and truth-to worship the Father in that near and blessed relationship, as the Son revealed Him and the Spirit gives us to enjoy, to worship God in that holy nature and majesty Whose perfect love has cast out our fear; for He has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ made sin for us that we might become God's righteousness in Him.

It is not enough to be "true worshippers," blessed though this is. "God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship in. spirit and truth." How sad for the true worshippers to swamp themselves with notorious men of the world, and in acts and words suited to a mixed multitude! This He called not for nor accepts. It is not worship in spirit and truth which our Lord declares "must" be.

It is a necessity of His nature, and of theirs too, seeing that believers are become partakers of it in His grace (compare James 1:18, 2 Peter 1:4, 1 John 3:9). If true worshippers, look to it that your worship be, according to His will, "in spirit and truth," not in forms or falsehood, but as we have been taught by the Lord]Himself and His, inspired servants. Since the Son of God is come and has given us understanding that we

may know Him that is true, formal and false worship is hateful to Him and a shame for “true worshippers” who have the Spirit and know the truth, and are, called to worship consistently.

9 I that speak unto thee am He

John 4:26.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 72-73.)

Now that the conscience of the Samaritan was reached and in exercise before God, the grace of the Saviour was not in vain for her heart. She had listened to words that brought home to her unmistakeably the love of God, whereof His Son was at once the witness and the fulness. One thing more she needed, which He was waiting to grant, the knowledge of Himself come, the Father’s sent One, without which there is no Christianity. He is “all,” as He is “in all” that are His; but He is also for any, as the gospel announces, and the woman here discovers. She felt that the flood of light which the Lord shed on the worship that was at hand, was too much for her apprehension, and accordingly says to Him, “I know that Messiah cometh (which is called Christ): when He is come, He will tell [declare] us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am He.”

The Lord had declared the Father’s name, little as she took it in; He had also confessed and denied not but confessed, that He Himself was the Christ. And we have His word for it, whatever the difficulty and the darkness unbelief pours over all, that this is life eternal, that they may know the Father, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom He sent. For such knowledge is of the Holy

Spirit, and, unlike all other knowledge, is inseparable from life. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God.” Grace had opened her heart, the truth had searched her soul; and the Lord laid hold of the confession she made (however feebly) of a coming Messiah, to declare Himself the satisfying object of trust. It was far from being His highest title; it was not the everlasting glory of His person; it was what He became as man on earth the promised One, and what He, rejected of men, is now also made on high. For His death that seemed to disappoint all hopes was essential if only to efface our guilt, and His resurrection restored (and more) what death took away. Thus He graciously met her, in that recognition of what He truly was, to her unspeakable comfort and rest.

Faith always meets Christ. He is the great divine discovery to the soul. All must meet Him on the throne one day; but this will be everlasting ruin to such as do not meet Him now. For them it will be judgment. Now it is the grace of God which gives and forgives. The unbeliever refuses Him now and comes into judgment then. To meet Him now by faith is life and salvation, as the Samaritan proved. Thousands saw and heard Him while on earth; but where no faith was, there was no life. It was when the woman believed that she received the blessing. And this blessing is no less offered to all that believe on Him without seeing or hearing. Indeed there is emphatic blessing as He told Thomas, for those who have not seen and have believed.

The Holy Spirit has recorded the tale for your soul, dear reader, that you too may believe, and be saved if you are not already. To you the word of salvation is sent; for Jesus is still a Saviour, not yet a Judge. By and by He will

be Judge and not Saviour. Never are the two functions mixed. Nor does the believer, as He assures us, come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. His work fails no more than His person; and he that believes has eternal life. The unbeliever will hear Him pronounce all, but too late. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Cor. 6.) “See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh; for if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven” (Heb. 12). He is the truth: rely on Him.

The unworthiness of the Samaritan up to that very day did not hinder His race nor her blessing Why should you doubt His willingness to receive and help you just as you are? For the blessing depends entirely on Him and His sacrifice. To receive it through Him, confessing your guilt and need, is to submit to the righteousness of God; to prefer your own efforts and sacrifices is going about to establish your own righteousness, as the unbelieving Jews did. Those who are indifferent to their sins, God’s warning, and Christ’s salvation, defy judgment and despise mercy. Alas! they assuredly must meet the due reward of their deeds and unbelief. For God is not mocked; and those that sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.

Hear then His words in faith. He pleads with your soul. “I that speak unto thee am He.” And He is the same, yesterday, and today, and forever. Doubt yourself; for indeed you have the gravest reason. Believe on Him; for God’s word bears the fullest witness, that as He declares all, so He endured all to save the foulest sinner and His worst enemy, if they repent and believe the gospel. His was all the worth, His all the suffering, His all the grace.

Give Him then all the glory, as He willingly gives you all the blessing. This is God's truth, God's love, and God's way. It is His gospel, His glad tidings, sent that you may believe. He does not begrudge you life and salvation in Christ; He delights in blessing; and this too, most rich and needed blessing.

But He warns too. "If the word spoken by angels (i.e. the law) was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? " Thus judgment at the close vindicates the God Whose saving love in His Son is set at nought. The sanction is as solemn, as the blessing is full and plain, immediate and everlasting.

The message meanwhile bespeaks God for its author; He is the God of all grace. But it is grace reigning through righteousness, for Christ suffered for sins, Just for unjust. Not otherwise could the defiled and guilty be brought to God. Our ransom is not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with Christ's precious blood as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. And faith honours both Christ and the God Who gave Him, as unbelief adds rebellion and contempt of God to our other sins which are many and deep. No doubt you deserve nothing from God but judgment, which, without faith in Christ, is perdition. But Christ deserves, and has secured by His work, that every believer should be saved. If this does not gratify man's pride, it suits God's love and glory, in which the believer finds his everlasting blessedness.

10 The Woman then left her waterpot

John 4:28.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 86-7.)

Blessed effects follow faith when it is the work of God's Spirit as here. "He that believeth hath everlasting life;" and life from God does not fail to show itself in ways pleasing to Him if not to man. A faith of mere tradition, or founded on evidences, is powerless. The conscience being untouched, in no case is it before God; nor is He trusted for everlasting life.

Little acts as well as matters of great moment disclose the work of God in a believer. The Holy Spirit notices both in the Samaritan woman. In the opening of the interview her pre-occupation with present things was evident. When the Lord seized the figure of living water in contrast with that before her, we see her total insensibility. She was unable to rise above earthly wants and desires. Only when her conscience was reached, did God and His word deal with her soul, however amazed and attracted she might be by the grace of Christ. Even when her life was suddenly laid bare by the wondrous stranger, so as to convince her that everything was known to Him divinely, she has no wish to escape into the darkness in which she had heretofore lived; she desires light in what most nearly touches the right state of the soul with God. She is assured that He could and would guide her aright in the worship of God, where men differ most and so keenly. She had to learn of a new worship superseding Jerusalem no less than her vain traditional mountain — the worship of the Father. This He, the Son, was alone competent to announce; as also the Holy Spirit is the needed power to enable the worshipper, even the true worshipper, to render it suitably to God's nature as well as His relationship as Father. But the work in her soul was not complete till He

stood revealed in her spirit as Messiah come, the Declarer of all things to us: so she expected and confessed, and yet how much more the reality and fulness!

At this point, the most solemn and blessed for every soul that knows it, when God reveals Himself in Christ to the needy and guilty but now the sinner repentant, came His disciples marvelling that He was speaking with a woman. For even they still shared the Jewish pride which despised the sex. How much greater their astonishment, had they known what she was, and what were His communications of infinite grace! “The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?”

It was the simple effect of divine truth acting on her heart, now that her conscience was before God. To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose, or matter, under heaven, a time to seek, and a time to lose. So she rightly felt the all-importance of the moment, not for herself only but for others. Her ordinary duty could well wait. It was nothing to her now to avoid the concourse of women at the well, for she clearly had been alone there. What were censorious tongues now? She had heard the Shepherd’s voice. Had He not called her, knowing all she was and had done? She left her waterpot therefore. To know Him was the great business. Another time was equally good for the waterpot. But here was the Messiah, the Christ; and if He deigned in His compassionate love to make Himself known to her, convicted as she was, surely no sinner need despair. Without a command, as the fruit of His grace, she leaves aside what was earthly and perishing,

she seeks to spread the blessed news, which filled her soul and made her forget herself and every consideration but of Christ and His goodness to such as she had been. “Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation,” just expressed her new-born feelings, the activity of that life she had in Christ.

And so it is with souls born of God, who learn from Christ that the Father seeketh such to worship Him. As yet she was ignorant of dogma, but by grace She had received Christ, the despised Messiah, and the more despised because He was and is infinitely more, the Son of God, the Only begotten, full of grace and truth. Little she knew of “Him; but she believed in Him as the Promised One, the destroyer of Satan, the Redeemer, not merely to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel, but given for a light to the Gentiles, that He might be God’s salvation unto the end of the earth.

The Samaritan woman had already proved that His divine knowledge of her sins did not in the least hinder the outflow of divine grace to her soul. Grace had used truth to search her and put her in her true place, that she might be fully blessed of God and able to draw near in adoration as a true worshipper. Nor is there anything so humbling as the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ When the prodigal came to himself, he made up his mind to say, “Make me as one of thy hired servants.” Had he adequately judged himself, he could not have asked even this; he must have felt his unworthiness (so far as he was concerned) of any place whatever. But when his father ran and fell on his neck and kissed him in his rags, he owned his sin and unworthiness; but not a

word of being made an hireling. It was, he now learned, no question of himself, but of the Father's love. So is it with our God and Father. He acts in His own love and for His own glory. And Christ alone has made it possible righteously by His propitiation; as He alone is the truth, the way, and the life, revealing Him as Father and God, that we may know the true God Whom we adore.

The woman in the energy of faith, not only leaves her waterpot for a more fitting season, but in her own way shows the effect of the truth that the Father is seeking true worshippers, as she also knew that grace can and does make poor sinners such. So it was with her. Now the positive power of the truth discloses itself. She seeks others, any, in the faith of His grace. "She saith to the men (that is, of the city), Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" And she was right, truly guided, where human learning and genius have utterly failed and prove their possessors to be but blind guides who only lead and fall into the ditch. She was right and testified of, and in, the grace that blessed her. For Christ is man, yet as truly God, the only Man Who ever thus told all to the sinner, the only bearer of his sins on the tree, that we being dead to sins should live unto righteousness. It is a suspicious faith that does not subordinate earthly claims to Christ, and that burns not to make Him known to the lost.

11 We have heard Him ourselves.

John 4:42.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 104-105.)

There is no salvation without the revelation of God to the soul, and this is in Christ His Son. The warrant is the

word of God, and now the written word (or scripture) on which rests all the authority of what is preached or spoken. This the Holy Spirit in quickening power carries borne to the soul, not only convicting the conscience but winning the heart to God through faith in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

God graciously employs, not an angel, but a sinner born anew to convey the truth to others, as we see herein Samaria. “And out of that city many of the Samaritans believed on Him because of the word of the woman testifying, He told me all things that I did.” It was a true work of God, and in the ordinary way of grace through the word dealing with the conscience. There was no miracle, any more than persuasive words of human wisdom, but demonstration of the Spirit, that their faith might stand in God’s power.

And the Lord Jesus acted in that grace which the apostle only learnt in their measure years afterward when propitiation was made and the Spirit was sent down. For when the Samaritans came to Him, they besought Him to abide with them, and He abode there two days. “And many more believed because of His word, and said to the woman. No longer because of thy speaking do we believe; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.”

It was the simple and blessed fact for these Samaritans, the beautiful foreshadowing of the true and unchangeable ground of faith for all that should hear and believe the gospel when the Lord would not be personally on earth. Any one and any thing may arrest souls by revealed truth; a man, a woman, a child; a sermon, a conversation, a book or a tract. But whatever

the means, the soul believes God; and without believing God there is no true faith, no divine authority and grace over heart and conscience.

Hence the Samaritans, struck by the converted woman's testimony, justly bore witness to the word of the Lord Himself. Hearing Him, they knew and believed the love that God has to us. Having received His testimony, they set to their seal that God is true. And as they thus believed God in the full revelation of Himself in Christ, we may surely say of them what scripture attests of Abraham when he believed God in a far less measure of light, that it was counted to them for righteousness. For living faith ever brings the soul before God, where it has His light whereby to judge itself. But God revealed in Man, and that Man His only-begotten Son, brings His love near to the heart in a reality beyond all thought, and rises above all sinfulness, proved (as we can add) in His death, that we might possess known remission of sins through His blood, and thus the conscience purged from dead works to serve a living God.

It is a, universal truth, in short, that the sheep hear the Shepherd's voice, and that they follow Him, for they know His voice. What these Samaritans enjoyed as a literal fact is no less true of all who believe the gospel. And Christ came that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly; or, as His servant wrote, died for all, that they that live should not henceforth live to themselves but to Him that for them died and was raised. Thus all things are of God Who reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ and gave us the service of reconciliation, the spirit of which is plain for the Samaritan woman; as the contrary of it appears in such

as place themselves or other men between God and the soul, denying His grace and intercepting His right.

The Lord Jesus was just the One to do the work of God; for as on one side He was God, so on the other He was Man, in one person, come here below to declare God and reveal the Father, to bear the sins in His own body on the tree and thus enable the believer to draw near to God without fear and assured of His perfect love. “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God” said the psalmist prophetically (Ps. 40) of Jesus. More than a thousand years after inspired David, wrote one equally inspired to expound him, “by the which will we have been (and are) sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10.).

Christ alone reveals God as light and love. By Him alone mercy and truth are met to-ether; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. All other systems, all adversaries of Him, are but thieves and robbers whom the sheep hear not. But His word is as divine as His work. As one of them said, Thou hast words of eternal life; as He said Himself, The words I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. When He went away on high, the Holy Ghost was sent down to abide for ever with those that believe, to glorify the Son that glorified God the Father, and to guide into all the truth. So that no excuse for unbelief is valid on the score that Jesus is gone. It is expedient for you, said the Lord, that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter (Advocate) will not come unto you but if I go, 1 will send Him unto you. Thus the Spirit ever fully takes of the things of Jesus and declares them to us, teaches all things, besides bringing to remembrance all that He had said, bears witness of Christ far beyond what the apostles saw or heard though

with Him from the beginning. For the Spirit was sent forth from heaven where Christ is now exalted, as He had indeed many things to say to them, which they could not hear till He was glorified.

How blessed then that, when we hear the apostles' words, it is still Christ speaking in them! If any believe not, it is because they are not of His sheep, the test of whom is that they hear His voice. But He adds "I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall pluck them out of My hand. My Father who gave them to Me is greater than all; and no one is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (John 10:27-30).

12 The Saviour of the world

John 4:41, 42.

The Samaritans besought the Son of God to abide with them, and there He did abide two days (ver. 40). What confidence on their part! what grace on His! Others more favoured, who despised them, besought Him with one consent to depart from them (Luke 8:37). Who else are recorded as ever preferring such a request for His presence? But those who asked received a blessing both now and evermore, as faith in Him ever does. "And many more believed because of His own word, and said to the woman, No longer because of thy speaking do we believe, for we have heard ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world."

Truly a noble and most suited confession! No Jew did or could then have uttered it. It was God choosing the foolish things of the world that He might put to shame

the wise, it was God choosing the weak things of the world that He might put to shame the things that are strong; and the ignoble of the world and the despised things God chose, the things that are not, that He might bring to nought the things that are; so that no flesh should boast before God.

It was an anticipation worthy of His personal dignity, which faith saw and testified, as grace created and sanctioned it. The Son of God is recognised in the fullest sphere of divine mercy. It is the more striking because He had maintained the place God had given the Jews as compared with Samaritan pretension. As surely as He was the Messiah, so salvation is of the Jews. But the Jews, blinder than their blind whose eyes He so often opened, were rejecting Him though trusting their own thoughts and indulging their own will. And the rejected Messiah, about to taste its bitterness to the uttermost, was displaying grace and truth open to any needy soul, and pressing home the reality of that need, that He might bless according to the love of the Father. His own word deepened the conviction which the woman's testimony had awakened, and the faith of the many that believed expressed itself in the confession, "This is indeed the Saviour of the world."

Was it not all worthy of God and His Son? The sin of His ancient people, in despising the grace of the Messiah because He did not come in power and glory to exalt their nation and confound their foes, only gave occasion to more grace. So the Samaritans believed without a miracle, and entered into the blessing all the more deeply. They take their own place: not a word of rivalry with the Jew. They were sinners: Jesus is the Saviour. They were of the world. But "this is indeed the Saviour

of the world." God saves not because we deserve but because He, Jesus, does; and we believe on Him.

As long as the Jew was under probation, this could not be manifested. But one of the peculiarities of the Gospel of John (and each has its special design, not merely from the writer's style, but from the particular purpose of the inspiring Holy Spirit) is that the Jews received not Christ, as we learn, from the very first. Hence a larger and deeper scope of blessing begins to shine through the clouds, even before the Lord's public testimony and right through it. This chapter is an unmistakable witness.

And is it all nothing to you, dear readers? Is not this, and more than this, expressly written that "ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through (in) His name"? John 20:31. Is it in vain that the Holy Spirit has perpetuated for you the grace that reached the many Samaritans? Or are you disposed to follow the proud and stiff-necked Jews in nullifying as to yourselves the counsel of God? If so, beware of perishing, as they did.

Beyond doubt, as all scripture declares, whatever be the grace of God, you forfeit it by unbelief. It is of faith that it might be according to grace. It is here you have sinned, and now you must be saved; and there is no means other than believing on Jesus. You in Christendom have heard more than either the Jews who refused, or the Samaritans who believed. And whoever you are, whatever you may have been, their testimony is for you, for anyone: "This is indeed the Saviour of the world." Such is the spirit of the gospel that went forth in due time to all the creation, as the Lord came expressly

to call not righteous men, but sinners “To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt; but to him that worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:4, 5). Were it otherwise, no sinful man could be justified. Whereas, “when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” It is the distinctive blessedness that God loves with no motive in the object loved, but because He is love. Hence says the apostle, “God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

And as the Samaritans at the beginning were divinely led to own the Saviour of the world, so the apostle John in his First Epistle, avowedly written for the dangers and evils of the last time, repeats the testimony when unfolding the love of God superior to all changes. “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son as Saviour of the world” (1 John 4:14). Yes, but how am I to receive certainty for my own soul? “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God” (ver. 15). It is the Spirit of God anticipating conscientious difficulty and satisfying the just desire of assurance from above in one who might otherwise be overwhelmed with the sense of sin. One cannot too much judge one’s self, provided that along with it there is no distrust of grace. The person and the work of Christ account for salvation and the highest privileges to him that believes, were he chief of sinners. God puts all honour on the name of His Son, whether in blessing the believer or in punishing the unbeliever by-and-by.

To believe God’s testimony is the first of duties, and Christ is the object of that testimony. So, when the trembling jailer at Philippi fell down before Paul and Silas he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The answer was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” The way is simple, the warrant sure, the salvation rich and full. The call of God is to believe on His Son, the Lord Jesus, the result is salvation for all that believe, the house no less than its head. Hence it is His commandment that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ: loving one another follows, as He gave us commandment. But it is in vain to urge love, holiness, or anything else till we believe on Him.

W. K.

Second Series

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1. Justified by faith

Rom. 5:1.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 134-135.)

“How should a man be just with God?” Solemn question! to which man can give no satisfactory answer. If righteousness rule, love is annulled; if love govern, righteousness is swamped. Man can devise no way which does not sacrifice the one to the other. The anxious soul is thus left a prey to fear, apt to drown his doubts in religious efforts if not in the pleasures of sin for a season. Self is unjudged, and conscience unpurged; God unknown. Christ a mere make-weight or help and an impossible example. In such a state (and nothing is

more common even in Christendom), the very gospel is turned into a law more galling than that of Moses; and some souls sink into indifference or despair, whilst others clothe themselves with the rags of their own righteousness, to find out too late that they are naked in God's sight.

Christ, Christ's redemption, alone meets the dilemma, alone puts in their true places God and man, guilt and judgment, peace and holiness. Without Him all for the sinner is a hopeless chaos of contradiction. By Christ's death, as God is glorified, so remission of sins is proclaimed to man: mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed.

But man, hitherto living to himself and without God, even if an observer Of forms and duties, is summoned to believe the gospel, not merely that there is grace and truth in Christ, but to believe on Him and His work for his own soul before God. This necessarily involves repentance toward God, as indeed is often expressly insisted on (Matt. 21:32, Mark 1:15, Luke 24:47, Acts 2:38, 17:30, 20:21). The word of faith, which we preach, says the apostle, is "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9, 10). His words in Rom. 4:23-25 set the truth in the clearest light. "Now it was not written for his (Abraham's) sake that it was imputed to him, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus from the dead, Who was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith," etc.

None need ask language more precise, none can desire more authoritative. It is scripture (2 Peter 3:15, 16); and scripture is the word of God, whatever the human instrument, communicated by the Holy Spirit for permanent use, written not for their sakes only to whom it was originally given, but for us also. Being God's word, it binds the conscience of every man whom it reaches: his abuse of it, his refusal to heed it, will but aggravate his condemnation. Cavilling will not blot out his sins nor rescue him from the wrath to come. Faith is the reception of God's word, and now pre-eminently of His message to every man, the gospel of His grace. We are called to believe that God raised Jesus our Lord from among the dead — Jesus expressly declared to be given up for our offences and raised for our justification or justifying. The efficacious work was entirely on God's part. We had contributed alas! our trespasses: He gave up His Son Who suffered for them, Just for unjust, and raised Him from the dead, the sure proof that the sacrifice was wrought and accepted for those that believe. Do you ask further demonstration? Rom. 8:34 adds, "Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us." His resurrection and glory on high are the answer, not only to His person but to His work, glorifying God as to sin and suffering for our sins. God is righteous in thus raising and glorifying Him. But His righteousness avails much more, and Justifies him that believes in Jesus (Rom. 3:26).

Here is the blessed ground of the gospel. Fallen and guilty, man has no righteousness for God (Rom. 1, 2). But God justifies freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Who bore the judgment of our sins on the cross, and now risen

declares the believer free. Hence it is “by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe.” It is open “to all,” but for this very reason far worse off with God is he who rejects Christ and the gospel of God. He who believes on Him is justified, yea is made God’s righteousness in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). He is justified by faith. There is no other way. It is not a process going on, but a fact accomplished and made known by that surest of testimonies-God’s word. For He loves that we should know what Christ has done for us, and what He can afford to give in consequence. If we believe in Him, He would not have us doubtful, or burdened, but enjoying the inestimable favour of being justified in His sight. It is the fundamental blessing, anticipated in the Psalm (32), accomplished in Christ, and proclaimed in the gospel.

It is “upon all them that believe.” The weak believer as well as the strong, may rest on the Saviour, Whom God set forth a propitiatory, or mercy seat, by faith in His blood. And why was the blood sprinkled seven times before it, if not to furnish the fullest confidence to every soul that believes? The veil is now rent; all is manifest, not only your sins in the light of the cross, but the blood upon the mercy seat, the witness of atonement for ever accepted. For God has before Him, not your sins, but the blood that cleanses from every sin.

More than that, it was to declare God’s righteousness; and this doubly. It was first to vindicate in the pretermission or passing over of the foregone sins in the forbearance of God. How else could He have dealt as He did with such as Abel, Enoch, and Noah, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with crowds of others named and unnamed of old? But it is also to show His righteousness in the present time when He sends the glad tidings to all

the world, to bear fruit and grow in all that bear and know the grace of God in truth. For it is no longer His ancient people under the law, but the gospel sent to all; no longer man's righteousness claimed, to convict of sin and powerlessness and ruin, but God's righteousness in Christ's death, that Himself might be just and justifier of him that has faith in Jesus.

Therefore, as the apostle triumphantly challenges in Rom. 8:33, "It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth?" Christ Jesus by His suffering work alone accounts for it. For our sins afforded righteous ground against us; but Christ bore them in His body on the tree, as His resurrection proves them to be altogether and righteously gone. It is God's righteousness, as the Epistle to the Romans lays down, not only to raise Him from the dead, but to justify all who believe in Him. His righteousness goes far beyond, even to heavenly glory for Christ and those that are His. But here the Holy Spirit urges the foundation alike for God and for the soul through faith. May it be your portion, dear reader, through sovereign grace!

2 Peace with God

Rom. 5:1.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 151-152.)

The sinner is at war with God Whose judgment he cannot but dread. He is guilty and knows it, but the effort for him to forget it always is vain, still more so to hide it from God. Even conscience recalls the sins long committed, just when the remembrance is most painful and overwhelming. Nor does the Holy Spirit fail to apply the word of God where there is an ear to hear, All things

that are reproved are made manifest by the light. This aggravates the darkness, and makes evident the unbeliever's total unfitness for God's presence. For indeed His glory is the standard; and how far sinful man comes short!

But the Lord Jesus is a perfect Saviour, and the only one. And as He came from God, so is He gone to God. He came down in love; He is gone up in righteousness, and between the two He could and did say, "I if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me." John 12:32, For He made peace through the blood of His cross. Col. 1:20. For whom did He make peace, if not for those who deeply need it? And as God sent His Son for this end, His heart welcomes the troubled penitent that looks to Him for it. Yea, God anticipates poor doubting man, and sets him at ease by gracious tidings which He now sends everywhere, preaching peace by Jesus Christ.

Of old God told His ancient people, "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth; there is none that, seeketh after God. They have all turned aside; they are together becomes unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is, under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are, in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." So the apostle quoted from Psalms 53 and others, and from Isa. 59. Is it not as true of you in Christendom? Are you not as bankrupt in righteousness, in spiritual intelligence, in any real care even about God? Nay, it is true of all that they have swerved, and together been unprofitable in

His sight, and not even one practising good. Nor is there a member of man's body untainted by corruption or violence. What then but destruction and misery in such ways, and peace's way unknown? Ah! how true that no fear of God is before men's eyes.

But why perish in your sins? Why persist.in guilty wretchedness, when God is calling to you, and calling you to Himself? The apostle in 2 Cor. 5 declares that God was in Christ reconciled, not worthy men, nor His ancient people but the "world" to Himself; nay, more, not reckoning unto them their trespasses. May you believe it! He represents himself and others labouring in the gospel as ambassadors on behalf of Christ. For the counsel of peace is between Them both, Who would win you from the enemy and sin and its judgment, that you might have peace with God. We beseech you, says he, Be reconciled to God. Him Who knew no sin, Christ, He made sin for us that we might become God's righteousness in Him. There is no barrier on God's part, and He declares that in the cross of Christ He has made, full provision for you, spite of all your evil. If you bow as a sinner and call on the name of the Lord, God assures you that Christ took your place in divine judgment of sin there to give you His place in righteousness and glory.

Thus the ground of peace, for the soul that is troubled before God, is Christ the propitiation for sins (1 John 2:2). Him therefore has God forth a propitiatory or mercy seat through faith in His blood (Rom. 3:25). You might, as you are, justly dread His judgment seat. But divine grace has interposed, after the sins, and before the judgment. Oh, trifle with neither! Unbelief will not save but destroy you. Hear His word and believe Him now. "Behold now is the accepted time; now is the day of

salvation." (2 Cor. 6.) For all that believe Christ bore the sins in His own body on the tree; and you may draw near in faith to God's own presence, for the veil is rent, and the blood. is upon the mercy seat and before it. And why was the blood sprinkled seven times before it (Lev. 16), if not to give complete assurance to him that thus and now approaches God in the true sanctuary?

No wonder that you, believing God's testimony concerning His Son, are entitled to peace, to peace with Him now and evermore, Undoubtedly your sins were many and great, yourself unworthy and sinful. But the Son of Man, it is written, came to seek and save that which is lost. Salvation is therefore yours if on the warrant of God's word you believe on Him. It is all well if your soul has been deeply concerned as you weighed your evil life in God's sight. But no such exercises can ever give you peace; any more than the harrowing of a field can itself yield a harvest. Nothing but the blood of Jesus can avail for you. But if we believe God's estimate of His blood as in Rom. 3, Rom. 4 points us to His resurrection as God's proof of our justification. "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Justification comes out of faith, not out of works of law. The soul is justified on that principle, and on none other. But having been thus justified, we know that the burden of guilt is rolled away by a divine work brought home to us, and "we have peace with God." It is through Christ alone meritoriously, but it cannot be ours save by faith. Believing, we have peace with God.

So Christ, with His death in view, left peace as His legacy to His own (John 14:27); and as He promised, so He performed (John 20:19, 21), on the resurrection day

saying, “Peace be unto you.” He repeated it, both for their own souls, and for His work as His envoys to others. Without peace resting on God’s word we cannot enjoy our real relationship as children of God, nor can we draw near to worship the Father in spirit and truth; the conscience is unpurged, and the affections have no due exercise, To have peace with God is the normal privilege of a Christian.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 46.)

Peace with God is a state of mind in the unclouded consciousness of what God is (but necessarily according to His nature) to us according to the value of Christ’s work, and in Him.

There is another order of peace from the conformity itself to this nature — a subjective peace. “The mind of the Spirit is life and peace.”

3 This grace wherein we stand

Rom. 5:2.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 168-169.)

Faith then receives God’s testimony to Christ and His work. He Who believes on Him is justified. My sins are no obstacle. It was for sins and for sinners that Jesus died; and they are blotted out and forgiven to him that believes the gospel. At God’s call doubt no longer, but believe His word. This is not only to turn to Him from self and sin and the creature in every form, but to honour God Whom You have slighted hitherto, believing His love and submitting to His righteousness. Not that faith is an object: Christ is what God presents to the needy and guilty soul, Confess Him as God reveals Him; neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no

different name under heaven that is given among men whereby we must be saved. That divine Saviour cannot fail; and it is because you have utterly failed in yourself that you need Him, Him only, to save you. For as God the Father sent Him to be Saviour, so does the Holy Spirit bear witness to Him alone. Cast away every doubt and fear; only believe.

But justification, wondrous boon as it is for a sinner is far from all that God gives through our Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle adds, “Through Whom also we have1 access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.” How many souls, after really believing on Him, take the ground of law in their newborn relationship with God! And what is the result? Dissatisfaction and uneasiness, doubt and fear not without torment. Self-judgment is thoroughly right; but in such a case it is apt to be as superficial as the faith, even supposing both to be of God’s Spirit. Neither can be deep, unless the soul rest by faith on God’s estimate of Christ’s blood and of its own guilt and abject need: when one does, the conscience is purged, the heart confides in God, and self-judgment proceeds habitually and unreservedly as we walk in the light.

Christ by His work entitles the believer to a constant approach and standing in the favour of God. This is part, and a most important part, of the salvation which the gospel proclaims. When justified, we are not placed, as the Jews were by their own choice (Ex. 19), under law; we have the well-known, near, and real access to God which is proper to the Christian (Eph. 2:18, Eph. 3:12). Before the redemption that is in Christ, it was not enjoyed, nor could it be given; and when Christ comes to reign over the earth, it will no longer be the portion of

those here below. It is a privilege peculiar to the gospel of sovereign grace; and he who now believes since Pentecost has it and ought to enjoy it.

Only consider how immense the blessing is to him that believes, whatever the license that the hypocrite takes to his own destruction. It is not only that righteousness is reckoned to you, but that you have got and so possess as a settled thing access by faith into this favour in which we stand: not a blot left on you, not a cloud hanging or rising over you, but divine favour without stint, change, or end. Christ and Christ's accomplished work alone account for it; as thus only was it rendered possible to faith. For it is not simply the love of God. He loves the angels, He loves His creatures. The gospel is the glad tidings of His grace for all, not Israel merely, but all men indiscriminately, that appeared when Christ died, rose, and went to heaven; grace rising over sins, and where sin abounded, over-exceeding grace reigning through righteousness unto life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This grace of God in the Saviour, not law, is what meets us as our assured portion in our approach to God. Nor indeed can there be true approach to God on any other ground than one of perfect favour in Christ. Grace and truth came to pass through Jesus Christ. It was not so before; it is the fact now. The law was given through Moses: grace and truth came into being for man here below through Christ, the only-begotten Son, Who alone could make either good, Who made both good to God's glory. The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin. More than that, we are through Him made welcome to the presence of God, we have boldness. Weigh the word which the Holy Ghost gives (Heb. 10:19); weigh

well the word, ye timid believers, for your souls' joy and blessing Weigh it solemnly, ye who believe in superstition and tradition and human reasoning, not in the gospel of the grace of God; weigh it and tremble for your dishonour of God's will, and of Christ's work, and of the Holy Spirit's witness.

For, if we believe in Christ, God's word tells us that we have boldness for the entrance into the Holies by the blood of Jesus, which fresh and living way He dedicated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh. Without this it would indeed be madness and presumption. But now that He is come and has found everlasting redemption, the presumption is on their side who deny it against those who believe in Him; and, if believing in Him they deny it, what folly as well as presumption Only God can tell us infallibly what He has done for us and given to us in His Son; and He it is Who tells us beyond a doubt that, as believers in Him we have obtained, and do possess, access into this grace wherein we stand. For it is not like the characteristic blessing of Israel contingent on the obedience of the law. The gospel is founded on redemption in Christ as the great fact beyond all others save His person Who achieved it. And justification is a fact attested by God's word and Spirit to him that believes; and so is the access we have into this favour wherein we stand. They rest on Christ and His redemption, and they are ours as believing in Him. Nor do they pass away, like Jewish privileges; they abide like Christ.

But may not the believer become careless and sin grievously? Alas! it is too true; yet God does not change nor forsake His child (as other scriptures declare), but chastises him faithfully, and, if need be, even to the

death of the body. See 1 Cor. 11, Heb. 12, etc., 1 John 5. Nevertheless, as these very scriptures show, He does not change from His grace even when He thus deals in His moral government. “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.” The Christian’s failure brings out the loss not of relationship but of his enjoyment of communion; and Christ’s advocacy works to restore his soul by self-judgment before God. For as the Christian, once darkness but now light in the Lord, walks in the light as God is in the light, so he comes under the dealing of God as a Father judging day by day, that he may walk according to the light. But he received and has access to God. “He that followeth Me,” says our Lord, “shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.”

4 Hope of the glory of God

Rom. 5:2.

Here is another privilege of faith, to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. To the natural man this may seem beyond all measure. But God, Who has given His own Son, does not bless by halves. It could not be so, nor ought it to be; for Christ now is the title of him who believes. One’s own name is merged in that of the Son of God. He is the first to own his sinfulness and his ruin without Christ; but now that he has received Christ, he has the title to become a child of God. He is justified by faith. He has access to God ever open; and he stands in His perpetual favour. And now he learns from God’s word that, if he look onward into the everlasting future, he may and ought to rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

This hope beyond all doubt is an immense thing to boast. But is it not a well-founded boast, if it rest upon Christ and Christ's work by faith? Nevertheless it is as simple as it is sure. It is no question of man's desert, but of Christ's; and Christ will not leave His own separate from Himself in heaven. He has already entered glory, and He will have those that are His own in the same glory as Himself. "The glory which Thou hast given me, I have given them" (John 17:22). Therefore it is that in Revelation 21:10, 11, the holy Jerusalem, the symbol of the glorified church, is seen "having the glory of God" in the day that is coming.

But we are also called to rejoice in the assured hope of the glory of God even now. It is now that we want its power in our souls. It strengthens us against the false and vain hopes of the world. There are few greater snares than human honour and praise; for they destroy faith. "How can ye believe," said our Lord, "who receive glory one of another, and seek not the glory which is from God alone?" John 5:44. So in John 12:42, 43, we are told that, although from among the rulers many believed on Him, yet on account of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory of men rather than the glory of God.

When Adam was in Paradise, the glory of God was not set before him as a hope. He was placed in a garden of delights, where all was very good. He had a test of dependence and obedience. He was forbidden to eat of the tree of knowing good and evil, whilst free to eat of every other tree in the garden. Under this tenure he was to keep his first estate; but he fell, and all was changed. He became an outcast from Paradise, subject to death,

and after death to judgment: as scripture elsewhere declares, both appointed to men, neither to man in original innocence. But even then grace interfered and held out another. man in prospect, the Second man — the last Adam. From that day all permanent blessing from God is by faith, the faith of Christ; and till He came, it was altogether in hope, nor could it be otherwise.

But now the Son of God is come and salvation is a fact; a reality to faith before the day of glory when it will be manifested to every eye. Hence it is written that all sinned, and do come short of the glory of God. Mankind are on a footing quite different from Adam. They are born in a state of sin, and they add their own sins. They are out of the first estate of man, being exiles from Paradise. The goodly garden is not their portion, and of the glory of God they come short. There was no abiding in pristine innocence: can men stand before the glory of God? This is the only alternative now: to be lost as men are in unbelief, living and dying in their sins; or, believing in Christ, to be saved and to exult in hope of the glory of God.

Only Christ, only the gospel of God, can save any by faith. Hence the believer is now called by glory and virtue (2 Peter 1:3), by God’s own glory and by virtue. It is the love of God in Christ which breaks down the proud heart (“by grace ye are saved”). But the glory of God in the future has the most powerful influence in the midst of present snares. Therefore has God revealed it as our hope through Christ and with Christ, to lift the soul above all existing attractions and depressions. He has called us by His own glory, and the virtue or moral courage that refuses the gratification of self, which is

opposed to the will of God. We are therefore said to be sanctified unto the obedience of Jesus Christ no, less than to the sprinkling of His blood. 1 Peter 1:2.

How blessed then is the believer's portion! Though he had been in God's sight without righteousness of his own, positively unrighteous, he is now justified by faith. Such is the righteousness of God, Who gave His Son, and gave Him to die, that he might be not only forgiven but justified. He has therefore peace with God. He is humbled to the dust when he looks back on himself; but Christ is his peace; and it was made by the blood of His cross. Nor this only; he can approach God in perfect favour as his present standing, and he can boast in the hope of the glory of God for his unending future.

How strong the contrast with man as he is naturally, even if highly moral, benevolent, and religious after the flesh! For such men are either self-satisfied, because insensible to God as He is and to themselves as they are, easily compounding with Him for what they deem a little and inevitable sin; or they are in gloom and terror when they think of God as their Judge, and strive to earn mercy or a mitigated sentence by hard labour and penance beforehand. The true God is unknown, because the word of Christ is not believed, and the soul has never learnt from the Spirit's teaching His value for the sacrifice of Christ. So precious is it in His sight that it procures peace for all that is past, favour for the present, and a place in the glory of God for all that is to come.

W. K.

5 We glory in tribulations also

Rom. 5:3-5.

No wonder that the apostle was not ashamed of the gospel; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes (Rom. 1:16). Justified by faith we have peace with God; we received and have access by faith into this grace wherein we were placed and stand; and we boast in hope of the glory of God. This expressly covers, with blessing unmistakably divine and wholly undeserved by us, the entire past, present, and future, for every believer.

Can the Spirit add more? This is just what the text before us does. God in Christ alone accounts for it all; and His love, through Him Who died and rose again, finds its joy in blessing us to His own glory. He delights in blessing man, and can afford to bless him righteously and according to all His heart through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

How are you treating such a God and such a Saviour? Does His goodness lead you to repentance? or according to your hardness and impenitent heart are you treasuring up to yourself wrath in a day of wrath and revelation of God’s righteous judgment? After the sin of man, yea when it rose up to its climax against His Son sent and come in love, God has answered this crowning sin by His own grace, so far exceeding, that, instead of judging all the guilty world which crucified Jesus, He is reconciling every one that believes, howbeit hitherto His evident and proved enemy, by the death of His Son. And why not you? Is it a small thing in your eyes, that though He declares you “lost” in yourself, He is willing to save you by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8)? Oh! hear the

word of reconciliation; for so He calls the gospel (in contrast with the law, however holy, just, and good in itself, which must condemn the ungodly). He has commanded His ambassadors for Christ even to beseech, Be reconciled to God. Man cannot himself become meet for His presence in light; but God made Christ Who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become God's righteousness. Neglect no more so great salvation. Beware in that case lest the worse befall you.

The Holy Spirit never uttered, never wrote, a word to sanction doubt, but to produce faith in God land His Christ. Let no one glory in men. For all things are yours (if you believe), whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's (1 Cor 3:22, 23).

It is therefore not only in His counsels going on to glory through redemption that He blesses and we boast, but in His ways through this wilderness world. Sometimes the believer is at his wit's end: difficulties so thicken. We do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession with groanings unutterable; and He that searches the hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He intercedes for saints according to God. But we do know that, to those who love God, all things work together for good.

So in our text the apostle, after saying that "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God," adds "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also," and explains clearly how it is: "Knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed

abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost that was given to us." It is the path of trial into which we are ushered when we are no longer slaves in Egypt, God's judgment being staid by the blood of the Lamb.

Are we then to murmur because, while Christ is on high, we see not yet all things subjected to Him? He is crowned with glory; but Satan is still the god and prince of the world, and hence the enmity to all who have faith, and the greater in proportion to their fidelity.

In Rom. 5:3-5 the true way of God is briefly traced in the discipline of the soul, full of profit for all exercised thereby. It all supposes and follows our justification by faith. There maybe, as there was of old, a shirking of God's will; but He knows how to deal with His children when refractory; and as of old, so now He chastens whom He loves, and scourges every son whom He receives. Nor is discipline the only end of God. He tries us, as He did Abraham; and blessed is the man that endures temptation, for after being proved he shall receive the crown of life which He promised to those that love Him.

So the apostle Peter says, that ye greatly rejoice in the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, though now for a little while, if need be, put to grief by various temptations, that the trying of your faith, more precious than gold that perisheth, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. But in our text the apostle dwells on the present fruit for the soul. "We glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience" (or endurance) etc. This is hindered if we question our justification and so our peace be unsettled. But starting on our pilgrim journey

with assurance of faith, we interpret the tribulations by the light of redemption, and confide in Him Who justifies the ungodly man (Rom. 4:5), having raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, Who was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification. Our acceptance of tribulation at His hand works out endurance or patience on our part.

Again, “patience [works out] experience.” It is not yet the experience of what is within, which is formally and fully discussed in a later part of this Epistle from Rom. 5:12 to Rom. 8 inclusively. Here endurance works out what God is along the road; which is missed just so far as we allow impatience. And this “experience” works out “hope.” In quietness of spirit and the proof of what God is towards us, let the world and present trials oppose as they may, we learn to have our, eyes habitually above. Hence it is that the hope of the glory of God which was accepted as a truth becomes more influential, consolatory, and cheering practically. Nor does it whatever its heavenly brightness, put us to shame, for the blessed reason, that the love of God has been and is shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.

No greater power of enjoying Himself than this, we may boldly say, could our gracious God give to the believer. Our blessed Lord, in the days of His. flesh, had the Spirit given Him, and so without blood. The Holy One of God, He needed no, sacrifice as He had no sin. The Spirit of God descending and abiding on Him was the sign and witness of His personal perfectness as He walked here below. Him, the Son of man, God the Father sealed. We receive the Holy Spirit because in Christ we have redemption; as, in the type of the O.T., the oil followed

the blood on the sons of Aaron, already washed in the water, the high priest alone being anointed without blood (Lev. 8:12); afterward, he and they together (ver. 23, 24, 30). This was a beautiful shadow, though of course not the very image. Christ is the truth. If the love of God, spite of our imperfect condition, has been thus shed abroad in our hearts in virtue of redemption, what surprise can there be that, when risen or changed it the coming of Christ, we should share with Him God's eternal glory? Even this hope does not make us ashamed because of His love pervading the heart.

W. K.

6 The love of God

Rom. 5:5.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 215-216.)

"The love of God"; wondrous truth! When one knows in any true measure what He is, and what we are, how much more wonderful! Here it assuredly means not our love to Him, but His to us. Had He not justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus? Was it not by faith, apart from works of law, and so open to Gentile no less than Jew?

It is noticeable that here first in this Epistle is there mention of God's love, and of the Spirit given to the, believer, the power of enjoying that love. Assuredly this is not the manner of man, yet just as it should be. In the early chapters the apostle urges man's guilt and ruin because of his manifest evil. It is no longer a question; scripture has decided it. Every Jew was ready to admit that the condition of the Gentiles, philosophers like the rest, was desperate; but rejoins the apostle, what about

your own state? If thou art named a Jew and restest on law and makest thy boast in God, and yet in fact dost transgress in this or that sort of ways, God's name is blasphemed on this very account among the heathen. Hence, as the law condemned, so the psalms and the prophets openly testify against Israel. For when the law says that there is not even one righteous, it speaks to those under the law; it is definitely and expressly therefore to the Jew; that every mouth may be stopped and all the world be under judgment to God.

But the cross of Christ, the full and flagrant proof of the world's inexcusable wickedness in unbelief, of the Jew yet more guilty than the Gentile, laid the basis by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God for a new kind of righteousness. This is God's righteousness, in contrast with man's which the law demanded but never could get from the fallen. Christ came, Jesus Christ the Righteous. "When ye have lifted up the Son of man," said Himself to the Jews, "then ye shall know that I am He, and do nothing of Myself, but as the Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He that sent Me is with Me; He hath not left Me alone, for I do always the things that are pleasing to Him... Which of you convicteth Me of sin?" But would He be made sin for us? Would God make Him, Who knew no sin, responsible for sin, to bear its consequences as truly as if He were guilty? This is what was done, not on man's part but on God's for man, in giving His Son to die as propitiation for our sins. And this is love, not that we loved Him, which we ought to have done but did not, but that He loved us, and proved it in the death of His Son, the sacrifice for sinners, a, sacrifice open to all, available for any, efficacious once and evermore for those that

believe. God is just in justifying him that has faith in Jesus.

No doubt God is love, as He is light; and this appears throughout His dealings with man originally and when fallen, as well as in His ways with the chosen people, though they were under His moral government Who could by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation. Still was He a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. Nor had He left Himself without witness before the heathen in that He did good, and gave from heaven rains and fruitful. seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness; neither is He served by men's hands, as though He needed anything, as the apostle preached to the Athenians, seeing He Himself giveth to all life and breath and all things; or, as our Lord taught, maketh His sun to rise on evil and good, and sendeth rain on just and unjust.

But how immeasurably more is God known in His Son! There and then only did He reveal Himself as He is, far beyond His governmental dealings with a fleshly people controlled by His law, which, avowedly, made nothing perfect. Yet His full revelation in Christ brought out the utter evil of man, beyond doubt save to the blind; and the very rejection of Christ, which closed the proper probation of man by the proof of his inexcusable guilt (John 15:22-25), in the, cross became under God the ground and display of sovereign grace, which saves the most rebellious, the darkest, and the vilest through faith in His Son. Truly it is God's righteousness, not man's;

for it only came forth in all its fulness when favoured man was indisputably the enemy of God, not merely failing in his duty altogether and in every way, but hating Him when He was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Alas! to proud self-sufficient man grace is more repulsive than law, because it makes nothing of his own righteousness (yea, denies it), everything of God's; and Christ is all, Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. Thereby should no flesh glory in His presence; but he that glorieth, as it is written, let him glory in the Lord. Was it not a great love wherewith God loved?

Here it is God's love not merely demonstrated to sinners as such, in the gift and death of Christ, but enjoyed and meant to be enjoyed to the full by the believer. Hence it is given as the reason which explains in general why we glory in tribulations, and in particular why hope even of God's glory does not put us to shame meanwhile. Assuredly it would if we measured its brightness with any degree of our love as we journey on. But God's love! All, this wholly differs. It is as perfect and unvarying as unmerited on our part, being simply and solely according to His complacency in Christ our Lord. Hence it is said to have been, and is, abidingly shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us. If the gift was a transient and complete act, the result is permanent. The Holy Spirit, the divine witness of Christ and of His redemption, the power of enjoying God's love, was (as our Lord assured the disciples) to be in them and abide with them for ever.

Further, that love is said to be shed abroad, or poured out, in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us.

Our affections are pervaded by His love, which is secured in power by the presence of His Spirit in us. And He is thus shown to be given to those who rest by faith on the Lord Jesus, the remission of their sins. being by His blood. But the great unfolding of His action on individuals is only added in Rom. 8, after the experience of indwelling sin and of law, as well as our place in Christ, have been distinctly set out.

Now have you, dear reader, the love of God shed abroad in your heart? Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you receive God's testimony to His Son? Christ declares that he that does has eternal life (John 5); as the apostle preached that every believer is justified from all things (Acts 13). You are called on to believe this too, for your own soul. When you bow in simple faith, God's love fills your heart, not before nor otherwise. The love of Him Who gave. His only-begotten Son, no less than of Him Who gave Himself for us, causes us to overflow within; and no wonder, for it is by the Holy Spirit given to us, alike springing up into everlasting life in worship, and streaming forth in witness to parched and perishing souls by the way.

Till one thus rests on Him Who for us died and rose, and on God's love Who sent Him, there may be spiritual desires, there may be an awakened conscience and piety Godward, there maybe earnestness about man, blind and lost in his sins. But the gospel is God's answer in Christ to these desires of pious anxiety; it gives purification to the conscience, satisfaction to the heart, with rest in the glory of God as the assured prospect; so that we may boldly say grace, God Himself, could vouchsafe no more. His love accordingly is shed abroad in our hearts; and this could only be through the Holy

Spirit given to us; not through new birth simply, but also the gift of the Spirit, when and because we are children of God. For the Spirit thus given is the seal of redemption, the power of liberty, the witness of sonship, and the earnest of the inheritance; and He never was thus given to believers till the atoning work was done. Compare 2 Cor. 3:17, Gal. 4:6, Eph. 1:13, 14.

7 Christ died for the ungodly

Rom. 5:6.

When the love of God shed abroad in the heart is a question, men habitually look into themselves for an answer. But they can find no satisfaction from within; and it is well that they do not, for the Holy Spirit will never help a soul to find rest in himself or his affections. There is no real rest for conscience or for heart in one's own internal state. Call it trusting to the Spirit of God, it will not deceive Him or even an upright soul. For to stand good against every strain and challenge, rest must be on the ground of perfection; and the only work that perfects the sinner in God's sight is the sacrifice of Christ. The Holy Spirit accordingly bears witness to Christ and His work on the cross (Heb. 10), as the only satisfactory answer to the sense of need He awakens in the soul, whatever the testimony He may afterwards bear with our spirits as believers (Rom. 8:16).

Therefore it is that the apostle immediately turns in our verse to the proof of God's love on our behalf, entirely outside ourselves, in the death of Christ. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Here indeed is a righteous resting-place for one ever so guilty, burdened, and exercised before God. His love provided it. The sinner contributed

nothing to it save his sins. Divine goodness rose above all human evil, and all Satan's malice. One, and but One, was capable of the infinite enterprise; One Who from the beginning, when there was no creature, was with God, and was God; One Who in due time came from God, and was sent in His love as a propitiation for our sins. Love in the Father, love in the Son, — divine love — undertook a work beyond all thought of man or angel till God revealed it And Christ was just the One to give it effect to the glory of God the Father (without which nothing had been right), to the efficacious justifying of the most defiled who bows to God and believes on Jesus.

For He was God's only-begotten Son that is in the bosom of the Father, His delight evermore, expressly so when He deigned to become man on earth, for the accomplishment of that most worthy and gracious purpose, and for the glories which should follow His sufferings. For as He could meet the Father on co-equal ground, so He had come down to man in the deepest reality, Son of man as the first Adam was not: born of woman, born under law, made sin on the cross, that the vindication of God might be as absolute as the righteousness of God which justifies the believer and flows out to meet every sinner.

Such is the Saviour God has sent; such is the standing proof of His love when the soul is sorely tried, and needs a clear, sure, and irrefragable object. It is not a promise, but an accomplished fact, and a fact of immeasurable and unending value, with which nothing can compare in time past or future, on earth or in heaven.

And it was "in due time." God had tried man innocent; and a brief space sufficed — man fell. God bore with

man an outcast, left to himself though not without a blessed and blessing revelation; and man became so corrupt and violent that He sent a deluge to take all away, save a few in the ark who began the world as it is. And then He gave promises to Abraham, and to his seed; after that, His law to Israel, who forsook Him for false gods “till there was no remedy.” “He had yet one (as the parable says), a beloved son; he sent him last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son.” Him they crucified and slew. It is the measure of the world’s sin: not transgression only, or idolatry, but the ignominious rejection of God’s Son.

Yet that worst sin of man met the love of God which rose above all his enmity, making Christ on the cross a propitiation for sins; as He sent the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel, the glad tidings of His grace, to the whole creation. Is not this love worthy of God and of His Son? Is not this the love which alone can, alone ought to, reassure your troubled spirit? Was it not exactly in due time that Christ died for ungodly persons? If you know that you are so, make this your plea — that Christ died for ungodly ones. Be assured that God, Who honours His word above all His name, will accept it and you in the name of Jesus.

Do you plead your powerlessness? God has anticipated this also in His grace, as you may see for yourself in this very verse. “When we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly.” Were you making efforts first to reform yourself and to please Him, the Holy Spirit would in no way help, save to convince you of utter weakness and sinfulness. In such a condition He treats such efforts as self-righteous and Satan’s substitute for genuine repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. To Him

only look as you are, and because you are both weak and ungodly: He can and will save every one that calls on His name.

It is a denial of grace and truth to allege that you are not trusting to yourself but to the Holy Spirit working in you what is good and acceptable to God. Till you have given up yourself as both ungodly and without strength, till you give up unwittingly seeking to establish your own righteousness and are subject to the righteousness of God, the real work of the Holy Spirit is to overwhelm you with such a sense of your sins as compels you to look only to Christ and His redemption. Without knowing it, you are striving to be a saint in order to win, not to say deserve, the remission of sins; and the blood of Jesus would come in, thus as the reward and crown of your efforts. But the Holy Spirit never lends Himself to such a disguise of your true condition; He lays bare to your own soul that you are powerless and ungodly, but also that Christ died for such. This alone maintains God's grace and man's sinfulness. For souls in your condition He is a witness to Christ's blood-shedding; by which received in faith there is remission, without which there is none. Practical holiness follows, and does not precede, faith in the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation. When you rest on Christ and His death, the Holy Spirit works as a spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind; yea, He joins His help to our weakness, but in no way till we abandon self, and we rest, where God rests for us, in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

W.K.

8 God's own love

Rom. 5:7, 8.

Yes, it is not more wondrous than true that, while we were yet without strength, Christ died for ungodly persons. Such are fallen men. Jew or Gentile made no difference as to man's nature. The law gave no power; religious form is not godliness. And because man is what he became through sin, in due time Christ died for us, powerless and ungodly persons. This was beyond all creature love.

Man needs a motive to draw out his love to its object. He sees grounds, perhaps mistaken, for his affection; otherwise he does not love. And so the apostle writes, "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." Possibly the one known as the generous benefactor might embolden a man drawn by it, even to die on his behalf. For goodness is rare and moves the heart mightily.

But God is sovereign in His love to guilty man. Far from aught congenial, there is every thing in him suited to repel God. Fallen man is corrupt or violent, proud or vain, self-seeking or independent, the sad contrast of Him Who is not more light than love. Yet "God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Such love is peculiar to Him. He loves from His own nature with no motive in the object. He loves notwithstanding the utmost unworthiness. He loves where no goodness is, nor yet rectitude, where men are sinners and nothing else, where there is only misery and guilt; yea, He commends His own love to such as were still far from Him and opposed to Him, giving the highest and most solid proof of it, in that Christ died for us who were in that evil case.

Thus God and man now stand face to face as they really are. The time of probation is over: man after full trial is lost. It is not merely that in every way and degree he has proved disobedient to God. Last of all he rejected and crucified the Lord of glory. In the person of the Son he cast God out of the world — God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The proof of it is the death of Christ at man's hand.

But the love of God was signally shown in sending Christ, not as Judge but as Reconciler; so it is, still more deeply and conspicuously, in making His death a sacrifice to blot out the sinner's guilt. "Christ died for us." None but God was capable of such love. Only He could rise perfectly above all the evil of the world. All this was ever before Him. Throughout all His dealings with man, with Israel in particular though never exclusively, God had intimated His mercy, and faith always received it. This gave meaning to pledges and offerings from the first. This was associated even with His acts in judging the world by a deluge or in destroying the firstborn of Egypt; there was divine love in exempting Noah's family in the one case, Israel's sons in the other. In the Levitical economy, whatever the judgment under which transgressors fell, nothing was clearer than the bright shadows of atonement in a variety of form, which found no answer worthy of God, no cleansing of the conscience from sins or dead works, till "Christ died for us." God is glorified thereby in any case; if we believe not, He abideth faithful. He cannot deny Himself.

The gospel makes all now as clear as even God can, consistently with His love and glory, till the judgment. Then it will be proved that not lack of light from God

was at fault, but man's will who loves darkness rather than light, because his deeds were evil. But now before the judgment, God commends His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. It is Christ's death which efficaciously and for ever atones for guilt. It. is by Christ's death that enemies are reconciled to God. All is yours if you believe on Him; all is lost if you turn from Him.

How could it be otherwise if Jesus be the Word made flesh, the Son Whom God sent in His love, Whom Jews and Gentiles slew (proving what they were), Whom (thus slain God in yet fuller love made a sacrifice for sin? It is righteous with God to justify you as a believer in Jesus (Rom. 3:26). Surely it is not unjust to judge you for all your sins, if you aggravate. them all by spurning the Saviour God has given in His infinite love.

I implore you, my reader, if you have never thus submitted to the righteousness of God in saving you, to search honestly what hinders you. It is certainly not on God's part; for the apostle declares that God is as it were beseeching you in the Sent One. Will you slight His call longer? How blessed, in life or death, to have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ! Vain for us to think of making it. He made it through the blood of His cross: so says the scripture. What a proof of God's love no less than Christ's! If you refuse to accept it, who is to blame but yourself? It is the preference of sin and Satan to God and His Son. It is contempt of Christ's sufferings and blood, as it is unbelief of God's word and His own love.

Undoubtedly God looks for a holy walk in His children, He looks for the fruit of light in all goodness and

righteousness and truth. But He looks for nothing of the kind till you are justified by faith: to ask such fruit from you in your unbelief would deny Himself, His truth, and His grace. Man deceives by vain words, if he says that one who believes but walks wickedly “hath inheritance in the kingdom of God and of Christ.” Such faith can save none. It is beneath that of the demons, who at least tremble (James 2). But the faith which comes to God through Christ as a guilty sinner, and yet rests on His work for the purification of sins through Christ’s death, is of His Spirit, and works by love and receives its end, soul-salvation (1 Peter 1). It is by faith in Christ Jesus that all or any are God’s sons (Gal. 3). Now we must be. in the relationship of sons before we can really walk as such. Till we are God’s sons, we simply deceive ourselves by pretending to a walk which pertains only to faith. The relationship is of grace on His part, and so to us of faith, not for man’s desert, but in spite of all demerit. Our duties, as His sons, begin when we are sons and know it: otherwise they are hindered through questions and fears. His own love in Christ answers every question and casts out fear.

W. K.

9 Justified by His blood

Rom. 5:9.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 265-266.)

That there is none just, no not one, the apostle had proved from the Psalms (Rom. 3:20). Those under law are, no less than those without law, all under sin. There is no difference in this: all sinned and come short of the glory of God. Such is the condition of mankind, and

authoritatively so declared. As being then guilty, of themselves none can enter heaven, none escape hell.

Therefore did God, after revealing at the beginning the coming destroyer of the enemy, at length send His Son, Who so glorified Him in obedience unto death for sin, that God can righteously send the good news of remission of sins, and life in His name, to every soul that bows in faith. Thus does He justify freely or gratuitously as far as man is concerned, by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The grace of God is the motive or proximate cause for justifying the unjust; and this is what is meant in such scriptures as speak of justifying any by the grace of God (Rom. 3:24, Titus 3:7). In His pure, spontaneous, unmerited favour it originated. We ware not only not just but ungodly, even if moral or religious after a fashion "we were yet sinners." But God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. There only was the efficacious sacrifice for the defiled; there the ransom most precious to God. This lays the ground for a new kind of righteousness — for God's righteousness in justifying him who, having no righteousness for God, believes in Jesus at the call of God. It was righteous in God to raise from the dead Jesus Whom unrighteous man crucified; it was righteous to set Him at His own right hand in heaven (John 16:10). But, further, it is His righteousness to justify the ungodly one, not in working for it, but in believing on Him as the God of grace in Christ (Rom. 4). For to him that works for it the reward is not reckoned for righteousness. For this cause it is of faith, that it may be according to grace; and this, not more that the glory may be to God, than that the blessing may be sure to the

soul that believes. For, as the Lord Himself taught us in the parables, it is the joy of God to save the lost (Luke 15). By His grace the believer is justified.

Hence we are also said to be justified by (or out of) faith (Rom. 5:1). The Jew, and indeed the natural man, is apt to think that justification must be out of works. But clearly if a soul could be justified by works, Christ died in vain; and the grace of God would be made void. Hence the gospel is preached to us expressly as lost and powerless; and Jesus our Lord was delivered up for our trespasses and was raised again for our justification. "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God." There is no other principle or way for a sinner; and sinners we have all been, enemies in mind by wicked works, utterly unfit for the presence of God. Therefore did Christ suffer for sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God; Who can meet us, as we are, on the ground of that atoning death, and justify us by the faith of Jesus. By Him, as the apostle at Antioch of Pisidia, preached to souls who had never heard such good news before — by Him "every one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39).

But there is a further connection in our text. We are said to be "justified by His blood." Here it is the apostle's design to express the power or virtue of that which has justified the believer; and he declares it unequivocally to be the blood of Christ. There is no room for mistake. Where the apostle speaks of the efficacious basis for that immense change of relationship, which is called "justification," he says it, is by or in His blood, Thus only does God account the believer righteous. "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin." So it was, not

with blood of goats and calves, He entered once for all into the sanctuary, having obtained eternal redemption. It is a work done and accepted by God, outside the believer, yet for him and in full view of his sins, which Jesus bore in His own body on the tree, — bore away unto a land not inhabited, never more to be. The believer once purged has no more conscience of sins. When awakened by the quickening voice of Christ in the word, his sins lay overwhelmingly on his conscience, and he judged himself in repentance before God. But now by faith he rests on the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; he rests on God's estimate of that blood as proclaimed in the gospel; he believes that God has found. a ransom; and he himself has, what Scripture calls, no more conscience of sins.

My reader, turn not away, because you think such news too good to be true. Too good to come from man, undoubtedly; but what can be too good for the God Who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son? — gave Him, that whosoever believeth should not perish but have eternal life. God feels, speaks, acts, worthily of Himself in justifying the ungodly. His grace prompted the wondrous work on behalf of sinners; faith is the empty hand, which receives the boon; and the blood of Jesus is the mighty sacrifice, by which you have your sins blotted out and yourself brought nigh to the living God as your Father. Forget not that despisers shall perish.

10 Reconciled to God

Rom. 5:10.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 283-284.)

Reconciliation with God is a rich result of the gospel. It is equally simple and sure. In the nature of things God alone can be the unerring judge of it. He accordingly bears witness to it as a spiritual fact due to the death of Christ, and true of every believer. The guilt and the enmity were entirely in us, as we were naturally. In His love God intervened on our behalf when we lay in our sins, evil, helpless, hopeless. He intervened in His Son Who died for us that we might be justified in virtue of His blood; for He sent Him as propitiation for our sins. No other way could glorify Him or justify us. Here only is love conciliated with justice; but it is God's love and God's righteousness, for in us, ungodly and sinners, was neither. Therefore it is for His glory, and according to His grace, and hence not of works but of faith, that no flesh should glory, but "he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." So speak both O. and N. Testaments.

What can be plainer than the testimony of scripture? "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by (or, through) the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:10). The Holy Spirit presents the efficacy of Christ's death unambiguously, that the believer may give to the winds his fears and treat his doubts as of the enemy. God's love is the source of the blessedness; Christ's death guarantees it as not only of grace but righteous. Only so is God just and justifying him that has faith in Jesus. Thus is the alienation met holily. Divine love laid the sins on the head of the sole adequate Victim; on Him, not on the sinner, was our evil judged unsparingly by God; and the glad tidings of that mighty work He sent far and wide, that through Christ's name everyone that

believeth on Him should receive remission of sins (Acts 10:43).

Only with remission there is far more. As we read here, the believer is “reconciled to GOD.” Not that God was alienated; for He so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son. But He abhorred, and cannot but judge, sin. Therefore must the Son of man be lifted up. “Christ died for us,” that we, not our sins, might be spared; that our sins, not ourselves, might be put away from before God; that we might be reconciled to God, and expiation be made for our sins. Christ has effected both for every believer; yea, He has wrought a work of such God-glorifying and infinite value, that God can righteously send a message of reconciliation into all the world and to all the creation. And on what a wondrous basis! Him Who knew no sin Be made sin for us, that we might become God’s righteousness in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

Undoubtedly, when a soul repents and believes the gospel, there is a marked moral change. Faith knows God and Him Whom He sent as never before, and by the Holy Spirit cries, Abba Father; while repentance means a real self-judgment in the sight of God. But reconciliation goes farther, and is the establishing of a new, near, and known relationship of favour with God according to the purposes of His grace and through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Now that Christ is come and the will of God done, all that raised a barrier and provoked flesh is gone by our death with Christ; and we are His Who is risen, that we may bear fruit unto God, and serve in newness of spirit, not in oldness of letter.

When Christ appears and the revelation of the sons of God takes place, the creation (which, as the apostle tells us, is now groaning together and travailing in pain together) shall be delivered. It is now in the bondage of corruption as it shared the consequences of Adam's fall, its head. But the Second man. as He now delivers those who believe in Him, will by-and-by deliver creation also into the liberty of the glory we shall then have. Before He comes in power and glory, it is ours, to enjoy already, as creation cannot, the liberty of grace. In that day God will reconcile to Himself through Christ all things (having made peace by the blood of His cross), whether the things on earth or the things in the heavens. But it is all-important to know that, whatever we may once have been in the sad and wicked past, God has now reconciled us in the body of Christ's flesh through death (Col. 1:21, 22). Impossible to do more for our souls now than He has already. done in Christ, always supposing that we believe in Him and continue in the faith grounded and settled.

Do you believe now, dear reader? Is it your peaceful, settled, assurance from day to day, that you are thus "reconciled to God"? It could be the portion of none without the perfect and accepted work of Christ; whereby, as Heb. 10:10 tells us, we have been sanctified once for all. Nay more, by that one offering He has perfected for ever (i.e. without a break) the sanctified (ver. 14). It is God Who reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:18). It is therefore as complete as is due to His person and His work. Believing that God is thus good to you now in His Son has a powerful effect on the inner man, its affections and its mind, as well as the outer ways and words, the whole life. But reconciliation

is God’s work in setting us who believe in our right relationship to Him, sins forgiven, ourselves justified and standing in His favour as His beloved children. Without Christ’s death for us it was impossible for sinful man to be thus blessed. But if by grace I believe on Him, all is mine, as God’s word declares. If then your soul rests on Him, on God’s testimony to Him and His work, be assured that you are reconciled to God. What God reveals, we receive without doubt in Christ’s name.

11 We shall be saved

Rom. 5:9, 10.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 297-298.)

Salvation is a great word and a great thing, especially in its force as interpreted by Christ. Israel often knew deliverances of divine mercy, saviours not a few; but they were national, for time and this world. Even then faith looked for things better and more enduring through the Messiah that was coming. So much the more were souls astonished that, when He came, He did not restore the kingdom to Israel nor destroy their enemies; for He was Himself rejected by men, in particular by the Jews, far more than His herald John the Baptist had been.

But thus was God’s counsel accomplished, His love displayed, and His word magnified; thus was man and Israel proved to be altogether guilty and lost; but no less was room left for sovereign grace, and divine righteousness, and everlasting salvation. All met in the cross of Christ, where the worst evil of the creature rose up against the perfect goodness of God, Who laid the burden of sin on His Son, the suffering Son of man, a

sacrifice for sins, a propitiatory through faith in His blood for showing forth God's righteousness. And now, Christ being raised for the believer's justification, he is assured of salvation, If sins set to any man's account by God must ensure judgment, never did one stand forth as a sufferer to the utmost like the Saviour. He was man, born of woman, as truly as any, not so the first Adam who was created, not born. He, the Son, was God as truly as the Father, or the Holy Spirit. He was the Holy One of God; which Adam was not, even untainted and fresh from God's hand, innocent and upright, but never said to be holy, though he had no sin then in his nature when tempted. Christ was in all things tempted like as we are, sin excepted. Such was the One, God and man, the absolutely obedient One, Who undertook to suffer and die, Just for unjust: the only, the adequate, the perfect sufferer for sins, that He might bring those who believe to God (1 Peter 3). But God raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God. What could be a grander demonstration of the sacrifice accepted, of sirs effaced?

Yet you are not justified by His blood, unless you believe the testimony God brings in the gospel; nay, you are worse than heathen; you add to all your other sins contempt of God's grace, and of Christ's atoning death, and of the Holy Spirit, the present and divine though unseen Witness. If the word of the law spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received just retribution, how shall those escape who either reject so great salvation when presented, or neglect it by a heartless profession of the Lord's name?

Do you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the

dead? Then fear not to rest on the inspired assurance; “thou shalt be saved” (Rom. 10:9). He that spared not but gave up His own Son for us all, when we were ungodly and enemies, is worthy of all trust, as His word is of all acceptation. To rest on it is “obedience of faith,” the root of all the practical obedience that follows. The soul that receives His testimony sets to his seal that God is true. Why should you fear that He’ in Whom you believe for the remission of your sins will abandon you afterwards? No doubt, you are weak; but what is Christ? Is He a little Saviour? is He not our great God and Saviour (Titus 2:13)?

Listen to the apostle authorised of God to reason with you. “Much more then, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life” (vers. 9, 10). Such is the salvation here guaranteed by God. No doubt it is for believers only, but it is for every believer, and not one should doubt it. If you at His Word cast your soul on Christ and His work, God declares the blessing is yours all through. Doubts of Christ and of His salvation come not from God’s Spirit, but from the enemy who hates you and Christ yet more. The express aim of the passage is to strengthen your confidence and chase fear away. The love of God in Christ has already met your need when desperate. That love which sought you when an enemy and made you a friend, yea God’s child, by faith in Christ Jesus, is still real and active on your behalf. Distrust not His love, nor His word.

It is quite right for the believer to exercise himself, to have a conscience in every thing void of offence toward

God and men. Nor can anything happen to him sadder than sin, far more serious in a believer than in another man. Assuredly it calls for self-judgment and humiliation before God in proportion to the offence and the offender. But God provides for the failures and the trials of the way by Christ's advocacy and priesthood, as also in the action of His Spirit and word. Impossible that grace, unless abused, should clash with the righteous government of God, for the Father judges according to the work of each (John 15, 1 Peter 1:17). Indeed this constant vigilance takes effect on His children, because they know themselves redeemed with Christ's precious blood as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. It is their new responsibility (for as men, on their old responsibility, they were lost) to walk as children of obedience, not fashioning themselves according to the former lusts in their ignorance; but, as He that called them is holy, they too should be holy in all manner of conduct.

In our scripture, however, the apostle would establish souls in the saying grace of God before dealing with the walk; and therefore he instructs those who believe to rest assured from their justification that they shall he saved. That unbelievers should make a principle of doubting is but natural. It is deplorable that any believer should be so dull and negligent of the word before us, if there were no other, or as if all others were not consistent. Of all men, the Christian should be wholly subject to God's word. And here we have a two-fold witness, either of them divinely strong, both conclusive, that believers shall be saved. It would be strange indeed, if after we were justified by Christ's blood, we should not be saved from that wrath which is to fall on

all impiety and unrighteousness of men holding the truth in unrighteousness. Not so: the apostle affirms that much more we shall be saved through Christ; and he adds that, if when enemies we were reconciled to God through His Son's death, much more being reconciled shall we be saved by His life. He was crucified of weakness; He lives of God's power. Each is to God's glory, each fraught with blessing. If that depth be so efficacious, what security in this height? Even as Himself said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." The believer is called to walk accordingly. His standing is wholly because of what grace has wrought in Christ, and given him freely and fully and abidingly, He is responsible to walk by faith as thus blessed of God, coming under discipline if he fail, but cheered from the start with God's assurance of salvation according to the virtue of Christ's death and in the power of His life.

12 We also joy in God

Rom. 5:11.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 312-313.)

The grace of God here shines at its brightest, as far as this Epistle goes; and we who believe are meant to enjoy all to the full. Never is this possible, never understood, till we are convinced by divine teaching that all our blessing is in Christ and His redemption. Justified by faith of Him and His work, we have peace with God. This strengthens us to judge ourselves and abhor our sins far more deeply than when, first convinced of our guilt, we cried to God and cast our souls on the sacrifice of Christ. Solid peace with God no soul has till he believes on Him

that raised up from the dead Jesus our Lord, Who was delivered for our offences and was raised up for our justification.

Faith is reckoned to the believer now for righteousness, not only as to Abraham of old but more blessedly still. For, as the apostle shows, he believed in hope of what God would do; the Christian believes what God has done for him in Christ. Abraham confided in promise; we under the gospel have accomplishment. The work of God's grace for the remission of our sins and purging our consciences is once and for ever done. It cannot be annulled nor can it be added to. There are resources of grace to meet other wants; but, receiving Him who died for us and rose again, we received the reconciliation.2 We know that the love of God was toward us, when we were yet sinners. Then it was that Christ died for us, not when we had a little strength and became godly. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for ungodly persons.

Such is the unerring word of God: what glad tidings for men! How wicked to despise His message! How blessed to believe! For sin wronged His love and His truth; and Christ vindicated both, while He suffered once for sins that He might bring us to God; and faith receives the boon on God's word to the salvation of the soul. He who so began carries on accordingly. By Christ also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God, instead of being alarmed and shrinking back to perdition.

Nor is this all. We rejoice or boast in tribulations also. This is the promise to the Christian, instead of the earthly prosperity pledged to the Jew if faithful. But

grace turns tribulations to the Christian's present good, by breaking his will, and teaching him what the God is that has found him and that he has found. For tribulation works out patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope does not make ashamed; because the love of God is then better known, being abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that is given to us. His love thus spent on us at all cost to Christ and to Himself, when we were unloveable to any but God, certainly cannot be less when we have repentance toward Him and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. His love- is the assurance to our faith, that, being now justified by Christ's blood, we shall be saved from wrath through the Saviour. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved in virtue of His life.

There is even more than this most comforting assurance as to the future. "And not only so, but we also joy (or boast, the same word as in vers. 2 and 3) in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (or rather "reconciliation," referring to ver. 10). It is not now the love of God, but the God of love; and He is our boast, in no way our dread as once. We can glory in Himself, not merely in what He has given us in Christ or will give us in the day when all will be according to His power and goodness. For as we have now received the reconciliation, His perfect love casts out fear, and we know what He is to us in Christ; yea, the very sorrows of the way lead us to know His love better, as well as His word which is thus verified to us not only in our Saviour but in every day's experience.

For the Holy Spirit does not fail here below while Christ is on high.

Indeed, this is life eternal, that the Christian should know the Father, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He sent. And he knows Him to be love as well as light, Christ's Father and our Father, Christ's God and our God. Receiving Christ, we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully. From such crooked ways there was no real deliverance apart from Christ; but now that the Son of God has come, the Deliverer from the coming wrath, He has also given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. We love, because He first loved us; and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. And it was manifested toward us in this, that God sent His only-begotten Son that we might live through Him, yea more, that He might die for us, a propitiation for our sins.

But it is impossible so to know God and His love without boasting in Him. The heart is cleared of its idols; the living and true God is served. But there is much more than this. For the heart is led up, by the truth of Christ and the love of God displayed toward us in His work, from the blessing to the Blesser, Who sets us in perfect and unchanging favour. His very chastening thenceforth is the effect and proof of His love to His children, as we read in Heb. 12. Hence do we boast in God, even now in this world, as the fruit of "the reconciliation." So in order to it our Lord taught us in the parable that the father deemed it well to make merry and rejoice because the lost prodigal was found; not the sinner only

to be saved, but the God Who saved him. Can we but glory in Himself then? We are thereby made true worshippers and worship Him in spirit and truth. Thus do we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we now received the reconciliation.

1 We “have” peace is simply possessing as a present thing; we “have” access is the continuance of what is past, and so is “we stand.”

2 This is the true force of what the A. V. here calls “the atonement,” which is the right word, not “reconciliation,” in Heb. 2:17.

Third Series

1 God created

2 God said

3 Adam

4 The two Trees

5 Woman

6 The Tempter

7 Eve Tempted

8 The Fall of Man

9 Naked

10 Where art thou?

11 Convicted

12 The woman's Seed

1 God created

Gen. 1

He Who “in the beginning” created the universe is also the source of spiritual life, of a divine nature as in 2 Peter 1. Every creature above or beneath is the fruit of His will and power, He sovereign and good, they dependent and subject responsibly if not in fact, for self-will, sin, entered both heaven and earth. As of old, so now, all blessing is in the Son, in Whom life was and is. The Spirit of God took His part then as He does today according to the scriptures. From above is every good giving and every perfect gift, from Him with Whom can be no variation nor shadow of turning. Hence, as sin

completed brings forth death, He was pleased to bring forth believers by word of truth that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. There is for a fallen creature no holiness possible, no walk acceptable to God, save through faith in virtue of life above the creature; and this is now set in the clearest light of God's word. "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God, the life he hath not." Our Lord here below had presented the matter so fully that mistake is inexcusable. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life" (John 5:24, R. V.).

This is grace, which the sinner needs to save him, the believer knows it in Christ. But, even as to nature, how the Bible opens as becomes a revelation from God! There is no discussion, no reasoning to prove the being of God, no unfolding of His attributes. He acts in power, and speaks with authority, as the true God. He is good, does good, and pronounces on good, as One that has pleasure in it. If from the world's creation His invisible things, His everlasting power and divinity, are clearly seen, being apprehended through the things that are made, how much more does revelation make known? Science is here blank ignorance, it knows not and never can know anything of origins. Its field is the investigation of phenomena, and it rises by generalisation to the fixed laws which govern what exists in nature. No doubt it may advance, to a fuller degree and a more exact distribution, by a better knowledge. But from the beginning there was a reality in God's creation to be investigated; and man, whatever his hostile will to hide and lose himself in second causes,

cannot escape the conviction that there must be a first cause, God the Creator. He it is Who made known His ways to Moses, His doings to the sons of Israel. He it is Who later revealed Himself in Jesus, His Son, His Only-begotten, in Whom is life eternal for the believer, without Whom abides the wrath of God for him that disbelieves. To reject the grace of God in Christ is to remain in unremoved guilt and death, with a fearful expectation of judgment to come.

Only the fool has said in his heart, No God; he is fool morally and in the worst sense. Reasoning, if sound, may argue that so this or that must be; revelation says that so it is. Nothing is so simple, satisfactory, and deep as the truth. This alone in grace meets man's ignorance and his need: the truth answers both, now and for ever. Believers are entitled to say, We know, and this on God's testimony, as sure as it is clear, forming the consciousness of the new man by God's Spirit.

God, and God only, has self-being. He is the "I am," and so speaks of Himself. He is the Most High, the Almighty, and the Eternal, and thus made His name known in due time; and He alone can rightly say "I will." So said the Son when incarnate here below; which could not be, if He were not one with the Father, as truly God, and therefore as competent by the sacrifice of Himself to save righteously as to create.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Here we are not told of all the beings created at the first, for elsewhere we read of the angels of His might. Nor have we particulars first of the states, and then of the denizens, of the earth, before man was created under the new conditions of the six days

followed by the sabbath. Previously we have two revealed facts: creative energy originating the universe (Gen. 1:1); a subsequent state of utter confusion, into which (not the heavens, but) the earth was thrown (Gen. 1:2), before that reconstitution which made it the suited sphere for the moral dealings of God with mankind, and the display of His own grace in Christ. Then Adam's transgression wrought ruin to himself, the race, and the earth; but God will have His eventual triumph over evil power, as well as weakness, through His own Son, the Word made flesh. For He was the perfect pattern of obedience, in life and death the overcomer of Satan, the accomplisher of redemption already by His blood, about to come again to effect redemption by power, not only for those that are His for heaven and earth, but for all the creation itself, enthralled even yet by reason of the first man's fall, to be delivered for glory by the Second. The Holy Spirit will not restore all, whatever His blessed work in that day, it is an honour reserved for Him Who suffered on the cross: Jesus is Heir of all things.

God thought fit to make and try man, and, as the needed measure with the fallen race, to wash away his corruption and violence in the waters of the deluge. Here He called out Abram and his seed to a land they shall yet truly and for ever enjoy. Here He tested Israel by the law, and gave them priests, prophets, and kings till there was no remedy. Here, as sin had entered by the first man, He sent His Son, a man Christ Jesus, to vanquish in every way the enemy of God and man, and to deliver by His death and resurrection such of Satan's victims as believe. Here therefore was displayed God's moral glory in the humiliation, obedience, and cross of the Son of Man. Here consequently shall His glory be

manifested, in Christ and all that are His above and below, to the blessing of the universe, when Jehovah reigns and the earth rejoices, set free from thraldom to Satan and his blinded instruments. No doubt the glory above is higher than what the earth shall enjoy, and those who suffered with Christ on earth shall be glorified with Him on high.

See then, my reader, that as you have heard the word of truth, you believe it; for it is the gospel of salvation to all that receive the Saviour on God's word. If he that disregarded Moses' law died without mercy on the word of two or three witnesses of how much worse punishment shall he be judged worthy that trod underfoot the Son and counted the blood of the covenant a common thing?

2 God said

Gen. 1.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 346-348.)

Great as creation is, God's word embraces far more and deeper things. "Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." It is therefore worthy of all acceptation, whatever He may say and whatever the theme. Thereby is revealed the truth by Him Who knows it perfectly.

In Heb. 11:3 we read, "By faith we understand that the worlds, have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which do appear" (R.V.) Evolution is an hypothesis which leaves out God and denies creation. It is a mere effort of imagination to account for the universe, and an effort that set., aside that definite and universally observed fact which underlies all natural science, the permanence

of species.. So the ancients, in the West as well as the East, suggested cosmogonies no less fanciful. But the word of God is now scripture, which alone lets us hear what is worthy of God and satisfactory to man. “He spake, and it was; He commanded, and it stood fast.” Details are only revealed when man was about to be created. For scripture is a moral book; and God’s good pleasure is in men. Hence, when the “days” begin, how often we read in Gen. 1 “God said.”

Alas! sin soon followed. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). As man thus universally failed in uprightness and fell under death, it became thenceforth, if he were not to be abandoned to ruin and despair, a question of divine righteousness and of life superior to death. And no sooner did God appear in judgment of the evil than He spoke of the Saviour, the Second Man, the woman’s Seed; Who, Himself bruised, should bruise the serpent’s head. This was what “God said” to meet the fallen. And faith received it. So we learn in Abel; so the elders had witness borne to them. They believed God’s word; they looked for a deliverer from sin and Satan. It was plain that He Who had authority had power. They in their way saw, as He saw fully, that every thing He had made was very good. They heard that Adam and Eve had violated the LORD God’s commandment. But they also learnt that, if they listened to the evil tempter and transgressed, He did not leave them to perish, even though, in consequence of their sin, “He drove out the man.”

The Saviour did not come yet, nor for ages afterwards; but the word of God about Him was given at once. “The LORD God said,” even when pronouncing sentence on

the serpent, that the mysterious Seed of the woman should crush the evil power which had misled man to sin and death. Man never thought of such a consummation, still less could he accomplish it. Nay, his proud unbelief refuses the blessing when accomplished, brought to his door, and proclaimed in his ears. It is of God's grace, the work of His righteousness, and revealed by His word; but man, being guilty, distrusts His good and holy benefactor, dreads in a measure His judgment, yet believes not His mercy in a Saviour, still less that (through His death for sin) it is God's righteousness unto all, and upon all them that believe. Even those who claimed to be God's people and were not idolaters, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

Faith alone and always received the blessing; and faith is of hearing, and hearing by the word of God. From the beginning it was so, and so it is still. The word of faith is what the apostle preached. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved; for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10.)

So ever since the fall every believer looked for the One that was coming, the woman's Seed. They did not know much of Him. It was not yet said that He was to be called Jesus, nor that God would raise Him from the dead. But they heard from God that He, the Seed of the Woman, should bruise the Serpent's head: a work altogether beyond man as such. In due time God Who said thus much said more; but the little He said from the

first, faith received; and those who believed were blessed. God in the blood of Jesus showed His righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime in the forbearance of God. Thus was His grace in all past ages vindicated by the same death of Christ, which is the ground of the gospel now sent to every creature under heaven. Those who received what God said, be it less or more, of the coining Saviour got the everlasting profit all through, even as Abel had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God testifying on the ground of His gifts. By faith he offered unto God a sacrifice according to His mind. He believed in the bruised Seed of the woman, and brought to Jehovah a sacrifice on which death passed; whereas Cain never rose above the reasoning of nature or the resource of his own wretched self Even so is it with the mass now. They trust in themselves or in men like themselves. They confide in human things and sayings. They venerate shadows and shows. They believe in ordinances. They are puffed up by sights and sounds, by ceremonies, processions, and the like. But they hear not Christ's words and believe not Him that sent Christ. They count it presumption for any to have everlasting life, delusion that a believer comes not into judgment, and mystical madness that he has passed out of death into life. The believer trusts God in Christ for eternal life. Self and its works, the church and its ordinances, are the refuge of the fearful and unbelieving, not God's love nor Christ's work as revealed by the Spirit in His word. There is neither repentance nor faith. Whatever good works, or the church, may be for the faithful, it is a snare for the sinner to trust them for salvation.

Development is as false to God's word, as evolution is to His creation. They are the extremes of superstition and of scepticism, alike frigid zones where life and light are unknown. The truth is inseparable from the Son of God; it was manifested in Him, Christ Jesus, a Man; and no lie is of the truth, no matter how long or widely held. Hence we are begotten again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, through the word of God which liveth and abideth (1 Peter 1:23); and by the same word we grow unto salvation. For if we receive the end of our faith, salvation of souls, we are guarded by the power of God through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, when our bodies will be saved as our souls now are.

Hence we are told (James 1:18) that God of His own will begat us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruit of His creatures. By-and-by new heavens and a new earth will display the glory of Him Who is the Father of lights, from Whom every good giving and every perfect gift come down. Believers are now a sort of first-fruit of it, the product and witness of His grace. His will working by His word is the source of the everlasting boon; as our will issues in lust, sin, and death.

But the word cleanses too, as the Lord told His disciples (John 15) that they were already clean because of the word which He spoke to them. Of this water is the well-known symbol, and the Spirit makes it living. Hence the Lord in John 3 explains new birth to be born of water and the Spirit. It is receiving Christ's testimony; and he that has received it has set to his seal that God is true: the blessed reversal of Satan's success at the beginning, when distrust of God entered the heart. Thus is the heart purified by faith (Acts 15:9).

Assuredly this is not all. For Jesus, the Son of God, came by water and blood: both flowed from His pierced side; and he who believes receives the virtue of both. Purification is by His death, and expiation too; as it is the Holy Spirit Who bears witness in the word of God. Sins are judged and confessed, alike hated and forsaken; the blood of Christ that cleanseth from every sin, and not the guilt of the believer, is before God. Faith rests on the perfect and efficacious death of the Saviour. And he that believes the word of God, His witness, has peace with God and eternal life in His Son.

3 Adam

In Rom. 5:14 Adam is said to be a figure or type of Him that was to come. Such he is strikingly and, as with Aaron in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in contrast even more than resemblance.

Made in God's image, after His likeness, Adam had from God, dominion over bird of the heavens, and fish of the sea, over cattle, over all the earth, and over every living thing that moveth upon it. He, the only one of all here below, became living soul by Jehovah Elohim (the LORD God) breathing into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen. 2:7). Therefore was his soul alone immortal; and his spirit, instead of going downward to the earth like a beast's, went upward to God that gave it (Eccles. 3:21, Eccles. 12:7). Therefore shall each one give account of himself to God, and all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each may receive the things done through the body according to what he did, whether good or bad (Rom. 14:12, 2 Cor. 5:10).

For Adam, not only responsible as he could not but be, soon became an object of judgment. Surrounded by

every natural good, he was subjected to the simplest and least irksome of divine commands — to abstain from the fruit of a single tree, the test of his obedience. This he violated at the first temptation of the enemy, following his wife into evil instead of guiding her in good. Hence, as disobedient, he was driven out of Paradise under sentence of death, and when thus fallen became father of the race.

But the good, holy, and righteous LORD God sought Adam the very day he sinned, drew the guilty pair from their hiding-place, and, after bringing home their guilt respectively, in His judgment of the serpent revealed the triumph of His grace in the woman's Seed, the Second Man, and Last Adam (Gen. 3:15).

And how blessed the contrast of Him Who was thus set forth from that early day, the one Object of faith and hope! For the Son of God is come and hath given us who believe understanding, that we may know Him that is true. Old Testament, no less than New, bears witness to His glory and His humiliation, His pouring out His soul unto death and His exaltation at God's right hand, as eventually and visibly over (not Israel only but) all peoples, nations, and languages, yea, all creation.

Meanwhile, as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned, so the grace of Christ brought in transcendent blessing, presented unto all men in the gracious appeal of the gospel, and taking effect "upon all that believe" (Rom. 3). For as through one offence the bearing was unto all men for condemnation, so through one righteousness the bearing is unto all men for justification of life. For as through the one man's

disobedience the many were constituted sinners, so also through the obedience of One shall the many he constituted righteous (Rom. 5:12-19), Even the incredulous Jew could not consistently resist the truth of the gospel, if he held to the authority of the law. For he could not deny that Adam's trespass involved the race in sin and condemnation. Was it not then worthy of God to bring in for the race a still better, richer, and more enduring good through the one Man, His own Son? And as the blessing is of God's grace unto all, so it is by faith and is preached to all, instead of depending on the law given to Israel. The gospel is universal in its appeal, yet takes effect only in those that believe, but equally in all believers be they Gentiles or Jews.

Adam, innocent, stood only on his obedience; but, swayed by his wife who was deceived by the tempter, he too disobeyed. He sought to be as God, knowing good and evil, and fell. Christ, on the contrary, Who was God, came in flesh to glorify God and save sinners, carrying out His obedience, as Adam his disobedience, unto death. And this He did perfectly and suffering to the utmost in the difficulties and ruin which man's sin had made, as Adam fell tried in the least degree with all circumstances in his favour. Wherefore also God highly exalted Christ, and sends out the glad tidings to all creation. And thus did Christ vindicate God's love, while Adam acted upon Satan's lie which defamed it, as if He kept back a little thing which would do His creatures great good. For that little thing, the forbidden fruit of the tree, Adam gave up God; Who so loved the world as to give His best, His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life.

Further, if Adam believed the enemy that gainsaid God's warning of death, Christ went down under the death of the cross, and (what was infinitely more) under the judgment of our iniquities, which Jehovah laid on His holy head as a sacrifice (Isa. 53). Thus was God's truth vindicated in a way worthy of Himself and of His Son. That He is light was thereby proved; that He is love, no less; both beyond dispute in the gift of His Son to die for the guilty according to His word. All the cost was God's, all the suffering was His Son's: when Man, on behalf of men, with all the value of a divine Person and, for those that believe, its infinite transferable efficacy with God.

And thus as Adam only became a father when fallen, Jesus stands risen from the dead, after having once suffered for sins, Just for unjust, the life-giving Spirit. He comes, as He said Himself, that His disciples might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. It is the life of Him Who bore their sins in His own body on the tree; it is now the life of Him risen when the debt was paid, and the judgment borne. Thus the believer has eternal life, and comes not into judgment, but has passed as his settled state from death into life.

Is it thus with you, whoever you may be, as you read these lines? If you hear His word and believe Him Who sent His Son Jesus, you are entitled to this as the portion which God's grace is now giving to the believer in His name. Beware of the tempter, a liar and murderer from the beginning. Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. And the Holy Spirit is now bearing witness to Him. The church is responsibly, and ought to be, the pillar and basement of the truth; the Jew is not, nor still less the philosopher; but that assembly of a living God which owes its being and blessing to His grace, and is bound to

confess Him Lord and Saviour. “Hear Him.” Moses cannot save, nor Elijah; Jesus only. Believing in Jesus is of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God the Father “He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father who sent Him “ (1 John 5:23). “Whosoever denieth the Son hath not the Father, he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also” (1 John 2:23). For indeed Jesus is the Good Shepherd that laid down His life for the sheep, and this in a way beyond all creature thought, after suffering all that man could do unrighteously in His faithfulness to God, suffering atoningly, He alone, from God in His love to lost man.

“Be it known unto you therefore, [men-] brethren, that through Him is preached unto you remission of sins. And in virtue of Him, everyone that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though one declare it unto you” (Acts 13:38-41).

4 The two Trees

Gen. 2:9.

(B.T. Vol. 19, p. 375-376.)

Scarce any fact of paradise seems less understood than that recorded in the latter half of Gen. 2:9, none supposed to be more distinctly an early myth. Yet were these two trees, singled out from the rest, a positive fact suited to that day of primeval innocence, and to no other; but embodying divine principles of the deepest and most enduring value for all time; and this without

applying force to either, or indulging in imagination of any kind, but in subjection to the indications of the inspired record itself. And the truth conveyed intimately concerns every soul of man.

The first thing to note is that “the tree of life” in the midst of the garden was absolutely distinct from that “of knowledge of good and evil.” To eat of the latter was forbidden on pain of certain death (ver. 17). Only when the man did eat of the prohibited tree, the LORD God took care that be should not take also of the tree of life (Gen. 3:22), It would have been the perpetuated life of sinful man: a calamity, and violation of all order, not a blessing. Apart from that transgression, the tree of life was open to him, and expressly outside the tree of knowledge.

Clearly then the first tree points out the channel of life for man unfallen, the provision of God for Adam in paradise freely given and quite independently of the second tree: so true is this that man forfeited his title to partake of the one tree when he ate of the other. Man was responsible not to eat of the tree of knowledge; if he abstained, he was free to eat of the tree of life. When guilty and fallen, he was debarred, and driven out, with a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life (Gen. 3:24).

Now the constant effort of man, especially of religious man, is as it were to identify the two trees; that is, to suspend life on the fulfilment of responsibility: a notion which flies in the face of the facts, when man was innocent, and still more manifestly false, when man was a sinner, and expressly excluded from the tree of life. The original relationship was lost through transgression.

The only natural religion that ever had or could have reality had ceased to be. All henceforth turned on what God is to man in saving mercy. Man in the most favourable circumstances had wholly failed toward God. Sin morally compelled God to be a judge. Love, divine grace, made Him a Saviour. Even so it was to lie only in and through His Son, His deigning to become man, and His going down into death and judgment for the guilty. The Father hath sent the Son as Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14); the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).

But consider the intermediate dealings of God before the Advent. The Epistle to the Galatians lays great stress on the promises as given, a covenant previously confirmed by God, 430 years before the law. They, too, were thereby so arranged that the one could not annul, still less be confounded with, the other. Now the promises answered to the tree of life, as the law to the tree of knowing good and evil. The promises were the unconditional and pledged grace of God, designedly long before, and absolutely distinct from, the law, which expressed His righteous demand from man on the ground of his responsibility. If Israel, if any, pretended to stand on that ground before God, the ten words were His terms. Such terms can only be a ministry of death and condemnation to sinful creatures, as Israel were, as all mankind are. The fatal mistake then as always is to seek life by meeting man’s responsibility. Israel took that ground and failed utterly, as all sinners must who go the same path. Scripture records the failure in the O.T. and explains it in the N.T., that men now may profit by that solemn lesson of old and betake themselves only to God’s grace in Christ.

For Christ alone has solved the problem; and this by accepting the full responsibility of man and bearing the consequences of sin and our sins in death, yea, death of the cross; so that, after glorifying God perfectly, He is risen from the dead, a life-giving Spirit to all believers. Thus there is no condemnation to those that are in Him, in Whom the two trees are thus brought into blessed harmony for our salvation unto God's glory.

As responsible men, we are ungodly and powerless, as the apostle asserts beyond dispute. So the Lord treats even the Jews as "lost," which closes the question of that responsibility. What more presumptuous in our sinful state of fallen nature than to seek life by pretending to fulfil our duty as men? Even to innocent man, as Gen. 2 teaches, life and responsibility were set expressly and altogether apart. But as Christ gives life freely to believers in His name, so is He propitiation by His death for their sins. For both were absolutely needed, if we were to be made meet for sharing the portion of the saints in light; and both are now given of God through faith to every believer, who has eternal life in the Son and through His blood redemption, the forgiveness of our offences. Not that a new responsibility is lacking, but it is the responsibility of a child of God. So Himself said "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19); and previously that He gives His sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, and none shall snatch them out of His hand (John 10:28), yea the Father's hand also securing them (29). Can any assurance be conceived plainer or stronger?

Thus in Christ alone, by His sacrifice and the sovereign gift of life, we have the principle of two trees, and this in fulness of blessing for all that believe; whereas the

unbeliever, despising the word, and as self-confident as he is weak and sinful, repeats the error of Adam and Israel to his ruin. As Christians we have the treasure of Christ in our earthen vessel; and are responsible to be always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus, the new nature, may be manifested in our body.

5 Woman

Gen. 2.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 14-15.)

Alienated as fallen man is from God, nothing is so strange to him as the truth. And no wonder. It brings the true God before him, and reminds him of his departure from God. He is under Satan's lie, and naturally opposes the truth, which he is inclined to treat at best as myth, philosophic or religious. But it is by the word of God's revealed truth, that the Father of lights brought of His own will any forth, that they should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures. His word is truth; and of that word Christ is the great personal object of faith, Who puts every soul that hears the gospel to the test. To this end is He born, and to this end is come into the world, that He should bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth hears His voice, and follows Him Who gives the believer eternal life. "He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life" (1 John 5:12). If a man recognised his ruin and guilt before God, how would he not from his heart receive the Saviour!

But, owning neither his own need nor God's grace in Christ, he stumbles at the word, being disobedient, and

judges scripture, instead of being judged by it, as all believers are. Such an one sets Gen. 2 against Gen. 1, because through incredulity he sees God in neither, and is unwilling to learn the truth in each and in both, alike necessary to give us a complete view.

Beyond controversy Gen. 1:26-28 presents in noble terms the creation of man, the chief of his works here below. Here only did He call Himself into council; as man only He proposed to make in His image after His likeness, assigning dominion over the rest of earth's living creatures. But whatever may be the expression of singular dignity, it is simply mankind's place in creation, notably distinguished, and indisputably the highest, but yet the highest of earthly creatures, "male and female" like the rest of animated nature. It is therefore God, Elohim the Creator simply, of Whom we here read. It could not with propriety be otherwise.

Gen. 2 regards the scene from the point of moral relationship which brings in the name of Him Who governs on earth as revealed to Israel nationally, and so, in the O.T. as a whole, Jehovah, but Jehovah here carefully identified with the Creator, Jehovah Elohim, the LORD God. For there is none other. It is ignorance to account for the different names of God here or elsewhere, and any difference of words, style, etc., by imagining distinct writers, when all is demonstrably due to change of standpoint, and the simple but profound and exquisite accuracy of thought and language in Holy Writ. It is no rival account by another hand, but the same writer guided by the inspiring Spirit to set out man's moral position; the garden of Eden as the scene of his care, and, in the midst of abundance, the prohibition laid on him under penalty of death; the subject beasts,

and birds, brought to him and named by him as their, lord; finally a helpmate, in contrast with every other formation, taken out of himself in the wise goodness of Him with Whom we have to do.

All is consistent with the presentation of relationship, beginning with Jehovah Elohim (the LORD God) in Gen. 2:4, not Creator only but Moral Governor. Hence here, not in Gen. 1, is the garden of delight planted by the LORD God, the testing place of man's obedience. Here only in the midst of the garden we hear of the two trees: one the sovereign gift of life naturally; the other of responsibility. Here only are we told of man formed of the dust of the ground on one hand, and on the other by the LORD God breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. Adam was thus "son of God" (Luke 3:38), a living soul, not as other creatures by creative power only, but he only by Jehovah Elohim breathing into his nostrils. Nor is the effect lost for the race; for, as Paul quotes to the Athenians, we too are His offspring, as no other earthly creatures are. Therefore is the soul immortal for good or for ill; if saved, it is for ever with Christ; if lost, for everlasting punishment, because He is refused and men die in their sins. Such was man's relationship to Jehovah Elohim; and the test of obedience here therefore follows.

In pointed contrast with the relationship to him of every animal of the field and every bird of the heavens, to which their master gave names by divine authority, no helpmate appeared, till Jehovah Elohim caused a deep sleep to fall on the man. Then He took one of his ribs, and built it into a woman, and brought her to the man (vers. 21, 22). And the man, notwithstanding his deep sleep, recognised her at once as bone of his bones and

flesh of his flesh. “This shall be called Woman (or She-man), because she was taken out of man.” It is the strongest possible statement of her peculiar relationship to himself, and as perfectly suiting chap. 2 as it would have been out of place in chap. 1. How sad that men of learning, professed theologians, should be so dull to discern the mind of God in scripture, so ready to plunge into the dark after any Will-o-the-wisp of rationalism to their own loss and the injury of all who follow them!

The apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 11:8, 9, tersely sums up the truth of the case as having God’s authority: “For man is not of woman, but woman of man; for neither was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.” Those who venture to dispute the fact must one day learn what it is to give God the lie. It is the ground of the sanctity of marriage, one woman for one man: such was the order from the beginning of Him Who made her, as He did, of man, and so to be one flesh, alas! too soon forgotten by men generally and even by Israel. But there it was indelibly written to instruct the faithful and shame the rebellious.

And is it nothing for souls that the same apostle in Eph. 5:25-33 refers to this oracle of God? Yes, the first man Adam foreshadows the Second man and last Adam, on Whom fell a deeper sleep, that a heavenly Eve might be formed, even the church for which Christ in His love cave Himself, that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. No doubt this mystery is great, but it is no less true and blessed. It is infinite grace, and only possible through the death of Christ, by which a poor sinner is reconciled through faith to God.

Oh, despise not the living and abiding word! Despise not the grace of God which sends you His glad tidings in Christ and in His blood which cleanseth from all sin! It is for you, that, believing on the name of the Son of God, “ye may know that ye have eternal life.”

6 The Tempter

Gen. 3:1.

It is to be noticed that, when the enemy assails our first parents, he is left in mysterious obscurity. Yet no believer, no serious mind, can doubt, that under the form of a serpent, Satan was at work to deceive and destroy, whatever the misused ingenuity of unbelief may reason to confuse the unwary and credulous. To the first book of the O. T. the last book of the N. T. answers here as elsewhere with singular force, and identifies him from first to last as "the old serpent, that is called Devil (slanderer) and Satan" (the adversary), Rev. 12:9, Rev. 20:2. Nor are we left to this symbolic prophecy alone; for the apostle Paul, in 2 Cor. 11:3, had given no uncertain sound about this evil one long before. If the serpent lured man into his lie against God, grace revealed the woman's Seed, bruised indeed yet bruising the head of the enemy, the Deliverer not only of all that believe but of all creation also (Rom. 8). The Second man will surely triumph.

Along with the restless seduction of man into sin, Satan is shown us in the ancient book of Job and with striking clearness, as the accuser of the saint, in the presence of Jehovah (Job 1:9, 10; Job 2:4, 5), with permitted power to afflict and within certain limits even to destroy the body, though not Job’s life.

But the issue for God and those that are His by faith is in every case his defeat eventually, in no case apart from the grace of the Lord Jesus. For there is found the personal antagonism. “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). He may thwart God in each object and plan of His, he may traduce the believer, and for a while seem ever so successful; but he is doomed, as also all who trust him against God and His Anointed, to utter defeat and everlasting ruin.

Under the legal system, as God was hidden, so was the enemy. David first brought out into relief the type of His kingdom; and there we first hear of Satan (1 Chr. 21:1). Numbering the people in the pride of a national ruler was abandoning dependence on Jehovah and a denial of his own early faith; and the chastening was seventy thousand men of Israel mowed down by pestilence.

In Ps. 109 we see Judas, the leader of the Christ-rejecting Jews against Jesus. Nor was it only a wicked man set over him, but Satan standing at his right hand: the plain prediction of the traitor’s deed under the devil’s instigation, as the psalm that follows is of Jehovah’s exalting the Holy One to sit at His right hand till the word is given to judge. It is the same opposition, seemingly carrying its evil way, but only accomplishing the good counsels of God in honour of His Son.

Zech. 3 has no other voice, though speaking of Messiah’s people. Did not their guilt and defilement give title to Satan against the high priest who represented them? Unquestionably and irremediably, had not Messiah been stricken for the transgressions of the people, and bruised for their iniquities. Righteously

therefore can Jehovah that has chosen Jerusalem rebuke Satan, and say, Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Righteously can He cause the iniquity to pass from their representative and clothe him with rich apparel, and set a fair mitre on his head.

In the N.T. the Tempter confronts the Son of God, and in ways more consummately subtle and complete to draw Him out of dependence on God. The last three-fold effort is recorded for our instruction and thanksgiving: the natural, the worldly, the religious temptations utterly foiled by Him Who stands obediently in the truth, as Satan did not because there is no truth in him. The strong one, however fully armed, here found One stronger, Who overcame him, and took his panoply and divided his spoils. But again he appeared as the prince of the world; and as he could not mislead the Messiah out of the path of subjection, he drew the world, the Jews most of all guilty, to kill Him in it: yet this was his own suicidal guilt, as Christ's death was the glorifying of God about sin, and the reconciliation of all that believe, and indeed of all creation, save of course those that reject Him.

But the N.T. is no less clear that the devil and his angels, till judgment is executed, are incessant in their efforts to corrupt and destroy, to accuse the saints and to deceive the whole habitable earth. He works through the world and the flesh; but his own special field is through falsehood, and his direct enmity is against the grace, truth, and glory of His destined Conqueror. Hence the demons whom he commands trembled before the Lord Jesus in terror of His casting them into the abyss, or bottomless pit, where Satan is to be bound when Christ comes in His kingdom. Till then Satan acts as a

devouring lion or a beguiler in a serpent-like craftiness, fashioning himself into an angel of light or kindling the fires of persecution, where he fails with his lies. Fallen angels there are already consigned to everlasting bonds under gloom for judgment of the great day. These so audaciously broke through God's order before the deluge that He has imprisoned them ever since; and they ought not to be confounded with those that are still allowed for a season to tempt mankind, and have access to the heavenly places as well as the earth till judgment befalls them. For their leader is the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience; as our wrestling if Christians is declared to be against the principalities, against the powers against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual [hosts] of wickedness in the heaven, lies (or heavenly places). And this conflict will never cease while the church is on earth. But Rev. 12 tells us that they are to be cast out of the heaven, at a day still future, with new and marked consequences for a short time on earth, before the binding in the abyss for a thousand years, followed soon after by casting them into the lake of fire.

O my fellow sinner, heed the voice of the Son of God, that you may receive the remission of your sins and eternal life. He died for sins, and has authority now and on earth to give you remission. In Him was life, and He gives life, His own eternal life, to every one that believes. There is no other way; for He is the way, the truth, and the life. You are a son of disobedience, and by nature a child of wrath. Be not deceived longer by Satan, who cheats into thinking yourself strong and free, whereas you are without strength and his slave already. Christ only can save you; and He is as able as He is

willing; and God has His pleasure in it, for He loves the Son and pities you. Satan can easily and will surely keep you to be his companion in punishment, as now his servant in sin. Whosoever believeth on Christ shall not be ashamed.

7 Eve Tempted

Gen. 3:1-5.

The subtlety of the enemy displays itself throughout. The weaker vessel is deceived, being drawn away by plausible appearances. How like our life! What a light is thrown on facts of every day, with their bitter results through unbelief and impenitence! For God is forgotten, and objects in the scene that now is take His place. Such is Satan's aim till the soul be betrayed into open ungodliness and despair, which hardens an act into a habit away from God.

Here, as the beginning of moral evil on earth, the Holy Spirit relates the fact, in its detail of instruction for every child of Adam, with the grand yet deep simplicity of these early books of inspiration.

"And he said, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? (vers. 1) "It was but a question of what God had said. But where this is allowed, He is dishonoured, and a breach is made in the line of defence for the enemy to enter. To doubt God's word is the beginning of the worst evil, it is to sit in judgment on Himself; whereas He only can and ought to judge, and this He does now by His word, as indeed the Lord says will be at the last day. How presumptuous then for man to judge Him!" A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father where is mine honour?

and if I be a master where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 1:6). Under the seeming modesty of a query Satan was undermining the prime duty of a creature! And what did he seek in particular thereby? To insinuate a doubt of His goodness. What! May you not eat of all the trees? Is it possible that you are forbidden any? How can God love you and withhold a single good thing from you? Surely there must be some mistake. "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Is it so?

It is written, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Eve on the contrary listened and parleyed. The mischief was begun. As the serpent had substituted the more distant and abstract "God" of creation for the Creator in moral relationship with man (Jehovah God), she fell into the trap, and discussed the question raised only to excite desire for what he had prohibited. A rebel himself, he maliciously likes to thwart the Highest and have companions in his sin and misery. Yielding to him, instead of turning away at once, Eve drops notice of the relationship Jehovah had deigned to establish, and becomes a prey while she continues her converse. "And the woman said unto the serpent, Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but of the fruit which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (vers. 2, 3).

Had she held fast the sense of her responsibility to obey, she would have resented the question, rather than answered it. And her answer lets us see that the evil intent of Satan did not fail of its effect. She adds to the prohibition, and takes from the penalty. Jehovah had not said a word about touching the forbidden fruit, but had

in the most assured terms threatened death in the day of eating it. Exaggeration of truth is no more the truth than diminution of it; either enfeebles, and both are Satan's work. By the truth we are sanctified; and His word is truth.

But knowledge is not truth received in the love of it from God. Eve well knew and could tell the tempter the liberty given as to all other fruit, and the penalty for partaking of the one forbidden tree. Yet she ventured to hear what the serpent had to say when there was already the proof that he was by his question impugning divine goodness. Did not He delight in their happiness? From Whom came their most bountiful provision? Was she cherishing dependence on Him, or confidence in Him? How worthless is knowledge which issues not in grateful praise and simple-hearted obedience! Still more, if it leave one free to distrust Him! Alas! unbelief has grown apace since Eve.

Emboldened by his crafty success the enemy advances. "And the serpent said to the woman, Ye will not surely die; but God knoweth that, in the day ye eat thereof, your eyes will be opened and ye will be as God, knowing good and evil" (vers. 4, 5). It is no longer insinuation against His good will, but open assault on His truth. And it is the same lie which beguiles mankind ever since. Death is hidden diligently from men's eyes; and when it cannot be, its import is explained away. People are willingly ignorant, and are earnest only to enjoy the present. Let us eat and drink, and tomorrow go here or there and get gain. Ah! ye know not what will be on the morrow; but certain it is, now that man is fallen, it is appointed to men once to die and after this judgment. But men lend a ready ear to him who deceived Eve, and,

though unable to deny, believe it not: else that dark shadow would paralyse their pursuits and poison their pleasures. For the sting of death is sin, of which all are guilty; and into judgment for all their sins must come those who believe not in the Lord Jesus for remission.

Further, the serpent held out as a bribe the good of evil. In eating the forbidden fruit, your eyes will be opened, and ye will be as God, knowing good and evil. God is jealous; I am your friend. He would keep you ignorant and in leading strings. Take my advice: be independent and know for yourselves as He does. As he veiled the doom of transgression, so did he set off the bribe in glowing colours; and as Eve stayed to listen, she was tainted with his pestilent breath. She received the lying foe as her best friend when his slander of the living and true God entered her heart. Open sin and ruin followed without delay.

The remedy is not in man, but from God in Christ for him, yea, for the most guilty if he repent and believe the gospel. Nor did the law work out deliverance, but on the contrary wrath. The Lord Jesus is the only Deliverer, as indeed this very Gen. 3 foreshows. He vindicated God and vanquished Satan in every respect in which the first man failed. His coming, the gift of Him displayed God's immense love to the world, His death for sin was the irrefragable proof of God's truth no less than of His love; and His personal glory, yet becoming a man to be made sin for us, told out God's majesty as well as His love and truth. O what a contrast with those who, being only human, sought to be as God, and, coveting independence, became Satan's slaves! But thanks be to God Who through Him dead and risen gives the victory to us, even to all that call upon the name of our Lord

Jesus Christ. It is His voice that speaks from heaven, as of old He warned on earth. See that ye refuse not Him that speaks. For our God, whatever His love, is also a consuming fire.

8 The Fall of Man

Gen. 3:6.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 56-57.)

The woman then was beguiled, quite beguiled as we are told in 1 Tim. 2:14, and so became involved in transgression; but what of man? Of him we hear not a word in the colloquy of the serpent and Eve. The same N.T. authority assures us that he was not deceived: with his eyes open, he transgressed, swayed by his affection for his wife. It was deliberate disobedience on his part, not here thoughtlessness, or deceived as the weaker vessel by a mightier and subtle rebel; for both and their posterity it was ruin and death, to man irreparable.

Let us then weigh the simple words in which God brings the solemn fact before us. “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (ver. 6).

Eve by continuing to hear the tempter’s words more and more lost the authority of God’s word, which at first she knew clearly and felt to be paramount. But as she listened to one whose object was to draw her away from God and ensnare her into transgression, she became by degrees less sensitive as to God’s honour and Satan’s crafty malice. Was it so that after all God did not love man perfectly but reserved good from him? Perhaps too

they might take this fruit, fair and excellent as it looked like other fruits in Paradise, without a blow so dreadful as death. God would not surely be so stern about so small a matter, He that gave them all else! And was it not strange that they (related so nearly to Himself, His offspring, Whose breath was their life-breath, made in His image, after His likeness) should be refused the knowledge of good and evil, to become so far like Himself-was it worthy of Him? Alas! Eve, when tempted was at length drawn away by lust, by the desire to have what God forbad, and was enticed. She used her eyes against the word, and saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes. Emboldened thus she reflected that the tree was desirable to make wise; and so the lust, having conceived, bears sin, as the sin, when fully completed, brings forth death. Compare James 1:11, 15; 1 John 2:16.

The woman had weakly fallen; but the stronger vessel, the man! He well knew the prohibition of the LORD God; he had the fatal yielding of Eve to warn him, if this could be needed; yet he dared to follow her into evil, from which he should have sought to shield her and confirm her soul in allegiance to God; and he too rebelled at her solicitation. All was lost in the fallen head of creation. What dishonour to God! what malignant joy to the enemy! what a root of evil to man! “By one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all sinned” (Rom. 5:12, R.V.).

The ruin was complete. Distrust of God’s love, unbelief of His truth, slight of His glory in seizing it, introduced open self-will and transgression. And so it has been since with ever increasing corruption. For Adam was

head of the human race and involved his posterity in his own evil. He became a father only after he was a sinner.

It was not so with those who in a higher sphere rebelled against God without a tempter. They each and all departed from God, though they excel in strength. They therefore are left to suffer the due reward of their deeds. But man, in his weakness and exposure to the subtle foe, is the object of God's richest mercy, and gives occasion for the display of His glory in nature and character, in His ways and counsels, as no other creature does or could enjoy; but this positively and perfectly in Christ alone, the Second Man.

Thus it comes out in His headship to the praise of God's grace. For if through the disobedience of the one man the many (or Adam's family) were constituted sinners, so also shall the many (or Christ's family) be constituted righteous. The head according to God determines the condition of the family. We belonged to the one naturally; we belong to the other by grace through faith. No Jew could deny that so in fact the headship of sin and sorrow was with the human race: how could he question that the headship of blessing was just and worthy of God? If Adam sunk his family into that sad estate, why should not Christ raise those who believe into the good portion which He deserves?

But it is not only that the gospel is thus indicated: no otherwise can the sinner be saved consistently with God and His word. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil." If this was true beyond question of Israel, is it not quite as manifestly of men in general? How blessed then that God has given His Son to be a

man, a Saviour, a new head for all that believe! This as a whole scripture testifies from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation. Salvation is in Another, not in the guilty; it is in Christ. And salvation is in no other; for neither is there any other, or a different, name under heaven that is given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Christ glorified God in death as a sacrifice for sin, so as to atone for all that believe in Him; as Adam by his transgression dishonoured God and brought death on himself and his race. It was when Christ carried obedience to the death of the cross, that He, risen from the dead, was proclaimed the new head: God was glorified in Him as to our disobedience and its consequences, and not only in His unbroken life of obedience. He from the highest glory took the lowest place of a slave, and endured the most ignominious death, that of the cross. O what a contrast with the man of dust who sought to be as God and disobeyed unto death!

As the work of Christ was morally glorious in the highest degree, so is it efficacious and unfailing for all that believe, even though ruined in Adam and adding their own sins. But where sin abounded, grace far exceeded; that as sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

9 Naked

Gen. 3:7.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 74-76.)

Here was the immediate effect of sin in our first parents:- “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons,” or girdles. There was the sense of shame as well of guilt, and they sought to hide it from themselves and from each other.

It is all in vain. Conscience was at work, but not before God or toward Him: else had they cried to Him in self-judgment and sorrowful confession of the evil they had done. “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done that which is evil in thy sight,” said the penitent king. Yet it might be said that his iniquity was grievous wrong to a devoted servant and his wife, hitherto blameless. Adulterous seduction of the woman! Planned death for the man! What could be worse offences against one’s neighbour? But the contrite heart, even in such a case, justly feels that, whatever the crime before man, sin is against God so as to eclipse all else.

Unabashed innocence was gone. Adam and Eve, once guilty, felt the shame of sin; and their first effort was to cover their persons as they could. They knew that they were naked, when they had disobeyed God. But fig leaves cannot cover sin; and they knew this too, when they heard the voice of the LORD God the same day. For sin is against Him, and His voice when heard awakens terror in the guilty.

How good for such (and we all are, or have been, such) to know David’s “instruction” in Ps. 32. “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered; blessed is the man unto whom Jehovah imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” What a

blessing when God covers sin by Christ’s sacrifice! Without this all else is vain. For, being sinners, we must come as sinners before God, Who refuses any other approach to Him in the first place. How perverse is unbelief! Men strive to come as saints, which they are not, and refuse to come as sinners, which they are and nothing else. Why do they thus evade the truth to their own hurt as well as God’s dishonour? Because they have no confidence in His grace., But His grace brings salvation, for it is possible only through Another. Heaven is through Christ alone, and consequently it is by faith. For faith receives the testimony or witness God has borne concerning His Son. And the witness is this that God gives the believer eternal life, and this life is in His Son. So absolutely true is this, that it is added: “he that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” 1 John 5:10-12.

The work of Christ, as the fruit of God's grace, takes guile from the spirit. His blood purges the conscience. The useless apron or girdle, the filthy garment, is taken away; "the best robe" is put on. Shame gives place to uprightness, and perfect love casts out fear. Such are the riches of God's grace to him who believes in Christ. The pretension to work for pardon, peace, cleansing, or life, denies the guilt and ruin of the sinner. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness" (Rom. 4:4, 5). The ungodly, the sinner, deserves judgment, which is perdition, by his works; but the gospel is sent to him as a lost one, that believing he may be justified and saved. What grace! Yet is it God's righteousness, Who gives the believer what Christ's

work deserves; and thus only in the cross of Christ, where man's evil came out to the uttermost, grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life.

See to it then that you rest on Christ only according to God’s word. Without Him faith were as vain, as baptism, to say nothing of works. Else when clothed, as the apostle says (2 Cor. 5:3), you will be found naked. For all must rise, unjust as well as just. And the clothing of the resurrection body will not hide but disclose the real condition. Christ alone meets the nakedness of the sinner; He washes, cleanses, and clothes for the eye of God. Without Christ, even when clothed, you will be found naked: a paradox in natural things; a certain truth spiritually. For in that day there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known.

10 Where art thou?

Gen. 3:8, 9.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 91-92.)

The word of God is truth, where and when ever written, be the matter in hand what it may. How solemn when He, from Whom no appeal can be, is personally addressing man! So it was here when man had just fallen. “And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where [art] thou?” (vers. 8, 9).

Man was gone from God; and it was now manifest and undeniable. Even before Jehovah Elohim called Adam

and Eve into His presence, the fall was working its evil consequences. They were ashamed for the first time, and they sought to hide their shame from themselves and from one another. When they heard the voice of the LORD God, terror was added exceedingly, yet in vain; for how can man escape if summoned there?

Before the fall, how delightful was His gracious presence, Who planted the garden in Eden, and therein put the man He had formed! And out of the ground made Jehovah Elohim to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, besides the two trees in the midst of the garden, the silent witnesses of truth beyond all the others. A river too for watering the garden was not wanting, which after that parted and became four beads. Into this garden then did the LORD God put the man to dress and keep it. More than this He brought every animal of the field and every fowl of the heavens to the man, to see what he would call them; and whatever man called each became its name, But more than all this (the sign of his being the possessor and lord of the lower creation) was the deep interest of Jehovah Elohim in building woman out of the man, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, to be his wife.

But sin now made God’s presence most alarming. Man’s conscience was bad; and the divine presence, instead of awakening love and gratitude, terrified them to the utmost. The fig leaves failed. Adam and his wife hid themselves among the trees of the garden. The summons told the sad truth: “Where art thou?” Gone from God! Till man sinned, there was no question of judgment. Sin made it necessary for God to judge him. From this man shrinks; his guilt cannot be hidden, and God must judge.

What has man done since? What have you done, dear reader? Added sin to sin. So the Psalmist, writing some thousands of years after, confesses that men are all gone out of the way; and this not of heathen merely who knew not God, but of those that knew Him and His law; for whatsoever the law saith, it speaketh to those that are under the law. But now God commands men that they should all everywhere repent, inasmuch as He has appointed a day in the which He will judge the world, or habitable earth, in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained; whereof He has given assurance to all men in that He raised Him from the dead.

Oh, hear His call, while it is called Today. For this is the day of grace. As God came in quest of man who hid away from Him, convicted him of his sins, yet revealed the Seed of the woman to crush the great enemy of God and man; so Christ has already come, been made sin on the cross, was there and then once offered to bear sins in His own body on the tree. To Him does God direct the eye of faith. He is the one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. He is the unfailing Saviour, being God as well as man. He suffered once for all for sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God. And "be it known to you therefore, through this Man is preached [not promised merely, but preached] unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe [to none other is it pledged] are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38, 39).

You are not only gone from God but lost as you are. For when God in Christ came into the world to reconcile men to God, they would not have Him but cast Him out of His own world; they crucified and slew Him, Such is

man’s position after all God’s dealings: he is lost. But the gospel, which says so, makes known God’s salvation in Christ without money or price on man’s part, as in truth it cost God everything, His message therefore is that, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up land so He has been], that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have eternal life. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Do you think that this is too easy a way to be saved, too uncertain for you to trust? Alas! the thought betrays your unbelief. For no way was so hard, even for God, as to give His own Son that you might live through Him, and that He might die in propitiation for your sins. And the only certainty a soul on earth can have is from receiving God’s witness concerning His Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him; he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning His Son. And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life (1 John 5).

11 Convicted

Gen. 3:12, 13.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 105-106.)

The chapter tells how Adam and Eve fell into transgression, with mutual shame, and with undisguised alarm at the presence of God. There was no Sinai

smoking as a whole, because Jehovah came down in fire; neither did smoke ascend like that of a furnace; nor did the earth quake; nor the trumpet sound loud exceedingly. His voice without a reproach or a menace struck the guilty pair with terror; and they hid themselves from before Him among the trees of the garden. Compelled to answer His call, the man owned, not his sin, but his fear because he was naked; but he could not escape the searching question, “Who told thee that thou art naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee not to eat?”

Truly the word of God is living and energetic, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to discern thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature unapparent before Him; but all things are naked and laid bare to His eyes with Whom we have to do. As yet there is not a trace of repentance, but hardness of heart and self-justification. Had there been the least self-judgment, any real sense of dishonour done to the LORD God, they had confessed their sin in listening to the tempter, and humbled themselves at once instead of covering their nakedness in their own way. And when they heard His voice, they would have gone to Him though with bitter sorrow, instead of simply biding from Him in conscious guilt. Each would have said, “Behold, I am vile: what shall 1 answer Thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth.” “Now mine eye hath seen Thee, I abhor myself in dust and ashes.”

Far otherwise was it as yet with our first parents. “And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this thou hast

done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat" (vers. 11, 12). What glaring disrespect and ingratitude to God! What utter lack of affection and compassionate care for his wife, whom he ought to have led and shielded if he could from evil, instead of following her into it! What unworthy and impudent reflection on Him Who gave the woman as a helpmeet for his good, not as an excuse for disobeying God! To hear Him was his first and known duty, even before she was made. Both the man and the woman knew the prohibition of the LORD God; both were fully aware of the penalty of disobeying; and both consciously rebelled, though separately, she quite deceived, he not so yet persuaded by her, preferring the creature to the Creator Who had set them blessed in responsibility to Himself.

It is hard to conceive aught lower, and withal more insolent, than the answer of the man:- "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and 1 did eat." On the surface the words might be true; morally they were false, unworthy, and irreverent, yea blasphemous. Adam was so debased by sin as to seek to excuse himself by the woman's fault, and even to throw the blame on the LORD God; the woman only pleaded the serpent's craft. Neither felt or confessed personal wrong any more than disloyalty to God. The excuses only proved their guilt, and could not but be their conviction. Thus Adam was condemned expressly because he hearkened to his wife's voice (ver. 17); and enmity was put between the serpent and the woman, who had sorrow multiplied instead of the pleasure she sought.

So it is with their offspring to this day. Sin brings in moral ruin; guilt leads to guile. Man without exception

ever since is wilful and ungodly. There is no good but always worse evil from palliation or blaming others, as all are prone to do. For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks; and as if is corrupted through sin, out of that treasure the wicked man brings forth wicked things.

Thenceforward the sole hope for fallen man lay in God; and God's sole available and effectual good for man was in sending His only-begotten Son to become not man only but a sacrifice for the sinful. And so the Lord Jesus is the Saviour of all that believe in Him, as the scriptures abundantly testify: the Saviour of the lost, not the poor notion of a reinstatement of the race in what the first man ruined, but the blessing of the believer with all that God counts worthy of the Second man, His own Son, and of His redemption. What a blessed refutation of "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me"! God so loved, not His children, nor His people, but "the world," the Christ-rejecting Satan-serving world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

As this is the greatest blessing God could give, not pardon only, nor even peace, but eternal life; so His Son, in Whom that life is, becomes the test of every sinner here below, small or great, civilised or barbarian, wise or unintelligent. All are alike sinners: there is no difference in that awful fact, though some are bolder than the rest. It is appointed to men once to die, and, after this, judgment. Impossible for any one to escape either by any resources of his own or by other men. But Christ, sent of God to that end, went down into death and bore the judgment from God, as propitiation for

sins; so that, when He shall appear a second time, it will be to those that wait for Him apart from sin for salvation. So perfectly did He on the cross bear the sins of believers that none of them, as He said (John 5), comes into judgment.

Therefore does God call on you now, if you have not already obeyed His call, to receive life eternal and salvation in His Son. To receive Him is to receive, not only what you need and can find no. where else, but all the blessing God loves to bestow. Seek not to extenuate your case like Adam and Eve. Hide not away from Him Who, knowing all your sins, pities you no less than them, and now sends you the gospel in all its fulness, as could only be when Christ came, and died atoningly, and rose triumphant. It is therefore now not only the grace but the righteousness of God. Through Christ's work He is just and the justifier of the believer. For God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He that believes on Him is not judged: he that believes not has been judged already, because he has not believed on the name of the only-begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness more than the light; for their works were evil. For every one that doeth evil hates the light and comes not to the light, lest his works should be convicted; but he that does the truth comes to the light that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God (John 3).

12 The woman's Seed

The Serpent and the Woman's Seed.

Gen. 3:14, 15.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 127-128.)

Of the man and the woman the LORD God inquired; not of the serpent, a known and old rebel. On him judgment was summarily pronounced, but governmental, in accordance with the O.T., rather than everlasting, which was reserved for Christ and the N.T. “Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle and above every beast of the field. On thy belly shalt thou go and eat dust all the days of thy life. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it (he) shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (vers. 14, 15).

What can be more striking or instructive? It is in judging the enemy that the revelation of grace is made, not in what was said subsequently to the woman (ver. 16) or to Adam (vers. 17-19). This was not only just but for the divine glory in Christ. What could morally warrant promise to fallen man or woman? Their transgression just perpetrated called for judgment, and the LORD God did not fail to declare it. He is not slack to reprove sin or to vindicate His majesty. Both are evident here in His own words at the beginning; still more, and perfectly, in the completion of the ages, when Christ has been manifested for putting away of sin by His sacrifice. Never before had sin been adequately judged, never before had God been absolutely glorified about sin. And the salvation which results to the believer is according to the perfection of Christ’s atoning work and of God’s glorification thereby (13:31, John 17:4, 5 26).

All the pretensions of sinful man are thus swept away and annihilated. No room is left for the dream of man’s amelioration. Not so is God vindicated or sin judged or

the sinner saved. There is no restoration of the first man, but the revelation of the Second; no promise to the fallen head, but the assurance of the Last Adam, a life-giving Spirit, the woman's Seed, to crush Satan. In Him and His cross meet, as nowhere else, truth and love, righteousness and grace, man to the last degree obedient and submissive, holy yet suffering, and suffering not only for righteousness and truth as well as love beyond all that ever were, but for sins — He alone, when man and Satan had done their worst, suffering for sin from God, His God. "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?.... But Thou art holy that inhabitest the praises of Israel" (Ps. 22:1, 3).

God answered Him, not merely by receiving His spirit committed into His Father's hands but by resurrection from among the dead and seating Him at His own right hand in heaven. We answer it too in our measure by believing in His name and confessing that it was for sin, yea for our sins, He the sin-bearer on the tree was thus abandoned of God, that sin might be judged, and we who believe be completely cleansed, and the glad tidings of repentance and remission of sins be preached in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem, the city of all the world most guilty of His crucifixion.

Undoubtedly the blessing of divine grace was for Adam or any of his race, sinful though they were, if they believed; but the utmost care was taken that none could say truthfully that it was a promise to Adam. On the ground of the first man there was sin and ruin and death. Innocence lost is irreparable. There is no possible return to what was lost, any more than ground for hope that fallen man would do better than man innocent.

It is in this judgment on the Serpent that the LORD God pointed out the only hope and the full assurance of victory over the foe. It is wholly and exclusively in the woman's Seed. Christ is Satan's conqueror, Christ is the Saviour of man. It was not yet the due moment to make Him known as the Son of God, as God, yea as Jehovah. All this and more we find in the course of O.T. revelation; and all is most clearly revealed in the N.T., each aspect of His glory just as it was needed and fitting.

Here we may readily see His deep grace, His wisdom, His holiness; yet the simple truth, that the vindicator of God, the avenger of man, and the destroyer of Satan, would be the woman's Seed, not the man's, with a strict propriety that marks out the Lord Jesus from every other born of woman. The responsible man was altogether left out. Weak woman, who had at the beginning listened to the evil one and drawn her husband after her into transgression, was to be taken up in the pure and rich mercy of God. For in man and by man it was His counsel to bring a new and real and abiding glory to His name, and thus only to save the lost and defeat Satan.

There is indeed a true and essential work in the conscience, heart, and ways of every soul that believes unto salvation. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. But, morally speaking, the beginning of all goodness for a sinner is a divinely given sense and confession of his badness; and it is clear that this alone could give not peace, but despair. He is called therefore in the gospel to look out of himself wholly unto Jesus, the woman's Seed, and to rest in the work He wrought for us, in His suffering for sins on the cross. To this scripture pointed throughout, as the N.T. expresses it with the utmost fulness and precision. Even here we

have it in the crushing of His heel: a figure, taken from the serpent's habit, to set forth the acuteness of the wound inflicted on the woman's Seed, yet leave room for the contrast of his own crushed head under the risen Conqueror. The type here was but a shadow, as indeed elsewhere, and could not in this case fully announce that the deliverance of the guilty demanded the Saviour's death. But even this lack was supplied in the intimation of the skins wherewith the LORD God immediately after clothed Adam and Eve. It was a covering, not of mere nature like the fig leaves, to which they first had recourse. The divine clothing of the guilty is founded on death, the application of which to Christ is easy and most intelligible.

Such then is the object of faith presented in Scripture. One believes God when he believes in Christ, the woman’s Seed. So deep is the glory of His person, that only the Father knows Him fully. Man’s mind, presuming to fathom that depth, breaks away into one heterodoxy or another, on the human side especially, but also on the divine. The only safety is to believe God’s testimony concerning Him Who is the Son of God and the woman’s Seed. This is the mystery of godliness, not only of truth but of godliness: “He Who was manifested in flesh.” It is the abandonment of self, of the first man, the confession of our evil, to find the salvation of God in the woman’s Seed, and in the Son, not incarnate only, but in the body of His flesh through death. Thus only has God reconciled us who believe, once in settled alienation and enemies in mind by wicked works, now children and sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Fourth Series

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1 The Jewish leper

Matt. 8, Mark 1, Luke 5.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 141-142.)

In the first of the Gospels this is the earliest miracle given in detail: a suited testimony of Messiah to His people, a testimony that He was Jehovah in their midst acting in power and grace. Indeed even here the account is brief. The fact is in some respects all the more significant. The real state spiritually of the chosen people was no better in God’s sight. The law had singled out leprosy as the standing sign of uncleanness and exclusion from His presence. Hence the more manifest was grace toward the Gentile in the action of the

prophet of old, when Israel was sinking down more and more into apostacy.

But now a greater than Elisha was here. Immanuel was on earth, in the land; and this unhappy Jew prostrates himself before Him, and makes his appeal: “Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.” The chosen people were morally what he was physically; but they knew it no more than they bowed to His glory. But it will dawn on the remnant by-and-by, when they shall say, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Jehovah.” “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.” Far different was it in the day of Messiah’s visitation.

Even the leper, who did pay Him homage then, feebly apprehended the grace that was in Him “Lord, if Thou wilt.” Why question? Why doubt? Wherefore was He come, and come Himself, the Holy One, to dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips? A man, yet the King, Jehovah of Hosts! If the eyes of the blind were to be opened, and the ears of the deaf to be unstopped, and the lame to leap as a hart (and prophecy had bound up this and more with the advent of Messiah) was the leper to be an exception? Was he without the pale of mercy? The leper, abject as he was, acknowledged His power without hesitation.

But grace rises over all difficulty and applies the power to the need, however desperate; and here Luke lets us know, suitably to his own character, that the man was “full of leprosy.” But if faith was small, grace comes forth in its own immensity. “And Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him.”

It was not always thus that the Lord wrought in cleansing lepers. When the ten met Him, as we hear in Luke 17, they stood afar off, and the Lord cleansed all, but touched none of them. Here we have the beautiful sign of His mercy toward Israel another day, when He will bless them with His gracious presence and heal all their diseases, as He will forgive all their iniquities.

Now, present in humiliation, His glory could not be hid. Had He been merely man under the law, there was no license to touch the leper. Jehovah Messiah was there; and however He might stoop in love, He could not deny Himself. He and He alone could touch the leper, not only undefiled, but banishing the leprosy. How manifestly it was God in Christ winning the overwhelmed heart, and blending power with grace in a way beyond all human thought! Mark tells us that He was “moved with compassion”; and indeed the act was exactly suited to express it.

But He added words, recorded in all three Gospels, of the utmost weight — “I will; be thou clean.” None on earth but He was free so to speak. His Person gave Him the right. He, Who could truly say “I am,” was entitled to say “I will.” In every other born of woman it would have been not only presumption but sin. He could say these words Who does say in John 8, “Before Abraham was, I am.” “Be thou clean” was immediately followed with power that could not be disputed. “Immediately” the man’s leprosy was cleansed. The Lord Jesus spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.

It was but a sample; and, as the Lord enjoins, “for a testimony unto them.” Therefore Jesus said unto the leper, “See thou tell no man, but go thy way, show

thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded." A greater work was needed for man before God. A deeper want than any created by disease, however fatal, lay upon Israel; but this was "for a testimony unto them." To show himself to the priest ought to have raised the question there, if his lips kept knowledge, or if his heart sought it, Who has healed him? It would have drawn out the answer from faith; Jehovah is here; Jehovah has healed him. For no one knew better than the priest that man is powerless here; and the law has no provision for healing leprosy, only directions for cleansing ritually him who is already healed.

Alas! like people, like priest; all were unbelieving then, save the little remnant which heard the Good Shepherd's voice and followed Him. How is it with my reader? The Gentile professor, though christened, if this be all, is no less a leper in God's sight than the Jew; and the outward bearing of the Lord's name cannot bring to God without living faith. Nay, to possess externally was and is a great danger for the flesh, which goes asleep under privileges now as Israel did of old.

Oh, listen to His voice, that speaks still from heaven, and assuredly with no less power than to the Jewish leper. Why is the tale recorded so fully if it be not a multiplied witness, that you should believe on Him? Your case is no less desperate than the leper's. But the Saviour and His word are the same for ever if your faith may be as small, your appeal as hesitating, as his was of whom we read. The grace of the Lord Jesus meets faith however little and weak, and acts according to God's glory. May you then hear and live!

2 The Gentile centurion and his servant

Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:2-10.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 156-157.)

the first Gospel the leper is set immediately before the Centurion, to mark the grace at hand for the Gentile when the defiled people should reject the Messiah. So the Gospel shows from its beginning to its end. Hence it is that in its account of the Centurion (not in the corresponding narrative of Luke), the Lord declares that many should come from east and west and share the feast with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, whilst the sons of the kingdom, their seed, should be cast forth into, the outer darkness with its unspeakable anguish.

In the third Gospel, which has a moral object rather than dispensational, the Holy Spirit led to placing the forgiven paralytic after the healed leper (Luke 5:13, 14, and 18-25): the two striking pictures of sin as needing divine grace to cleanse, and the known remission of sins for power to walk and serve aright. Here too, the case of the Centurion is given in its actual place, which equally fell in with the scope of the Gospel. The Lord had laid down for His disciples in a large way and wholly above human thought or feeling that blessedness which He know in its perfection which grace calls to and forms. Hence it is no question here of scribes and Pharisees, or of those of old time, He urges the principle of God’s kingdom in words which leave the Jew out of sight and instruct the man of God where and when ever he may be.

The faith of the Gentile Centurion follows, with a detail of similar propriety. His bondman was dear, yea precious, to him, but sick and about to die. Yet the

Centurion did not present himself to the Lord. He came to Him only, as those are said to do themselves what they do by others. He was no heathen; he honoured the Jew, low as they were, because God chose them and entrusted them with His oracles, the scriptures. Therefore did he (a rare thing in a Roman officer) love their nation, as he even built them their synagogue. And so he sent to the Lord elders of that people, who besought Him earnestly on the behalf of one so worthy in their eyes (as rare a thing in a Jewish elder).

But when the Lord was not far from the house, the Centurion sent friends to Him, saying, Lord, trouble not Thyself, for I am not worthy (adequate or qualified) that Thou shouldst come under my roof. The very grace of the Lord, which offered to come and heal the servant, awoke a deeper sense of the Lord and of himself in his heart. This was a morally right feeling in the Centurion toward One Whom he could not but regard as possessed of divine power and title; as the elders were right in their sense of the Gentile's worth and religious feeling. He was in truth a believer. This made him humble as well as reverent. He recognised in Jesus what made himself nothing, yet what encouraged him to lay at His feet his appeal for a dying slave; and this first through Jewish elders, then through friends; for what was he himself to be accounted of? Whereas He, the Lord, has but to say by a word, and his servant shall be healed. He too, a man set under authority, had soldiers under him, and says, to one Go, and he goes, to another Come, and he comes, and to his servant Do this, and he does it.

Can we wonder that the gracious Lord wondered? It was faith simple and strong, the fruit of divine grace. The word of God, for this was read and heard in the

synagogue, acquainted the Centurion with God's nature and ways, as none of the Jews learnt who listened with no such sense of need but claiming a monopoly of possession. Not even in Israel, the Lord said, had He found so great faith. Those who were sent returned and found the sick man in sound health.

How is it with you who read these words? If not born of God, you are in the evil and darkness of the fall, and all the more guilty because you have heard not the law only, but the gospel from your tenderest years. Yet you have lived as if you were not a lost sinner, as if God were not a Saviour, as if Christ who died for sinners was not ordained Jude of quick and dead, most of all to be dreaded boy those who hear but neglect so great salvation. You are in a worse and more dangerous case than the sick slave of the Centurion. Only the breath of your nostrils severs you from death, the forerunner of the second death, the lake of fire for ever. Oh! weigh the tale written to save — written by the Holy Spirit to save — a slave of sin. Christ speaks in it to you who read or bear. For Him to speak by a word is ample to save the soul that believes. And He has said many words to give you confidence notwithstanding your many sins. He gives healing, life, pardon, peace, and power. He gives all things worthy of God, all needed by man. But beware of doubting beware of deferring. The "convenient time never comes. Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. If you put off, beware lest you perish.

3 Peter's mother-in-law

Matt. 8, Mark 1, Luke 4.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 166-167.)

We have only to compare the first Gospel with the two which follow, in order to learn not only how reliable in them all Scripture is, but the faithful persevering goodness of the Lord to Israel which was Matthew's task. It is Mark, who by his notes of time, "straightway" and others, gives us the surest clue to the historical order of events in His blessed service. With this we can compare the others, and may by grace gather why that order is left for other objects in the mind of the Holy Spirit. Thus we can see that with Luke, who describes the Lord morally, there was no motive for departure from it; and so here Mark and he coalesce. But the dispensational design, which He used Matthew to make known, required the change to a much later occasion, and therefore a wholly different connection. Hence all can notice that here are no links of time in his account. Both the others bind their narrative of the miracle with the precious and notable facts of that day in the synagogue of Capernaum. Matthew, because of transplanting the case, says nothing of the kind.

"And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose and ministered unto them" (Matt. 8:14, 15).

If the Gentile centurion appealed in faith to that gracious power, which had only to speak the word and healing followed, the Lord in no way turned from Israel. His heart yearned over the favoured but guilty people. And Peter's wife's mother laid down in fever gives us to see it clearly. Here He does enter the house, and touch her hand. Luke tells us that she was seized with a great fever (for the sickness differs much); and adds that they besought Him for her; as Mark, that they told Him of her

anon or immediately. This was all seasonable on their part; but He was there ready to cure. So Mark lets us know that He took her by the hand and lifted her up. Nor was it only that the fever left her immediately, but that she was serving them (Mark and Luke) as well as Him (R.V. of Matthew).

Such is the Lord to any sinner's need now. His ear is open to every cry direct or indirect to Himself. He was then healing the sick. He is now delivering men for time and eternity. Why should not you, my reader, appeal for your guilty soul? Is not the soul more than food, as the body is more than clothing? He only is the Saviour of both if you believe the gospel: of the soul now, of the body by-and-by. "Fear Him Who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." "Whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven." These words are faithful and true. Beware of unbelief; for now is the hour "when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." Life is in Him, and He gives it to all that believe. "Verily, verily, 1 say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation (judgment), but is passed from death into life" (John 5).

But you may plead that Peter's wife's mother had the apostle and more to speak for her to the Lord. This is true; but there is no appeal like the needy one's himself to the Saviour. Search and see if He ever refused one. He declares in John 6 that "him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out." Oh, I beseech you, be not faithless but believing. To find Him you need not to ascend the heights where He is, nor to descend where He descended. He is near to every one that calls on Him.

Every secret of every heart is bare before His eyes. Doubt not then, but believe.

On the evening of the same day He cured Peter's mother-in-law, and so immediately that she was able to serve Him and His followers, He did yet more for others. "And when even was come, they brought unto, Him many possessed with demons, and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all that were sick; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses" (vers. 16, 17). (See Isa. 53:4).

The very aim of that prophetic oracle was to announce that, before He suffered atoningly (which follows in ver. 5- 12), He entered into all that troubled His people even in their bodies, and as we see in the Gospels from Satan's more immediate power. And this He did not in power only but in the tenderest bearing of the burden on His spirit, while He took it away; as it is said elsewhere by the same prophet, "In all their affliction He was afflicted." Here then is more and most ample encouragement for you to bring your need to His feet. If you so come, He will never say you, Nay. Why is all this revealed, but that you may cast your soul on Him now? If you are a great sinner, be assured that He is a greater Saviour.

4 The Paralytic healed

Matt. 9, Mark 2, Luke 5.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 182-183.)

The new and precious feature which betrays itself at the point in this narrative of Matthew is the growing opposition and hatred of the religious leaders toward

the Lord. It is not, as in Matt. 8, a certain scribe ignorant of himself and self-confident who proposes to follow Him whithersoever He may go. In Matt. 9 the scribes begin with saying within themselves, This man blasphemeth; and the Pharisees end with their own blasphemy — that it was in virtue of the prince of the demons He was casting out the demons. Through the darkening unbelief the Lord gives His blessed and blessing testimony.

The first incident recorded is the cure of the paralytic as He was speaking the word to a crowd at home in His own city — Capernaum. This malady aptly sets forth the effect of sin in destroying power; as leprosy in its unclean taint before God or man. The occasion was the house filled even beyond the door, as Mark tells us; which accounts for the difficulty the four bearers had of getting near. Eastern buildings, however, furnished easy access to the roof; and this they uncovered, and let down the sick man on his pallet through the tiles, as Luke tells us. The Lord saw their faith and says to the paralytic “son” (or “child” rather), “Thy sins be forgiven.”

It was indeed a startling word; and so it was meant to be. The Lord laid bare the root of the evil, and dealt with it at once fundamentally. He alone could thus speak. Not even an apostle approaches its force. It was proper to Him Who was alike Jehovah and Son of Man. The men learned in the law were shocked. They unbelievingly reasoned in their hearts to His dishonour; but He, the ordained Judge of quick and dead, read their hearts as He does, those of all, and answered their unuttered and evil reasoning by the question:- “Which is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Rise up and walk? But

that ye may know that the Son of man hath power (or, authority) on earth to forgive sins (He saith to the paralytic), Arise, and take up thy bed, and go to thy house." And so the man did immediately before them all. And the crowds at least were filled with fear and said, We have seen strange things today.

Let me plead with you who have sins and cannot avoid foreboding of judgment. Why should not you take hold of such words of divine grace? They are for every soul of man that believes. They were not limited to that age or race or land. They are written in the imperishable word of God, for guilty men wherever they be who bear, that they may believe and be saved. Therefore did He come not yet to judge, but to say still, Thy sins are forgiven. Miracles may cease; but the love never fails which forgives sins to every needy sinner that believes. And if Jews reject, it but gives the opportunity to open the door freely to the Gentile, far and wide. Is God of Jews only? Is He not of Gentiles also? Yea, writes the inspired Hebrew of Hebrews, of Gentiles also. Fear not then, but believe.

"The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." This the scribes learned in the law did not believe; for they knew not Him, nor the God Who sent Him. They would not have disputed that God forgive sins. They rebelled against the Lord's exercise of any such authority. He claimed it as Son of man, exercised it on behalf of the paralytic, and gave Him immediate powers to rise take up his couch, and walk, before their eyes, as His disproof of their evil doubts, His witness outwardly of that precious boon. He had overcome Satan for this life and was dividing his spoils.

But more: Christ has accomplished redemption since. He took His seat on the right hand of the Majesty on high when He had made purification of sins. Risen from the dead, He has told us that all power (or authority) has been given to Him in heaven and on earth. He has vanquished finally; He has borne God's judgment of sin on the cross; He has borne our sins in His own body on the tree. Is there not all the more urgent ground for you to believe, and all the deeper encouragement for you to confide? He has sent out His servants expressly into all the world, and told them to preach the gospel or glad tidings to the whole creation. But He solemnly warns that he that disbelieves shall be condemned (or damned).

Oh, deceive not your soul, nor slight the Saviour Who is the Lord of glory. If He humbled Himself to become not only man but a sacrifice to God for sin, is there not the best of all grounds for you to bow, and bless and worship Him, even as the Father Who gave Him? And how many, once unbelievers, have become the most devoted of His servants like Saul of Tarsus, afterwards the great apostle? Be not like the proud scribes or bitter Pharisees, who trusted themselves, rejected Him, and perished everlastingly.

Power to walk aright and glorify God is inseparable from knowing your sins forgiven. Till you believe the gospel, you are as powerless as the paralytic was on his couch. When you have redemption in Him through His blood, the forgiveness of your offences, you can enjoy God's love in Christ, His counsels and His ways; and the Holy Spirit will strengthen you to walk worthily of Him, and of the calling wherewith you were called. Ability to walk as a Christian follows faith in Christ and His grace in

forgiveness. They reverse God’s way and Christ’s word whose effort is so to walk as to be forgiven. It is all vain, because it is self and unbelief: a flame of their own kindling. And this shall they have of God’s hand: they shall lie down in sorrow.

See then that ye look to Him, Who, if He is exalted now, is still the Saviour. For God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. If you believe not, you will assuredly be judged by Him and lost for ever. So His word declares plainly.

5 The Tempest, and unbelief rebuked

Matt. 8, Mark 4, Luke 8.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 197-198.)

Here is another manifestation of divine power and goodness in the Lord Jesus here below. Matthew wished to take it out of its historic place, after the parables of Matt. 13 were uttered, for that express purpose; or rather the Spirit Who employed him, if one may so say reverently.

“And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves; but he was asleep. And the disciples came to him and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish” (Matt. 8:23-25).

Thus did the gracious Lord test the faith of His followers, that they might confide in His supremacy over all need, His concern for them in all dangers and difficulties. Was not He with them Whom God had sent to save? Was not the Reconciler not only of all believers

but of all the universe, in the ship? He, Who was come to lay the basis of the new creation and everlasting glory? If He could not perish Who was here to rescue from everlasting destruction all that look to Him in faith, how weak and unworthy to wrong His love as if He would leave them to perish? Yet appearances were allowed to prove their hearts. The sudden violent squall, the sea raging, the little ship or boat on which they had gone aboard, the waves beating in so that the ship was already filled, the Lord asleep (not on a pillow but the boat-cushion)!

It was assuredly perilous increasingly, with but one ground of confidence: Jesus was there. But this to faith should have been everything; and it would have been, had they looked away from the wind, sea, and all else, to Him. When they woke Him, it was but with the appeal, “Lord, save us: we perish.” Even on the resurrection day they were yet more sad and despairing, if not blinded by alarm, because He had bowed to death and suffered on the cross; and He had then to reproach them as senseless and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets spoke. He, despised and rejected of men, had only to speak the word, and the elements least controllable by man obeyed His voice, Who stooped so low in love, yet was their Creator. “And He arose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still; and the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.” But He said also, “Why are ye so fearful, O ye of little faith”? Sinner, or saint, what a word of truth to both! No doubt there is a difference immense, between him that believes and the unbeliever, for the one is in the hand of the Father and the Son; the other lies like the whole world in the wicked one. Yet the unbelief which in the

latter resists the Holy Spirit fatally, so far as it works, dishonours the Lord and injures the believer; and scripture abounds with proofs of both, that each may respectively be warned. It was certainly fear that prompted the importunate repetition which Luke records (Luke 8:24), “Master, Master, we perish.” The disciples soon learnt the vanity of their alarm when he arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water; though they to the end of the earthly pilgrimage need to look earnestly to Him, as His love values it, and it is due to His glory. And if a rebuke to unbelief, how strengthening to the heart when we learn afresh His faithful and effectual intervention, whatever the manner of it!

But is this nothing to you, who are perishing in sins and unbelief? The Creator of all things did not become a man save to glorify God and to bless man, as blessing could only be thus; and by nothing short of death, the death of the cross. His incarnation was not only to manifest Him in life, solely doing God’s will, as it never had been on earth before, but to suffer for sins in the body God prepared for Him, that sins might be taken away by the all-sufficient sacrifice, and that believers might be sanctified, yea, perfected for ever. For this Heb. 10 declares to be the fruit of the Saviour’s work.

And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us. Whatever may be the good things in store for Israel when they repent and look in faith unto their pierced Messiah, the good tidings are now sent by God to any sinner, Jew or Gentile. Oh, take the place of truth, and own to God your sins and ruin, that you may not come into judgment. For His judgment (and the Lord Jesus is the Judge) is holy and righteous, and therefore must be utterly destructive

of the guilty. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). He is the object of faith set before any, and all by God, that whosoever believeth may not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3).

Listen not to the wiles of the devil, who whispers that you are taking away from God’s honour by looking to His Son, the Lord Jesus. Not so; for “he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also,” and “whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father” (1 John 2). And this is the reason why “the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son;” that all men might honour Him as the Father (John 5). Those who believe honour Him now, and have eternal life in Him, and by grace walk accordingly; but all who now dishonour the Son, by refusing His word and disbelieving Him Who sent Him, must be raised to a resurrection of judgment which will compel them to honour Him in the solemn endless day of their everlasting ruin. So He declares Who is the way, and the truth, and the life. Sin no more against God and your own souls; but believe on Him Who by the grace of God tasted death for every one. “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus a man, who gave Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due times”; and so He is to you now, that you may no longer neglect so great salvation, but believe on Him to the saving of your soul.

6 The Demoniac delivered

Matt. 8, Mark 5:1-20, Luke 8.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 212-213.)

There are two very different forms in which the enemy of God and man works: one which may be called extraordinary; the other far more common. It is thus for evil with the spirit that operates in the sons of disobedience, as the Holy Spirit does for good in children of obedience. The history in which the demoniac plays so conspicuous a part illustrates both. The second Gospel enters into affecting details of the man's hopeless misery, and of the Saviour's gracious power; as the first is more general in the display of a present Jehovah-Messiah, taking notice of a second victim as is usual throughout (Matt. 8:28, Matt. 9:27, Matt. 20:30), the least adequate testimony to Israel. Mark and Luke graphically bring before us the more notable of the demoniacs. When the Saviour was here, it would seem that Satan put forth his malignant power beyond all example. But a stronger than he was here to overcome him, take from him his whole armour wherein he trusted, and divide his spoils.

Immediately, on the Lord's quitting the ship from Capernaum to the other side of the lake, there met Him a man with an unclean spirit who had his dwelling in the tombs. None could bind him, not even with chains. Often as he had been bound with fetters and chains, the chains were rent asunder by him and the fetters shattered; and none had strength to subdue him. Continually by night and day in the tombs and in the mountains was he crying and cutting himself with stones. What a depth of unspeakably wretched and appalling degradation! Matthew adds the fierceness and danger to others; Luke, that for a long time he had worn no clothes.

The sight of the Lord Jesus even from afar arrested him, so that he ran and paid Him homage, and with a loud

voice cried, What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure Thee by God, torment me not. For the Lord said, Come forth, unclean spirit, out of the man. Nor was this all: He asked him, What is thy name? and got the answer, My name is Legion, for we are many. There is a fact outside human ken, on the evil side of the spiritual world, beyond measure horrible: a man with such a host of evil spirits in him as could justify the well-known name of a Roman battalion, and a man with a personal consciousness, yet also merging his personality in theirs! — Legion, for we are many!

But mighty as a spirit is, and especially when in such multitudinous and tyrannical force of evil, demons have no sceptical hardihood. They believe and shudder (James 2:19). Therefore did they beseech that He would not command them to depart into the abyss; for their sure doom was before their eyes; and they knew that when He reigns, they will be cast there, which they dreaded even now. Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time? is the cry in the first Gospel. So, when they begged to enter a great herd of swine feeding on the mountain side, the Lord gave them leave; and the swine, about two thousand, no sooner received the unclean spirits, than they rushed down the steep and were choked in the sea. It was the witness, to all that believe scripture, of the Lord’s delivering power on the one hand and of Satan’s destructive energy on the other. It is idle here, as everywhere, to confound possession by demons with either lunacy or disease. Either or both might be also, or neither be, and yet that possession of evil spirits. The reality was thus transparent. The effect on the swine made the objective fact undeniably plain,

and the suggestion of a physical or mental derangement inexcusably false.

Nor does the Lord, to Whom all belongs below as on high, need the apology of man to justify His permission, any more than for the sickness and death, the plague and the famine, the tempest and the earthquake, which He employs providentially in this fallen world. To what purposes of grace does He not turn every one of these inflictions for such as hear His word So doubtless it was then whether Jews or Gentiles owned the swine.

And here we face the more ordinary working of Satan's power. For when the swine-herds reported all, the whole city came to meet the Saviour and besought Him to depart out of their borders! They saw the possessed that had the legion sitting, clothed, and sensible; and they were afraid, not of Satan but of the Saviour! The witnesses related what explained all as to the demoniac and the swine; but all the people round about began to beseech Him to depart!

Such is man under Satan's power ever at work, if not so terrific in appearance far more dangerous than the maddening possession in its intensest form; and none is recorded beyond Legion's. Yet his presence never so acted on their fears, as the proof of the Saviour's beneficent power.

O my readers, are you under the same fatal spell? Do you dread to approach the Lord of all, the Saviour for eternity of all who believe? is it Jesus you dread in your soul? Is it from His grace that you shrink back, lest you should be saved now? Consider your most perilous condition. You are slaves of Satan, children of wrath, enemies of God. What must follow as you are? Death,

and judgment. So it is laid up for men as they are. Without faith on your part, baptism and the Lord's Supper, blessed as they are to faith, only aggravate your guilt. There is no Saviour but the Lord Jesus, Who, once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to those that wait for Him unto salvation (in contrast with judgment, as He died a sacrifice for their sins).

Not such was the state of the delivered demoniac, who besought Him that he might be with Him. But becoming as the desire might be, the Lord had work for him to do, before that first love is gratified as it surely will be in due season: "Go to thy house unto thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee and showed thee mercy." And he went his way and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus did for him. And he did right, though all were wondering.

Alas! wonder is not faith. Let it not be your lot to fall short of the demoniac. Delivered from the oppressive power of Satan, he was to bear witness of the gracious power of the Lord, even Jesus, shown to himself. But was it not by the hearing to produce faith in souls exposed to Satan in other ways? May you be delivered from the snare that would bid the Lord Jesus to depart. The day is fast approaching when He as King shall sit on the throne of His glory, and say to the faithless nations gathered before Him, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels.

7 The Woman healed and sent away in peace

Matt. 9, Mark 5, Luke 8.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 230-231.)

Here we have a living picture of a soul smitten incurably for man, every effort fruitless, all medicine and physicians in vain, her resources spent, herself nothing bettered but rather grown worse.

But faith cometh by hearing; and, having heard of Jesus, she came in the crowd behind, and touched His garment, or, as Matthew and Luke say, its hem. Faith is always sure of the Saviour; it may have as feeble knowledge of itself as of Him, but it does not doubt in Whom the virtue lies. Much remains to be learnt and corrected, but it goes straight to its object. For she said, If I but touch His clothes, I shall be made whole. And faith does not fail to receive its answer through grace. Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she knew in her body that she was healed of the scourge.

But the Lord knew the whole case better still, and meant for her no half blessing. She did not question His power; she seems to have connected it in her mind with His person and surroundings physically. She must learn that His soul acted with it, that His mind and heart were engaged in the blessing. It was not a charm, as heathenism made it in thought; nor was it even dependent on His bodily presence, as Jews were apt to conclude. He Who had deigned to become the Servant of divine love, in a world where sin reigned and had wrought fell ruin, would show her the kindness of God.

Touching the hem of His garment stealthily, she would, if the case had been left there, have ever felt that it was underhand and surreptitious. She did not as yet know God, though availing herself of Messiah’s healing

energy. The Lord could not in His grace consent to so partial a mercy. He is entitled, and He loves, to bless fully all whom He blesses at all; and “him that cometh to Me,” said He elsewhere, “I will in no wise cast out.” So fully did He come as a servant, that He was here only to do the Father’s will, not His own. Whosoever came, He received. And the full blessing He gave from first to last; He would lose nothing, but raise up at the last day.

So even at this day He not only forgives transgression, and covers sin, and imputes no iniquity, but takes guile from the spirit. This the healed woman needed; this the Lord gave. So immediately perceiving in Himself the power from Himself gone forth, He turned round in the crowd and said, Who touched my clothes? The disciples, as so commonly, misunderstood; and Peter, with the rest, talked of the crowds hemming Him with their pressure. But the Lord alone knew in the highest way, that a certain one did touch Him; and He looked about to see who had done this. It was not that He could not have named her, but to give her opportunity to confess the truth. How little she knew the grace that filled Him! For frightened and trembling, conscious of what had been done upon her, she came, and fell down before Him, and told Him all the truth. How little she knew that such was the condition of her better blessing! And He said to her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole: go away in peace, and be well of thy scourge. How transporting to her as yet confused and anxious spirit! What solid abiding comfort for her to be thus in His presence, and to have all out before Him, and to know Him more than confirming all she had got, with a message of peace unfailing for all that is to come!

Such is the Lord to every need that is brought to Him; such is He most of all to that deepest need, which demanded not power only but propitiation in His suffering to the uttermost, the death of the cross. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. As He does not change, among human shiftings and men's various and strange doctrines, so neither does His power, nor His love. But to be blessed fully we must meet Him face to face, and know from His own lips grace given to us. It was an immense mercy to have the mischief stayed, the living death arrested; but how much more to hear His voice banishing all fear and sending her forth in peace, as we pass through a world of strife, and spite of a fallen nature which ever tends to pleasures that war in our members!

There may be crowds around the Lord. He is not occupied with them, but passing through. The touch of faith, however uninformed or feeble, arrests Him at once. But a blessing, though immediate and rich, is not enough to satisfy Him. The Blesser will be known, that faith may have a blessing, good measure, pressed down, shaken up, and running over: so does God give, not man. If it is for His glory that all be clear and confessed, it is also the condition of peace by faith. When silence is kept, the bones wax old through roaring all the day long, and the Lord's hand is heavy night as well as day, so that moisture is changed into summer's drought. But peace is known, when one's sin is acknowledged to Him; this cannot be while one's iniquity is hid. "I said, I will confess my transgressions to the LORD; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." So it was, so it is, so it must be, as long as grace brings sinners to God. Nature is all wrong in fearing that the Lord begrudges blessing,

and the fullest, and for ever. It is no question of our merits who have but sins and death and wrath as we are naturally. It is His grace that saves; and His grace would have us to know that He makes salvation assured with all His heart.

8 The Daughter of Jairus raised

Matt. 9, Mark 5, Luke 8.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 245-246.)

A great request was now laid at the feet of Jesus. The petitioner was Jairus ruler of the synagogue. His daughter, a maiden of twelve years, was dying. “But come” said her father, “lay Thy hand upon her: and she shall live.” Nor did our meek Master turn a deaf ear, but arose and followed him.

The dying maiden was a striking type of the daughter of Zion, for whose sake Messiah was here. And the Jewish ruler expressed his faith in engaging His gracious presence and power to restore his daughter at the last gasp.

On the way the woman with a bloody flux for twelve years touched His garment and was healed. And the Lord not only yielded to her deed, but drew her out from her hiding, and sealed her faith and confession with His open approval to her better blessing. It is not otherwise with the Lord now, as we have proved who have gone to Him in out depth of need in this interval, since He came as Messiah to be sought by Israel, and before He reaches the daughter of His people, not sick only but dead. Grace has met us to the uttermost, not merely immediate healing for such as have touched Him on His way, but clearance away of all fear and doubt that we

might taste how gracious He is and rest in peace through His word.

Yet this created a delay which must have tried most severely the importunate Jairus. And while the Lord was yet speaking to the healed woman, one comes from the ruler's house saying, Thy daughter is dead: trouble not the teacher. But an answer was given to nourish his drooping faith, Fear not; only believe, and she shall be made well.

So it will be in the day that hastens. Unbelief will do its deadly work among the mass of the Jews. But the desperate condition of the chosen people will draw down the action of grace; and faith will, according to God's word, look to Him that loves to heal, and to Him that smote to bind up; and He will in due time raise them up and cause them to live before Him. Whether it be the long and desperately tried woman or the maid of Israel, faith alone enjoys the blessing. And justly so; for faith renounces all dependence on self and honours God and His Son, giving credit for love as great as the power, and Christ's word as unfailing as either. Faith therefore purifies the heart, us well as relieves and assures it.

Here the Lord, when come to the house, suffered none to enter save chosen witnesses, Peter, James, and John, with the father and mother of the maiden, As for all the rest who were weeping and bewailing, He put them out when They derided His saying, "Weep not: she is not dead but sleepeth." They believed their senses, not His word; and the scornful shall not see the blessing. But He took hold of her hand and called, saying, Maiden, arise. Then her spirit returned (for it was gone), and she rose up immediately; and He directed food to be given her.

So in due time will the same Lord raise up the people from the valley of dry bones, as the prophets assure us, no matter how many say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost: we are clean cut off. As Jehovah hath spoken, He will perform; and in that day shall it be known through all the earth.

Quickening was no strain on the Lord of glory. It belonged to the Son as to the Father; and now that the Son was here a man to do His will, the Father gave Him to have life in Himself, showing Him all things that Himself doeth. Of these none was more characteristic than awakening the dead and quickening them. His dignified calm is remarkable here as on all such occasions. He took the dead child by the hand, and called; and she arose immediately. He graciously thought of her bodily need, which at such a moment even parents might not unnaturally overlook. Truly “He hath done all things well,” and as none other; though many another did like works or even greater in His name, which exalts Him as much or more than if He had done them all Himself.

And has this tale of the Holy Spirit no bearing on you who read these lines, — dead to God while you live? Nay, it was written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name (John 20:31). How many have heard His voice, since He was here, in the written word! For the hour now is (John 5:25), as the Lord so solemnly avers, that souls hearing Him may not come into judgment but pass out of death into life.

Leave not such an issue uncertain. You might well despair if it turned on you, as men fancy in the pride and

impenitence of their hearts. But the life you need is wholly and solely in the Son of God; and God is calling you to believe that Jesus is He, and that He gives eternal life to every believer on Him through His word.

It is “the dead” who are now called to hear: and they that hear, the Saviour assures us, shall live. Clearly they are not dead physically, but in trespasses and sins; and they are called to hear Him and live. For fife is not in the first man whether profane or religious; it is in the Second; and faith by grace receives it. For such a boon, morality is as vain as ordinances. Those that live do live to God, and honour His institutions; but believers guided by God’s word and Spirit testify to Christ as their life, and reject every other dependence as a destructive error and a cheat. He is the way, the truth, and the life, as He Himself declared; and so it is in John 5 with His “verily, verily.” Woe is his who despises Him or sets up a rival in His stead. “Whosoever denieth the Son hath not the Father; he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.” And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life! It is far better than to be raised to natural life as Jairus’ daughter was, though He Who raised her is the same Who quickens those who believe now, and Israel from the dust of death by-and by. Fear not; only believe.

9 The Healing of the blind in the house

Matt. 9:27-31.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 260-261.)

Healing of the blind was a marked work of the divine Messiah. So Isaiah predicted in his earlier announcement (Isa. 35:5): “Then the eyes of the blind

shall be opened”; nor was it otherwise in his yet more personal anticipation later (Isa. 42:7, Isa. 61:1). So in the synagogue of Nazareth the Messiah applied the last scripture to His own service. “Today is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” Without doubt we are justified in giving the largest scope to the language employed; but the figurative in no way supersedes the literal.

Nor was there any act more characteristic of Messiah than giving the blind to see; as the testimony to His Sonship was rendered by, His raising dead men (Rom. 1:4), most of all in raising Himself from the grave, after the Jews crucified and slew Him by hand of lawless men. Many a wonder had been wrought in days of old by Moses and Joshua, by Elijah and Elisha, and others; but never do we read of eyes given to a single blind man before His advent; so that the Jews justly regarded it as a special sign of the Anointed of Jehovah.

The present miracle is also peculiar to the first Gospel. There are two blind men specified: a fact which made it very suitable to him who was inspired to testify of Jehovah- Messiah to the circumcision. For it was a well established maxim of the law for them to look for at least two witnesses. Hence the mention of the two demoniacs in Matthew’s account of the last fact in Matt. 8; whereas for Mark and Luke it sufficed to dwell on the more striking of the two (Mark 5, Luke 8). A similar principle applies also to the two blind whom Matthew shows healed at Jericho (Matt. 20:29-34: compare Mark 10 and Luke 18).

As the Lord then was quitting the scene of raising up the Jewish ruler’s daughter, two blind men followed him, crying aloud and saying, Have mercy on us Son of David.

Even Mark and Luke record the like appeal in their account of a similar miracle at the close. In all cases it strikingly attests that He was owned as the Messiah, pre-eminently that Son of David Who alone could avail those so afflicted. Thus they could with assurance appeal to Him on the ground of plain and positive warrant of scripture:- “Have mercy on us, Son of David.”

Even the Jewish leper of Matt. 8 made no such appeal; still less the centurion, as recorded next. Nor do we find it in the general account of the healed, any more than the particular case of Peter’s mother-in-law in the same chapter. The call of those imperilled in the boat during the tempest on the, lake was, “Lord, save us: we perish.” When the demoniacs cried out, it was “What have we to do with thee, Son of God?” It was not the paralytic that cried to the Lord (Matt. 9), but Jesus (seeing their faith) said to him, Child, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven. Even Jairus did not so address Him on Whom he counted for his dying daughter; nor of course did the woman who only approached behind and touched the fringe of His garment.

On the other hand in Matt. 15:22-28 we have the converse, so full of instruction in the ways of God. The Canaanitish woman, real as her faith was, failed to receive the answer she sought or indeed any at all because at first she called amiss. The grace of the Son of David to the distressed of His beloved people is a clear and blessed encouragement for a Jew; but what had a Canaanite to expect from Him? When He brings in the power of His kingdom by- and-by, it will not be as it was in the day of His humiliation, and as it had been ever since the entrance of Abram. “The Canaanite was then in the land” (Gen. 12:6); “the Canaanite and the

Perizzite dwelled then in the land" (Gen. 13:7). Even Judah in the days of Joshua failed to purge his portion of that accursed race: those of the hill country were driven out, but not those of the valley. And so it was for others yet less. But the sad issue to their ruin was that "the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites," etc. (Judges 3:5)

When the kingdom by-and-by is in Messiah's hand. "there shall be no more a Canaanite in the house of Jehovah of hosts" (Zech. 14:21). Was it then hopeless for the woman of Canaan? By no means; but He answered her not a word, when she cried substantially as the blind men, On that ground judgment for the Canaanite is predicted rather than mercy; and the disciples had nothing better to say than "Send her away, for she crieth out after us." This the gracious Lord did answer with a word that cheered her tried spirit. "I was not sent (said He) but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Therefore there was an answer to the blind who so cried out, and none for her as yet; for she was not only a Gentile but of a race specially cursed (Gen. 9:25). She drops accordingly a claim of relationship valid for the most wretched of Israel, but wholly void for her, and paid homage, saying, Lord, help me. Then He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. The truth fully burst on her, and she submitted to it. Her faith, already real, threw off its hindrance and became great. She abandons claim, for she had none; she confesses sovereign grace, and receives the blessing at once. She said, Yea, Lord; for even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table. Then the Lord answered her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.

This helps to give the emphasis of the miracle in our chapter. And when the Lord came into the house, the blind came to Him, and He said, Believe ye that I am able to do this? and they say in reply, Yea, Lord. So it was in that day, and so it will be for the people by-and-by. Jehovah will bring the blind with a deeper blindness by a way that they know not. In paths that they know not will He lead them, when He will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight In the day that is coming the blind will look to Jehovah-Jesus that they may see; as we see a little earnest of it in the two who followed into the house, and confessed their faith. How graciously Messiah touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it to you! And their eyes were opened.

Has this no echo of comfort and blessing for you, my reader? Granted that you have eyes to see naturally; but your lack is of the deepest. You see not Jesus for your soul, nor believe in Him. If you too are Gentiles, the gospel is expressly sent to you to open your eyes, and turn you from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. This is much more and better even than the boon the Messiah gave the blind Israelites. It is the fruit of yet richer grace and of His own unfathomable sufferings. It is what the love of God sends to the poorest of sinners through the redemption that is in Christ. How blessed to see the Son and to believe in Him, and have eternal redemption! May it be your portion now through faith! For this cause is it of faith that it may be according to grace. It is not your righteousness, for then it were of works; it is God’s righteousness founded on the redemption of Christ, unto all, and upon all that believe.

10 The early Haul of fishes

Luke 5:1-11.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 278-279.)

The Holy Spirit transposes the call of Peter and his companions to a later place than the historical order adhered to by Matthew and Mark, which fell in with His design in their Gospels. But it suited His work by Luke to give previously the Lord's preaching in the synagogues of Galilee, His striking procedure in Nazareth on the sabbath day, His deliverance of the demoniac in the synagogue of Capernaum, His healing of Peter's mother-in-law with many more, and His preaching in Galilee. He Who arranged the task for each evangelist knew all the truth, which judges every man, and can be judged by none save at his peril.

In beautiful connection with the great work of proclaiming the gospel, we see the Lord standing by the lake of Gennesaret, as the crowd pressed on Him to hear the word of God. Into one of two little vessels there, from which the fishermen had gone and were washing their nets, He entered, and asked Simon (for it was his) to put out a little from the land, and thence He, sitting down, taught the crowds. After that He said to Simon, Put (thou) out into the deep, and let (ye) down your nets for a haul.

What can one conceive to act more powerfully on the mind of Simon and the rest! Sailors, especially fishermen, are apt to trust their own judgment in their craft and to think cheaply of landmen's advice. The circumstances too made any hope naturally forlorn. Master, said Simon (who had already, been led to Jesus and received from Him a name of honour), through a

whole night we laboured and took nothing; but at Thy word I will let down the nets. And having done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes. And their nets were breaking. And they beckoned to their partners in the other ship to come and help them; and they came and filled both the ships, so that they were sinking.

But great as the wonder was and pointing to the Son of man with all things put under His feet down to the fish of the sea, it was small compared to the spiritual power which let the light of God in Christ into Simon's soul. For when he saw it, he fell down at the knees of Jesus, saying, Depart from me; for 1 am a sinful man, O Lord. He knew himself as he never did before. God in His grace brought thus near filled him with self-judgment, and he pours out the confession of it at the Lord's feet. He believed already, and before the miracle promptly gave up his own thoughts and his discouraging experience at Christ's word. Then the immediate and amazing answer to his confidence not only awed his soul but searched his conscience thoroughly. It seems like a moral dilemma to say at Jesu's knees, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. It is really what an exercised soul feels on which the light falls with overwhelming power. Nothing farther from one than to depart from the Lord, yet His divine goodness and glory so realised that one feels utterly unworthy to be near Him while clinging to Him. When the work of redemption was done, much more could be enjoyed by the purified conscience and the heart resting on His love known in peace; but for this all had yet to wait. Even now the grace Simon saw in Christ made manifest his sinfulness but filled his heart.

The vast take of fish, the bursting nets, the sinking ships, each of which would have commanded Simon's interest at any previous time, were all unheeded. Jesus was all to his soul. Self-importance dwindled, no less than anxiety, and every earthly desire. He fell before One, a Man on earth, Who presented God with a power which delivered from Satan and the effects of sin for soul and body. As He Himself had read at Nazareth the opening of Isa. 61 and said, Today is this scripture fulfilled in your ears, so His course demonstrated in an outreaching grace which irritated even then all who would limit divine privilege to themselves. Even then it was clear that preaching the kingdom of God was more momentous in His eyes than the mightiest deeds of power: "therefore am I sent." He received not glory from men; He would by the word bring them into living relationship with God; He would not only lead such as Simon into deeper blessing, but call them from every object and tie on earth to Himself and the activities of His grace.

Depart from Simon! from a sinful man! Why, the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. As His grace made God better known, so it discovered Simon to himself, who would soon learn and own that He the Lord Jesus knew him perfectly, yea all things. Yes, the Lord Jesus knew all when He entered Simon's ship, and heard him own His word; and He so revealed Himself to his soul that Simon could not but follow such a Master and Lord.

And now He Who spoke the word of power for the miracle says to Simon, Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt be catching men. There is a season to everything, a time to fear, and a time not to fear. Nor is this peculiar

to Simon. It is for every believer in Christ. Till we know Him by faith we do well to fear. Not to fear before that is impenitence with indifference or presumption. But when grace makes Him known to us, “Fear not” is as truly for us as for him. And so it was for James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were Simon’s partners. The word addressed to Simon they took for themselves believingly; and they were right. It was written for us, that we might believe and have the blessing with like assurance. Perfect love casts out fear.

All, no doubt, are not called to “be catching men,” as Simon was; and eminently was made good in due time this word of the Lord also. But while the Lord still calls and sends to preach the gospel, neither man nor woman that believes ought to hide the word of His grace, but publish His name far and wide, as they have opportunity, and in all earnestness, though decently and in order. Time was, whilst all the apostles lived too, when the scattered faithful went through the world evangelizing the word; and the Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord (Acts 8, Acts 11). Let us fear neither for ourselves, if we believe on Him, nor to speak a word in season, His word, to the weary, if they too by grace may hear and live.

11 The Water made wine

John 2:1-11.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 294-295.)

This was the beginning of the miracles, or “signs” as they are called in the fourth Gospel, wrought in Cana of Galilee. In it the “Lord Jesus manifested his glory,” a glory truly divine. The occasion was a marriage feast, to

which He was invited, and His disciples, His mother also being there. How instructive the grace which thus lighted up with love and holiness from above an institution of God that began in the paradise of man, but apt to sink with the fall of man into levity and licence! The law failed to retrieve it; the Lord alone vindicated it according to the mind of God that had been expressed before the law (Gen. 2; Matt. 19), The Lord's bearing is a hard thing to those who idolise Mary. It is written for everlasting profit that, when the wine failed, His mother said to Him, They have no wine; and that He replied, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come (vers. 3, 4). Assuredly if any infer disrespect from these words, they are in error; but so are those who do not learn that the Son of God solemnly objects to dictation where divine glory was in question. He was sent to do the will of God His Father, not to please His mother, as here in her amiable solicitude for a family with whom she was evidently intimate, and at a time which engaged her feelings in their strait. Christ had already as a youth of twelve years testified to Joseph and Mary, after their anxiety, His consciousness of Sonship in the highest sense; now when emerging into public ministry He remonstrates with Mary, who as evidently now alone remained. Not even His mother must interfere with the glorifying of His Father, by a wish of hers however kindly meant.

And Mary understood it, saying to the servants, Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it. She was still the meek bond-servant of the Lord, if others blasphemously make her the Queen of heaven and claim falsely the honour due to the Eternal Son. He, not she, is the One pre-eminently to be heard; as the Father's voice

proclaimed on the holy mount, This is My beloved Son: hear ye Him. No more unworthy thought of fallen nature than to doubt His grace in Whom all the fulness dwells, or to imagine that He the one Mediator needs her intercession to stimulate or strengthen His love. He is Himself full of grace and truth; and He is able also to save to the uttermost (completely) those that draw near to God through Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. On the contrary she is unable, either to save or so to intercede for others, and needed to pray herself, as she was a sinner like others to be saved by faith. So we find in the last record scripture gives of her in Acts 1:14: “These all [the apostles] with one accord continued stedfastly in prayer with [several] women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.” What a contrast with ecclesiastical development in no long time! How soon men turned from him that called them in Christ’s grace to a different gospel, which is not another, but perversion!

According to scripture, to hear His word and believe Him that sent Him, is to have eternal life and not to come into judgment, having passed from death into life. And that life is a life of obedience and love, as 1 John 5 carefully shows. “He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” He that is not subject to the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. Practical obedience flows from submission to His person, and proves the reality of the heart-subjection of faith.

Christ’s hour was not yet come for going down below all depths to glorify God; still less to be set on high with all things put under Him. He was here to give such witness as might please His Father in all dependence. And a

worthy witness followed. For as six stone water-pots stood there according to the purification of the Jews, each holding two or three measures (probably the Jewish Bath), He said, Fill the pots with water. And this was done to the brim; whereupon He bade them, Draw out now and bear to the feast-master. Thus the servants and the feast-master became the irrefutable vouchers of the work Christ wrought; as did the bridegroom, who for the moment reaped the credit of reversing man's way, and, instead of supplying what is worse when men have freely drunk the good wine, of keeping it till the last.

But no! It was Christ Who thus made grace to shine; not the first man, but the Second, and this, manifesting His glory, yet never leaving the servant character He had taken, always refusing to allow the honey of humanity in the offering no less than the leaven. If He proved the omniscient to Nathanael, He is here the omnipotent. It was the true transubstantiation of God's word. The water was made wine, and the good wine, as all could see and taste, and bow to the manifestation of His glory. To reject Him is to men's own shame and ruin, who obstinately will not have God or His Son on any terms, even when divine glory veils its splendour with flesh and in lowly grace adapts itself to our every need with power incontestable. Such is the Lord Jesus. He is speaking still to every soul in the gospel. Oh! refuse not Him that speaketh from heaven.

"The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that is, the word that we preach," says the apostle; "because, if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." To he saved from perdition through faith is not a miracle, sensible

outwardly; but it is a greater wonder than the water made wine. It is the wonder of grace, yet of divine righteousness through redemption. And it is a wonder God is showing day by day in all who believe, to the honour of His Son. Oh! refuse not Him that speaketh, and is near you on the earth, the Son of man now in glory Who came to seek and to save that which was lost, Jesus the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. Blessed are all those that put their trust in Him.

12. Nobleman's son healed

John 4:46-54.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 310-311.)

The story of our Lord, in His dealings with the Samaritan woman and the town's people that followed, is all the more admirable, because there was no miracle. It was His power in bringing the conscience face to face with its sins before God and in revealing the Father in the Son, the Saviour of the world by His Holy Spirit.

Here we are in presence of our Lord not only giving a blessed sign of gracious power when all else was hopeless, but correcting unbelief in a Jewish courtier, who came to Him in Cana and appealed for his child sick in Capernaum. "When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him and besought him that he would come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death." It was not surprising that those who only looked on Jesus as the Messiah should connect His power with His actual presence. But one of the great designs of our Gospel is to make known in Him God, the Son eternal, superior to all times and circumstances. When the nobleman then entreated him

to go down and heal his son, the Lord laid bare the error that demanded a visible wonder; his condition was as yet little different from the Galileans of whom we read in ver. 45, of whom it is written that they received Him, having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem at the feast. “Unless ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.” This only increased the father’s importunity, who says, “Sir, (or Lord,) come down ere my child die.” Then comes the word of power, “Go thy way: thy son liveth.” The man believed the word that Jesus said to him and went his way. If the Lord did not go with him and lay His hand on the sick child, it was but for better and in a better way. His word was given and believed.

Thus was the blessing wrought, a two-fold one; to the father’s soul, and to the son’s body. The father believed the word of the Lord Jesus, the son had his fever cured, and the Lord was honoured in both ways. And we readily see how different the case is from the Gentile centurion and his bondman about to die of the palsy. For there the Lord went with the Jewish elders, and was only stopped when not far from the house by friends whom the centurion sent to say, “Lord, trouble not thyself, for I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof. Wherefore neither did I count myself worthy to come to thee. But say with a word, and my servant shall be healed.” Yes, his was faith of the simplest and strongest character, formed by the sense given him of the Lord’s glory. The word of Jesus was ample: He had but to speak, and it was done. Yet some famous men in early days have confounded these two distinct cases.

But to a similar point of simple faith was the nobleman now brought as the centurion took himself. “Go: thy son liveth” was received in his heart from the lips of the

Lord Jesus. And as he was going down, his bondmen met him, saying, Thy child liveth. He enquired therefore from them the hour when he got better; and their answer was, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. It was clear as light, the immediate unmistakeable action of divine power, not beginning but complete. At that very hour, as the father knew, Jesus said to him, Thy son liveth; and himself believed, and his whole house. Here at least it was no form, but a reality without danger of accrediting what might be untrue, and a fact which helps us to understand other statements of like kind.

But how is it with you, my reader? For this is written, like the rest of the Gospel, “that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye way have life in His name.” It was blessed when sickness drove men to Jesus for healing; it is more blessed still when sinners feel their sins before God and look to the Saviour for that deepest need. He is the Life as well as the Resurrection; and He gives life eternal now to every one that believes, as He will raise their bodies at the last day. Undoubtedly the Saviour is now in heaven; but this assuredly detracts nothing from His power or His love. The same Jesus is now exalted on high and shall so borne in like manner, as He was seen to go up into heaven: The more urgent is it that you should neither slight God’s call to believe, nor forget the consequence of neglecting so great salvation, for either is to brave the judgment.

If you are looking for a sign or wonder in order to believe, profit by the Lord’s gracious correction of one far more to be excused than you who have all the word of God, and the N.T. in particular which leaves no room

for such an error. Is it not plain to you that all depends on the Lord Jesus, and that His grace is as great as His glory? When He does not answer a word, it is to draw out self-judgment in faith. When He does not comply with a request, it is to lead by His word into faith of the unseen.

Sometimes souls are discouraged by a harsh rebuke of their feebleness at first. Never does the Lord so deal with any. He corrects in order the more to bless and prove and strengthen. Here we perceive faith growing exceedingly, when the mixture of sight, so natural to a Jew and indeed to flesh and blood, was removed by His word. And next we are told that the whole house was brought under the blessing of living faith: a result by no means unexampled in the ways of the God of all grace, but rare enough at any time, yet, where or when ever it is, full of interest and encouragement to those who would learn of Him, and seek the honour that comes from the only God. With Him you must have to do. If you hear Christ's word and believe Him that sent Him, you receive life eternal and do not come into judgment, but have passed from death into life. If you refuse now, you cannot escape the voice of the Lord, when He summons men to stand before the great white throne, and be judged for works of which you may boast now — but oh! the shame and horror when the truth is out. May the goodness of God lead you without delay to repentance at the feet of Jesus.

Fifth Series

1 The Sower

2 The Darnel of the field

3 The Mustard seed.

4 The Leaven

5 The Treasure hidden in the field

6 One Pearl of great price

7 The Dragnet

8 The merciless Bondman

9 The Labourers hired

10 The two Children

11 The guilty Husbandmen

12 The Marriage feast

1 The Sower

Matt. 13.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 323-324.)

In the preceding chapter the Lord had pronounced solemnly on the Jews. They had spoken against the Son of man, and there was forgiveness for it; but they were hurrying into that blasphemy against the Spirit which admits of no forgiveness. No sign should be given but that of Jonah the prophet — the death and resurrection of the Son of man. That evil generation must have its last state worse than the first. And thereon the Lord formally disowns His relationship natural, stretching His hand toward His disciples and saying, “Behold, my

mother and my brethren!" — only such as do the will of His Father that is in heaven.

Accordingly in the first parable of Matt. 13 the Lord addresses the multitudes which from the beach heard Him in the boat, and presents Himself as a sower. "Behold, the sower went forth to sow and as he sowed, some [seed] fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured them. And others fell upon the rocky places, where they had not much earth; and straightway they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was risen, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away. And others fell upon the thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked them. And others fell upon the good ground, and yielded fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He that hath ears, let him hear" (vers. 3-9), The Lord could not, did not, forego the rights of God, as later He made known in the parable of the Householder, and of Himself, the Son and Heir sent to receive the fruits (Matt. 21:33-41). But, well knowing the sad issue, He was come for the deeper purposes of grace, whatever be man's evil and rebellion. He is "the sower" who "went forth to sow." He begins a new work on God's part, though man cannot escape the responsibility of receiving and rejecting the seed sown, "the word of the kingdom."

Alas! man is indisposed, sinful man, to receive the word that grace sends through Emmanuel, God's Son yet Man in the humiliation of love. And we have light unequalled given by His words; for "never man spake like this Man," His enemies themselves being witnesses. He explains the various cases of human unbelief with a simplicity and depth all His own.

The wayside hearers are those who receive nothing from God. The wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in the heart. Unless the conscience is reached and sin is judged before God, there is no quickening. The man that only hears abides in unremoved death; he is not born anew; he cannot see or enter the kingdom. The seed, instead of taking root, is devoured by the birds, that is, the enemy.

In the second case appearances were better. The seed fell in stony places and forthwith sprang up, where there was little earth. It was but a work in man's nature. And as hasty feeling received the word and it had no root, so when trouble or persecution arose because of the word, they as quickly shirked suffering. When the sun was risen, they were scorched, and withered away. A divine work is laid in the conscience, and life abides. Here all was superficial and evanescent.

The third case looks at first rather more promising, the seed that fell among thorns. But the thorns grew up to their ruin. Here the bad result was slower; for though the word was heard, the anxiety of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choked the word, so that fruit could not be.

It is remarkable that in these instances the word is not "understood." For there is no true spiritual understanding of the word without the work of God, without life; or, as the third Gospel puts it, without believing and being saved. How is it with you, dear reader? Have you so learnt and judged yourself that you listen to Him assured there is only death within? Are you no less sure that life for you or any is solely in Christ? that it is in no institution, still less in the church? Do you

know by faith that life is in Christ for every soul that believes in Him? So God declares in His word. This fallen man resists and resents. His confidence is in his own powers, or in something or some one like himself, not God's grace; for, having an evil conscience, he distrusts God.

Christ came on an errand of infinite love from God. In Him man if he had not been blind would have seen what he should have been toward God, and what God is toward man. Christ was the wholly dependent and the unfailingly obedient man; but God was also in Him reconciling the world to Himself, the perfect expression of divine love to the guilty and miserable. But man would have neither: his unrighteousness hated true righteousness; and his enmity to God hated the love that came to save and bless him. As He said Himself, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other hath done, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But [it is] that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause" (John 15:22-25).

As this is absolutely true, so is man evidently lost. But God declares the truth that He may repent and believe the gospel. It is by the word of truth that we are begotten of God. And this shows itself from the first in our receiving the word, which reveals how evil we are before God, and how good He is to us in giving His own Son to die for the ungodly. Thus it is God commends His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then being now justified

by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. Such is God's righteousness for the unjust, God's salvation for the lost, as He makes known in the gospel to every one that believes.

So here the beginning of our goodness is in the real owning of our badness, and yet believing God's grace to us in Christ. Here, when the seed is received, it is "into the good ground." The souls hear and understand and bear fruit, one a hundredfold, one sixty, one thirty. For among believers there are differences. When the eye is single, all is bright and blessed; but flesh and the world hinder, so far as they are allowed; and all therefore do not bear fully.

2 The Darnel of the field

Matt. 13:24-30.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 339-340.)

For the due understanding of this parable, observe that it is the first in which the kingdom of the heavens is likened to this or that. The opening parable of the seven contained in the chapter is of such a comparison; it presents the Lord as Sower before that kingdom was set up. The other six suppose its establishment; not in manifested power and glory according to O. and N.T. prophecy, but in mystery, as here made known by our Lord, rejected by men and exalted by God on high, unseen but none the less real and glorious, affording scope for faith no less than unbelief as being a day of profession. It is Christ's ascension which gives occasion

to the kingdom of the heavens here revealed to faith and assuming a character of grace in keeping with His rejection.

We have the Lord's own interpretation that "He that soweth the good seed is the, Son of man" (ver. 36). This it was of moment to explain; because His heavenly position might, have seemed incompatible with such activity of grace. There ought to be no doubt that He was the sower before He took His seat on high as in the first parable. Whatever the means or instruments employed, He it is that is still sowing good seed in His field. And as He says, "The field is the world." As He is the rejected but glorified Son of man, it is no longer the land of Israel, but the world. The needy, the guilty, the ruined world is precisely the object of His gracious care. Among the lost sheep of the house of Israel He had laboured in the flesh, and in vain (Isa. 49) for the mass, who refused and hounded Him to the cross. Now from the right hand of power He sowed the good seed in His field, the world. Nothing less was suited to His glorious plans, any more than His love. Undoubtedly He will another day bring Jacob again to Him in sovereign mercy; but meanwhile He is given for a light to the Gentiles, and salvation to the end of the earth. "The field is the world."

O my readers, hear His voice, that you receiving His word, now sent to any and to all, may be sons of the kingdom. Even before the kingdom of the heavens was set up, our Lord said (ver. 9), "He that hath ears, let him hear." So He says still at the end of His interpretation of this first likeness of the kingdom (ver. 43). It is not the law laid down to an ordered people on penalty of death. It is the word, wherever received in faith, to produce

fruit. The great principle the Lord introduced when here is individual responsibility. This He reiterates from on high. The kingdom when set up in no way enfeebles it, as we thus learn. And though the church, as we know from elsewhere, brought in communion of saints, common subjection, and common action, yet never does God sanction the giving up of individual responsibility. The presence of the Spirit gives power to the word for conscience and heart to conciliate what self-will under Satan ever seeks to dislocate.

Christ is life, and righteousness, and salvation. If you believe on Him, these are yours in Him; and they are found not otherwise nor elsewhere. Man cannot quicken, nor a minister, nor yet the church. Christ is all: so scripture testifies; and if you receive Him on God's word, this is the work of the Holy Spirit, Who glorifies Him. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are admirable and abiding institutions; but they are perverted to poison when put in the place of Christ and of faith in Him. Hence it is the word for individual reception. If you reject Christ and receive not His saying, you cannot escape One that judges you: the word the Lord Jesus spoke, that shall judge at the last day. Oh! neglect not so great salvation, nor His authority.

And the danger is the greater, because Christ's enemy, while men slept, came and sowed darnel also among the wheat. Indistinguishable at first, they became manifestly different ere long. For the darnel are the sons of wicked ones. They are found all over the field, the world of Christian profession. Such is Christendom, to speak of nothing worse, and there were soon greater abominations from early days too. But these are bad enough and prepare for every evil from beneath. The

darnel are the heterodox and the lawless among the baptised.

Yet this does not make the field to be the church but the world, save in their eyes who understand neither, and are so deceived as to confound them. Hence we may see that, when the Lord forbade His servants from uprooting the darnel, He in no way denies in the church the discipline which the Holy Spirit demands (1 Cor. 5). It is the extermination of the wicked professors He prohibits under His figure of gathering up the darnel from the field. And experience falls in with this. Disobedient servants of His have rooted out the good seed, oh! how often, under the plea of getting rid of the darnel. Grace is to reign now. “Let both grow together until the harvest,” saith the Lord Who will then send forth the executors of judgment.

The season for harvest will be a marked change: a different work with different workmen. The reapers are quite another class, His angels, whose business is to gather up first the darnel, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but the wheat are gathered into Christ’s barn above. It is a vain dream that the world is to improve under the action of the gospel or the church. On the contrary the normal state of the wheat-field was spoiled as a fact from early days; and the servants are forbidden to employ their ineffectual efforts to efface the evil, which must go on till the consummation of the age. Then shall the Son of man intervene with His angels. Revival or reformation can in no way abolish the mischief the devil wrought while men slept, as they quickly did. God secures His own work by grace all through: the good will surely be gathered into the heavenly granary in due time. But the field was soon

spoiled through man's lack of care and Satan's craft; and this cannot be adequately dealt with till the Lord come in judgment of the quick.

Look and listen then to Him now. Receive Him at God's word to life eternal. He is the way, the truth, and the life; and there is no other; that you who live may henceforth live not to yourselves but to Him Who for you died and was raised. Thus may you await His coming not only in peace but with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

3 The Mustard seed.

Matt. 13:31, 32.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 355-356.)

It is well to understand that "the kingdom of the heavens" does not mean heaven itself but its reign over the earth while the King rejected by man is seated on high. The six later parables present successive comparisons of that kingdom in its chief characteristics: three are its public aspect, and so, like the first, were addressed without to the great multitudes; the three last, like the explanation of the first similitude, or Parable of the Darnel, were spoken in the house only to the disciples, as dealing with what needed spiritual intelligence.

Another distinction is obvious. The Parable of the Mustard Seed, like that of the Leaven, shows what the kingdom is like, in marked difference from its predecessor, as it becomes more apparent still in its successor.

"The kingdom of the heavens is like a grain of mustard which a man took and sowed in his field; which is less than all the seeds, but, when it hath grown, is greater

than the herbs, and becometh a tree so that the birds of heaven come and roost in its branches" (vers. 31, 32).

Here the Lord gives us to see the least and lowliest beginning of Christian profession growing to be a power in the earth. In Luke 17:6, He employs the same figure of a grain of mustard; as indeed it was a proverbial expression for what is diminutive. But the grain soon shot up so as to leave the pot-herbs behind, and afford shelter to the birds it notoriously attracts.

So it was to be, so it has long been, with that which bears His name here below. The Lord marks beforehand the surprising contrast between the extreme littleness of its first estate when sown, and the height to which it was ere long to advance. He is not here pronouncing on its inner or moral nature. He shows from the first what all the world can see when it came to pass. It is one of "the mysteries (or secrets) of the kingdom of the heavens," but secrets given for the disciples to know. And the Lord here sets out the fact, in due time palpable to all mankind, that what began the most minute was to develop into a conspicuous and protective power on the earth, according to the well known figure of a nation or political system in Isa. 11:33, 34; Ezek. 31; Daniel 4, etc.

Now this was no mystery for Israel any more than for the Gentile powers. It was expressly allotted to the ancient people of God, as we read in the Psalms and the Prophets. So in the days of depression when captivity befell "the rebellious house," God made use of a tree to illustrate His ways with them, and their ways before Him which drew out His sternest chastening. But He adopted the same figure to assure the believing heart that in His mercy all will be reversed in the day to come,

and that He will plant the tender twig on a mountain high and eminent, even the height of Israel. “And it shall bring forth boughs and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar; and under it shall dwell all birds of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I Jehovah have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I Jehovah have spoken and will do it” (Ezek. 17). It is all of His mercy; but how could the result in this case be otherwise? For Jehovah of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem and before His ancients gloriously.

Wholly different was to be the proper portion of the Christian on earth. “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth... Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. Blessed are ye when they shall reproach you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you” (Matt. 5:3-12). Even those whom God set first in the church were expressly charged by our Lord against power and glory of an earthly sort. “Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among; you. But whosoever would become great among you shall be your servant; and whosoever would be first among you, let him be your slave: even as

the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:25-28).

Thus the Lord lets us know in this parable that, in the face of His revealed will, Christendom would soon manifest a portentous change, and from its primitively low estate vie with the powers of the world in earthly grandeur and influence. We are called now to walk apart from the world, its power and its glitter, content to be hated as our Master was (John 15), cherishing also the secret of God's grace and the relationships it gives us, and suffering with Christ meanwhile. "But if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may he also glorified with Him" (Rom. 8). "Faithful is the saying: for if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:11, 12). Now is the time for us to have tribulation in the world, till He come to take us to the Father's house, and we be manifested also with Him in glory when He is manifested. The day of glory with Christ will make ample amends.

But how is it with you, dear reader? Is Christ the object of your faith? If so, it is well indeed with you now and evermore. If He is nothing to you beyond any other whom men discuss, notwithstanding God's testimony to Him, it were better for you that you had not been born. Refusing God's light and love in Him Who went down below all depths for sinners, you cannot escape the judgment which He will execute on all the impenitent and unbelieving, that despise Him and the saving grace of God in Him. Before that everlasting judgment there shall be a day of Jehovah of hosts upon all that is proud and mighty, and upon all that is lifted up; and it shall be brought low. Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day.

Meanwhile God commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent. Oh, that His goodness may lead you to repentance! The time is short: delay not. Your sins are many and great. The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from every sin: nothing else can.

4 The Leaven

Matt. 13:33.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 373-374.)

The Lord Jesus here pronounces the fourth parable of the seven, the third likeness of the kingdom in these mysteries.

“Another parable spake he unto them. The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was wholly leavened” (ver. 33).

Individuals are not the question here any more than in the two that precede, especially in that of the mustard seed which is most akin as the structure marks. Individuals had their place in the opening parable, and, hearing, were born again, and were each fruit produced by the seed. If received into good ground, there was life and fruit; if not, the word of the kingdom had no vital effect. But in the parables that follow before the multitude, we have successive states which characterise the kingdom while Christ is hidden on high. The first is the ruin of the harvest here below by the mixture, while men slept, of darnel with the wheat; which mixture must be left for the returning King to deal with at the end of the age. The second is the portentous rise of what was planted an exceeding small thing; but it grew into an earthly power of attractive pretensions. Neither of these

clearly has to do with the individual, but, as it suits “the kingdom,” with the state of things, and each in its due sequence.

What then signifies “the leaven”? Does the bearing of it revert to the opening parable and its appeal to individuals? Does it not rather continue the line of the comparisons of the kingdom? Surely the latter only, setting forth the assimilating effect of a doctrine, or creed, over a certain measured sphere till it was wholly permeated. This very distinctly differs from seed with a principle of life that bears fruit, a suited and frequent figure in scripture. Never is leaven so employed elsewhere. From earliest days it symbolised a corruption that tended to work and spread, as in the Passover, authoritatively applied in 1 Cor. 5 to evil which must be purged out, By our Lord it was used to set forth the teaching of Pharisees and Sadducces, of which the disciples were to beware. Compare Gal. 5:9 for doctrine, as 1 Cor. 5 for immorality.

In no case then does scripture warrant leaven as a figure of quickening, in no case identify it with the washing of regeneration, and renewal of the Holy Spirit which God shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Living water is as different as can be from leavening; which, being a process of fermentation, causes dough to rise find makes it pleasanter to the natural taste. If Christ be in Levitical language the unleavened bread the redeemed eat, leaven has its appropriate use in the two wave-loaves which represent the Pentecostal first fruits; for the regenerate have still evil in their nature. Hence the sin offering which always accompanied the wave-loaves; whereas for the wavesheaf, figuring Christ risen, as there was no leaven

of course, so no sin offering could be thought of. The same principle explains the leavened bread alone with the sacrifice of peace offerings for thanksgiving. Where fallen nature enters, so does leaven; whatever the promises of grace, God takes account of it. But quickening is the direct energy of Christ, Who is life acting by the word of faith.

Hence, the best, that can scripturally be said of leaven is of doctrine working among men, as here in three measures of meal till it was wholly leavened. The kingdom was not only from the humblest beginning to become a towering power on the earth, like any worldly state, with its elevation coveted by those that found shelter there. It was also to penetrate men's minds within a definite sphere, forming and fashioning them according to the teaching presented. What the spiritual character of that doctrine might be is hardly within the scope of what is said before the crowds. And we know that what spread over a large part of the shattered Roman empire and beyond, after the Christian profession rose up to worldly power and influence, was a mere creed, and by no means God's gospel for faith obedience: an idolising of the sacraments and of the crucifix, and a setting up, if not of gods, yet of mediators to the dishonour of the One; not the word of the cross as His power to those that are saved. It was no longer God choosing the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, or the weak to shame the strong, but the wise, mighty, and noble choosing the symbol of Christendom as the object of visible homage, and even the means of advantage or ambition. Such was the work of the "woman." The Lord had long been in the back ground.

My reader, see that you be not deceived nor deceive yourself. The unseen enemy has boundless and subtle wiles; and you are exposed, but ought not to be ignorant of his devices. Christ only can avail your soul for salvation. And He is as acceptable, as He is unfailing, Other foundation can none lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. It is not when we become strong or godly; but just as we are that He saves and to the uttermost: while we were yet weak, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. Only hearken to God's call. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

5 The Treasure hidden in the field

Matt. 13:14.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 7-8.)

Here the importance of the Lord's speaking to the disciples in the house is manifest. He began with explaining the parable of the Darnel of the field. They are not exterior facts of the kingdom like those said without to the crowds, but spiritual views for His followers only. If those spoken openly have been misinterpreted through the natural mind, the later are yet more exposed to it.

"Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid, and for the joy of it goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth the field" (Matt. 13:44).

The gospel or the soul's salvation is by no means what this parable or the next presents, though often so interpreted. In reality, one can hardly conceive any thing more opposite. For the gospel is the revelation of God's

grace in Christ; salvation is a free gift, like eternal life. It is in no way true that the man, who has it brought before him, sells all that he has to purchase that treasure; still less does he buy the field, which is certainly something else very different, to acquire the salvation of his soul.

Never since the world began has any soul been led by the Spirit to sell all that he had to buy life or pardon, salvation or glory. And if any have sought in this fashion to be delivered from evil or to gain God's favour, we may be sure that their suit was rejected; for it is an ignoring of guilt and ruin, a frustrating of God's grace, and a making void in effect Christ's death. On the other hand it is allowed fully that, in those that are Christ's and have Him as their portion, there may be and there ought to be a like devotedness to any extent in our measure. But this is a very different thing, and not what the parable teaches.

It is overlooked that the soul's need and blessing we have had already in the opening parable of the Sower, as it is indeed a personal question, antecedent to the mysteries of the kingdom, and carefully presented as distinct, before any likeness of the kingdom begins. Those likenesses bring out larger considerations, whether outside or within. And the Lord is the "man" here, as nobody can doubt in His field of wheat spoilt by the darnel (ver. 24).

Thus read, all flows without jar and in accordance with all truth. It is the Son of God incarnate Who is compared to one who found and hid the treasure in the field. And, in this aspect, "the field" retains its significance as "the world," instead of being twisted into "the scriptures," or

“the letter” or “the Christian profession”; it is “the world” where Christ found His own, who constitute His “treasure.” The meaning is then not only enforced by but agreeable to the rest of God’s word. And the Lord’s consequent action is no less in harmony. For what can be more certain than that He emptied Himself to become man, and, when found in that fashion, humbled Himself and became obedient unto death-even death of the cross? Nay, we may press the analogy closer still from the known facts of the case. He was as Messiah heir of David’s throne, but gave up all in His death, which purchased the world and redeemed His own who were in it. Even His enemies, who blaspheme and deny Him Who bought them (2 Peter 2:1), are His purchase. But His own have also in Him redemption through His blood. So plain is it that purchase and redemption are not the same, nor equally extensive. For clearly the purchase is not of the treasure only but of the field (or world) wherein the treasure was hid. Redemption is not thus universal but belongs only to those that believe, as all scripture teaches and this parable illustrates. Christ has paid (to say the least) the full price, to reconcile “all things, whether the things on earth or the things in the heavens” (Col. 1:20); and the day is near, when God will head up the universe in Him (Eph 1:10), the Heir of all things, at His coming. Christ bought the world, but His joy is in the “treasure” which is to be with Him and like Him in that day.

How then do you stand as to Him? To be bought, as is the field of the world, is only the more. terrible if you deny Him. And all that call not on Him, all that neglect so great salvation, do deny Him, though they may not break into heresies of perdition. You are summoned by

God in His word to believe on Him. So believing you shall have mercy: for it is written that whosoever does believe on Him shall not be ashamed. All who reject Him, high or low, poor or rich, must bear their doom to endless shame and woe, Oh, why sin against God and His Christ and your own soul? Why regard lying vanities, whatever they may be, and forsake your own mercy?

Christ, the world-rejected Lamb, is worthy, and He has brought to your door redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Is not this your deep need whoever and whatever you are? In none other is remission; in Him it is as perfect as Himself. Oh, delay not, nor turn away. It is yielding to His enemy and yours, to the liar and murderer from the beginning. Consider too how your unbelief insults God in all the ways of His grace. “As though God did beseech through us, we pray (says the apostle) on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). Unbelief directly dishonours the Father Who sent, and the Son Who in love deigned to be sent. And the Holy Spirit is sent down since Christ’s ascension to testify of His Person and work and glory. Oh! beware of doing despite to the Spirit of grace. For we know Him that said, Vengeance belongeth to Me: I will recompense.

6 One Pearl of great price

Matt. 13:45, 46.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 23-24.)

As the leaven followed suitably the mustard seed in the parables spoken without, so does the pearl duly come after the treasure in those within, the house. None of these conveys what was shown in the parable of the

sower before the likeness of the kingdom. In that first parable did the Lord set out the word as the germ of life and spiritual understanding to the believer. The comparisons of the kingdom of the heavens, external and internal, present subsequent truths and larger considerations; whether of the outward course of the dispensation while the rejected Lord is on high; or of its spiritual aspects for the guidance and enjoyment of the faithful who have the mind of Christ.

After the Lord explained within the house the parable of the darnel to his disciples, the latter class opened, as we have seen, with the treasure. Now is given the far more precise instruction of the “one pearl.”

This, which is evidently true as a sketch, helps to save the reader from serious misconception of the particulars. From early times men, having lost the fresh fulness of grace in the gospel, began to bend scripture generally to meet the first need of the soul. Hence the mustard seed was diverted by many to teach the work of grace in the heart from its small beginning, as the leaven was supposed to mean the gradual work of sanctification to bring about a universal change. Even the parables within the house are turned to the same account, only employing great things, instead of small, to show in the treasure the value of what we should make our own, and in the pearl the dream doubled to make it certain.

No believer doubts that the Lord Jesus is the richest of treasures, and the jewel above all price. But as the general structure and the bearing of the discourse point to a different aim, so the special forms of these similitudes are inconsistent with the assumption that the

work of divine grace in the heart is intended. How plainly untenable it would be to suppose a sinful or even an exercised soul selling all he has to buy the world! in order to possess the treasure said to be hidden there. Nor can any deny the truth that Christ in His joy over the treasure did, as He alone could, buy the world. in order to have the treasure of a people out of the earth for heaven.

A late dignitary, who treated the parables in a very interesting way, thought this interpretation “strangely reverses the whole matter.” What matters overturning an error however old, if we can only receive and enter into the truth with simplicity? The fact is that spiritual men have long felt the inadequacy of popular views. The word of the Lord abides. Be this our criterion. “Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a man of merchandise seeking goodly pearls; and having found one pearl of great value, he went and sold all whatever he had and bought it” (Matt. 13:45, 46). Now is it not harsh in the extreme to infer that lost sinners are compared to a man inquest of goodly pearls? It is untrue even of the uncommon case of the rich young ruler, irreproachable as his conduct was, who clung to his wealth, and forfeited treasure in heaven, and left Christ full of sorrow. He never knew his ruin and did not even seek to he saved. And never was a greater mistake than that Saul of Tarsus answers to the merchant, “determinate, discriminate, unremitting.” He was, as he said, “chief of sinners” and, like every other, saved in sovereign grace.

It is Christ then Who really seeks and buys. It is Christ Who alone has also the perfect discernment of the moral beauty He saw and prized above all. Indisputably He alone of men understood and sought goodly pearls; and

this one pearl of great price He saw, in divine counsels, to be saints like Himself holy and blameless in love — yea, one with Him, the church glorious, which He will present to Himself, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. He alone was in Himself perfectly what the saints are in divine purpose to be; and shall be in fact at His coming again, as in principle they are even now.

He that is in Christ is exhorted, as he has life in Him, to have in himself the moral mind which was in Christ Jesus, to obey and serve in love as He did absolutely, to count all things loss and dung that he may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having his own righteousness but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God on the condition of faith. But the parable sets forth what is the ground and pattern and spring of all such effects in the Christian, in the Lord's own love to saints seen as the reflection of His own beauty, the one inestimable pearl, for which He sold all else, glory on high, kingdom below, all whatever He had, to buy that pearl. It might be, it was, in the depths, submerged in what was lowest and vilest; but He saw the end from the beginning, He discerned what grace would effect, loved us and gave Himself for us, as He will have therein the object of His love and rest in His love on high.

O my friend that reads these words, flatter not human nature, nor your own character. In an ungodly family you may have been shocked with the horror of open evil, and have walked morally; in a godly one you may have been guarded from corruption and trained in religious habits. Yet it strangely reverses, not the point of this parable only, but the whole force of revealed truth, and of the gospel particularly, if you compare yourself in

your natural state to a merchant in quest of goodly pearls, still more if you credit yourself with such devotion, in your unconverted days, as would give up all you have to win Christ. Since man was created on the earth, never was such an instance; and if it had been, how could it avail for a sinner without new birth or redemption?

The same apostle, who tells us this was his experience as a saint, condemns all he had been previously (though more moral and religious than you) as filth. He also proclaims from God of the entire race, that there is not a righteous person, not even one, that none understands, that not one seeks after God, that peace's way is unknown, and no fear of God is before their eyes. He further declares that it was not merely so among the Gentiles, but that the law expressly pronounces this sentence on those under the law, spite of all their privileges. Now the gospel is sent to all as equally lost. For, says he, there is no difference; for all sinned, and come short of the glory of God. Hence God justifies freely though the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Whom God set forth a mercy-seat through faith in His blood. The very object is to cut off boasting of self in every form, that no flesh should boast before God. He that boasts, let him boast in the Lord.

7 The Dragnet

Matt. 13:47-50.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 37-39.)

The last similitude of the chapter is the counterpart of the first; for as this is the sowing of the good seed in the world, where the harvest is spoilt by the enemy's darnel,

so that is the judicial dealing with the bad fish after the good had been gathered into vessels before the consummation of the age.

“Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a dragnet cast into the sea and having brought together of every sort; which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach, and, sitting down, gathered the good into the vessels and cast the worthless out. Thus shall it be in the consummation of the age: the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from amidst the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping, and the gnashing of teeth” (ver. 47-50).

Here again we have what was meant, not for the multitude, but for those who had ears to hear. The Lord speaks to the disciples only in the house. It is for the spiritual mind.

We may notice here as elsewhere how carefully the truth was communicated, so as not to impair the Christian hope. The Jew has had times and seasons set out and discriminated to guard him from being deceived by the cry, The time is at hand. Now that the Christ was rejected of Jew and Gentile, the unequalled tribulation must be before the times of refreshing from the presence of Jehovah and His Christ. But for the Christian it is of all moment not to confound the proper hope with prophecy, but to wait for the Lord to receive us to Himself precisely as the early saints did. Whatever events are revealed, and they are many, varied, and momentous before the day of the Lord, His coming remains immediately before the heart without any predicted events to intervene.

In fact, we now know that many centuries have transpired; but from the parables here and elsewhere we should never have gathered such an interval as might hinder constant looking for Christ. We could not from the letter have gleaned, but that the fishermen, who first cast into the sea the dragnet, at length filled out of every sort, were the same that drew it up on the beach, and sitting down gathered the good into vessels and cast the worthless outside. He Who knew the end from the beginning had all before Him but disclosed with a wisdom self-evidently divine. Mistake there was none: only the rashness or ill-will of unbelief can say so. If taught of God, we wait for the Lord Jesus now, as the apostles did. Our hope, as our faith, is the same. All hangs on His word, which can fail no more than His love. And those who have fallen asleep have in no way missed their hope; for it remains true as ever, that the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living that remain to the coming of the Lord shall in no wise precede those that are fallen asleep, but shall together with them be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4).

The parable does mark in the first place the fishermen completing their work of filling the dragnet from every kind, and drawing it ashore; next, sitting down and sorting the good fish into vessels, while they cast away those unfit for food. This was the fishermen’s work of delicate discrimination; and the more striking as the servants were forbidden in the first similitude to gather the darnel. To deal with the wicked is in both parables assigned to the angels. They are, as the interpretation goes on to say (not only explaining, but adding), to come

forth and sever the wicked from amidst the righteous. This is another truth, which must not be confounded with the fishermen's work of gathering the good into vessels. Both are true, but they differ in their nature and objects. We, the servants or fishermen, have to do with the good; the angels will execute judgment on the wicked. The Christian is called to the work of grace. So it was even among the Jews of old. "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth," said Jehovah to Jeremiah: not the vile from the precious, but the precious from the vile.

How is it with you, dear reader? To be within the dragnet is no security. Are you Christ's? He Himself welcomes the anxious and the restless and the wretched and the despairing. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Yea, He declares, "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out." And He deigns to give the most lowly and gracious reason: "For I came down from heaven not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." And His will that sent Jesus is, "that every one that seeth the Son and believeth on Him shall have life eternal; and 1 will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:37-40).

What more do you want to win your hearts than these words, if you believe the Lord? To honour Him is to honour the Father, Who refuses to be honoured otherwise. And no wonder; for to Him it is that His God and Father is indebted for His glorification morally in a world which had departed from Him, and done Him foul wrong, not only among Gentiles, vain and dark and proud, but in His own people guiltier and prouder still. Then and there it was that the Lord Jesus vindicated Him, not only in emptying Himself and becoming man,

but in humbling Himself when man and being obedient unto death — yea, death of the cross. There it was also God made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become God's righteousness in Him. Then it was He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree that we being dead to sins should live to righteousness.

Fear not therefore to receive the Lord Jesus at God's word, as your quittance from all that you have done and are, and as your new start; for He Who died is risen, the giver of a life in Him, which speaks to you of victory, and is the pledge of holiness. Fear not: only believe.

8 The merciless Bondman

Matt. 18:23-35.

The grace which forgives to the uttermost is characteristic of Christianity. Christ Himself bore witness of it habitually, and expressly to the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee. It is the prime message of the gospel; and the church assumes it to be settled for the least member of Christ's body.

Peter suggested what he regarded as a perfect limit of forgiveness, and enquired whether seven times satisfied; the Lord answered, Until seventy times seven. Grace declines a stipulated term and demands the widest margin; but the parable indicates solemnly the doom of him who has no heart for it. Whatever the man pretended to, the only true God, the Father, was unknown, and Jesus Christ Whom He did send: life eternal was not his.

"For this the kingdom of the heavens is likened to a king who would make a reckoning with his bondmen. And when he began to reckon, one debtor for ten thousand

talents was brought to him. But as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and the children and all that he had, and payment to be made. The bondman then falling down did him homage, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay all. And the lord of the bondman, moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt. But that bondman, on going out, found one of his fellow-bondmen who owed him a hundred denarii, and having laid hold he was grasping his throat saying, Pay what thou owest. His fellow-bondman then, falling at his feet, besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee. And he would not, but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay what was owing. But his fellow-bondmen, having seen what was being done, were greatly grieved, and went and fully explained to their lord all that was done. Then his lord, having summoned him, saith to him, Wicked bondman, all that debt I forgave thee, since thou didst beseech me: oughtedst not thou also to have pitied thy fellow-bondman, as I also pitied thee? And his lord, in wrath, delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was owing to him. Thus also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if ye forgive not from your hearts each his brother" (Matt. 18:23-35).

But one debtor is specified, and his debt enormous. Even if of silver, Haman offered no more in lieu of destroying the entire Jewish people. Not less guilty is the sinner before God. No wonder he "was brought to Him": of himself he would never come. All depends on the reality of one's submission to God's righteousness. If he be not born of God, it is superficial. Profession may have no root of faith, but spring from the mere feeling of terror on the one hand or of sympathy on the other. It may be

but creedism or deference to public opinion. It is often mental apprehension. In all such cases there is no thorough self-judgment, no divinely formed repentance, and hence no true sense of the grace of God, nor real appreciation of Christ and His work, whereby faith knows. But the sentence of judgment (for God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of them that hold the truth in unrighteousness) may alarm souls into the profession of the Lord's name apart from living faith. So it was when our Lord preached; as He warned such as quickly received the word with joy, and soon gave it up in trial. So it was yet more, when the gospel went out in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. A single case is more impressive than a crowd. Further, as individually one believes, so too judgment will be individual.

Here the debtor who did not keep the word, nor bring forth fruit with patience, "on going out," soon betrayed his emptiness. He, being a dead stone, who had never tasted that the Lord is good, ruthlessly assailed his fellow that owed him a comparatively small debt. And his lord incensed at cruelty so selfish after such grace, consigns him not to prison only but to the tormentors in irretrievable ruin.

O my reader, deceive not your soul: God is not mocked. Read not only Gal. 6:7-10 but Rom. 2:7-11, which press not the grace that saves, but the indispensable character of those that are saved. "He shall have judgment without mercy that showed no mercy."

How is it then with your soul, my reader? Have you received Christ and believed the gospel to the remission

of your sins? For this is the A B C of God's message based on Christ's redemption. There is far more given in His grace; but with this most needed and touching answer to our deep want God begins. He remembers no more our sins and iniquities, as He often assures us; but He would have us to know them blotted out by the Saviour's blood, as we remember Him and show forth His death habitually. What can be conceived more contradictory of His grace than a hard vindictive spirit? Are not we who are forgiven distinctly charged to forgive? Nay more, are we not solemnly warned that Christ's heavenly Father will award unsparing judgment, not to open adversaries only, Jew or Gentile, but to the Christian professor especially, if from his heart he forgives not a brother's trespasses? Can any course be more fraught with danger than glossing over Christ's plain meaning under the fond claim that, whatever come, we are safe? He that believes to the saving of the soul is neither presumptuous nor cowardly where Christ is at stake, but keeps His word and denies not His name, sharing His life and displaying His character.

The bondman with the debt to God of 10,000 talents is historically the Jew, availing himself greedily of a gracious oblivion of all in the gospel, but so little imbued with the Spirit of Christ, as to hate and persecute, forbidding any mercy to the Gentile because of his injustice to Israel, little indeed compared with the Jew's wickedness against God. Therefore, as the apostle shows, is wrath come upon them to the uttermost (1 Thess. 2:16). So also we see in the Acts of the Apostles, that though the blotting out of their sins was preached to them on their repentance and turning to God, they did not truly profit by His mercy. They dogged enviously and

as enemies the steps of His messengers, whom He sent next to the Gentiles. Thus they pleased not God and were contrary to all men, and afford the sad witness that, if the despiser of Moses' law died without compassion on proof of two or three witnesses, much sorer must be the punishment of those that trample down and count unholy the blood of the covenant and do despite to the Spirit of grace.

9 The Labourers hired

Matt. 20:1-16.

People have little difficulty in understanding the general drift of the answer to Peter, who said, Behold, we have forsaken all and followed Thee: what shall we have therefore? Our Lord shows that God will be debtor to no man, and that for every loss on account of His name every one shall receive again a hundredfold and inherit life eternal. But He adds the cautionary words, Many first shall be last, and last first. For as Christ is the motive where faith is, reward is but the encouragement to him that follows the Saviour, it cheers him when already on the way. Make the reward the object, and all becomes mercenary. Even where Christ is the constraining power, there is danger of clouding Him under an overweening estimate of sacrifices for His sake; and hence the need to think of the shortcoming implied through self-reliance. In every case however God never forgets but assuredly repays.

Why is it that there has been such perplexity and difference from of old to the present about the parable which opens chap. 20? It is because man bulks so largely in his own eyes that room is not left for the sovereign grace of God. Now this is the very thing the

Lord here asserts. Pious men might and must more or less distinctly allow it in His saving souls; but the Lord claims it for His dealing with service. And it ought not to be a question that in the parable not salvation but service is the matter in hand. Alas! in all ages the tendency has been and is to confound the two things to the deep injury of both; for if mixed up, no soul who has a due sense of his unprofitable service can or ought to be assured of his salvation; yet without that assurance God's grace is not fully received, nor has Christ's blood practically cleansed the conscience, so that the service is vitiated correspondingly from first to last. And no wonder; for never can exist the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope, which we are exhorted to hold fast firm unto the end.

Now what can be plainer in scripture than the truth that "the free gift of God is life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23)? In John, Gospel and Epistles, it is no less plain that the believer has that life now. No doubt, it is in the Son, and alone in Him rightly and securely; but "he that believeth on Me hath life eternal" (John 6:47). And the First Epistle was written that God's children might know, that they believing on the name of the Son of God have life eternal. They do not wait for His coming again to have it; they have it now for their souls, they will have it for their bodies also, and in its proper glorious sphere, when He comes for them. And it is of life eternal by-and-by that the Synoptic Gospels speak.

But the parable contemplates, not conversion, nor life eternal, but labouring in the vineyard. How can those that know the gospel fall into a mistake so evident and profound as to overlook this? It was for Christ that

Simon Peter left all and followed Him. Christ drew him, not reward, though reward there is; for God is not unrighteous to forget any work or labour of love shown to His name in the service of the saints or of the gospel. But it is divine love in Christ, seen by faith, which draws the soul after Him, and makes His call effectual. Such alone do work that pleases God; and life eternal is therefore shown in Rom. 2 to come at the end of a fruit-bearing course; but the utmost care is taken in the same epistle to declare that we are justified freely by His grace (Rom. 3:24). Yea, it excludes any work on our part from that great act of His grace. “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt, but to him that worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:4, 5).

In the parable on the contrary it is a question of work done for the householder, who calls and sends into his vineyard.

“For the kingdom of the heavens is like a householder which went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard; and when he had agreed with the labourers for a denary1 the day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing in the marketplace idle; and to them he said, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing; and he saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard. And when even was come, the

lord of the vineyard saith unto the steward, Call the labourers and pay them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a denary. And when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received every man a denary. And when they received it, they murmured against the householder, saying, These last have spent one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. But he answered and said to one of them, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a denary? Take up that [which is] thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? or is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last" (vers. 1-16).

Plainly the Lord lays down the true spring and principle of service. It is confidence in him who calls. All is set out with divine wisdom. The workmen first called agreed to the terms. Those at the third hour went to work on his word; "whatsoever is right I will give you," as did those at the sixth and ninth hours. The last batch at the eleventh went there simply at his call: "Go ye also into the vineyard." With these last the steward is directed to begin, giving each a denary. This aroused the murmurs of the earliest workmen, who resented the householder's liberality. But he stopped the mouth of their spokesman at once. The injustice complained of was solely in the complainant. "Didst thou not agree with me for a denary?" Grace reserves its title to bless. "Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last." The despised enjoy the grace that

abounds beyond all question of man, and those who indulge in selfish thoughts justly sink. God Who never fails in righteousness maintains His right to act according to His own goodness. He is sovereign even in this where man sets up his claim to his own chagrin. Indisputably just, He is good and will act upon it, as He loves to do: what loss and misery those make for themselves who dispute it!

10 The two Children

Matt. 21:28-32.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 88-89.)

The proud men who were blind to the glory of Christ, and averse alike to God's grace and truth raised the question of His authority. It is always so with such as value themselves, and love not God's intervention, and are jealous of those that do His work. He could have pointed to witnesses greater than John; though among women-born none had risen greater than John the Baptiser. But the works which the Father gave Him to complete testified yet more. So did the Father's voice. And the scriptures which bore witness of Him He treats as the highest possible, for they have a permanence which no mere words can possess. But here the Lord met their unbelief by appealing to the baptism of John: whence was it? Of heaven, or of men? They saw their dilemma, and fearing man, not God, they answered, We cannot tell. Confessing their incapacity, chief priests and elders though they were, as the cover of their dishonesty, they are left without an answer. The Lord however presents them with a portrait, not of themselves only, but of those they despised.

“But what think ye? A man had two children and he came to the first and said, Child, go work to-day in the vineyard. And he answered and said, I will not; but afterward he regretted and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise; and he answered and said, I [go], sir, and went not. Which of the two did the will of the father? They say, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say to you, that the tax-gatherers and the harlots go before you into the kingdom of God. For John came in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the tax-gatherers and the harlots believed him. And ye, when ye saw, regretted not afterward to believe him” (vers. 28-32).

It is a plain and direct dealing with conscience. For two classes were then before the Lord’s eye: the rude and profligate, the careless and profane, who made no pretension to religion and pursued worldly profit and open sin; and the respectable and decorous, who piqued themselves on heeding the rites of religion and on their own decent character. Now mankind in Christendom is the same still, tested by a standard more searching than John’s, though his was a mighty work, as the Lord bore witness to him. Viewed in themselves or in the light of testimony, how living is the picture! The one class puts shameless insult on God, and glories in lawlessness. But an appeal comes which convinces the daring sinner of his outrageous evil: he breaks down in self-judgment, he turns to God and serves Him whom he had set at nought. The other class, on the contrary, claims credit for its proper ways; and as conscience is untouched, they are self-satisfied, and God remains unknown. How exactly such souls answer to him who says “I go, sir, and went not!” Are there not many like him now?

Hence when John, who did no miracles nor claimed official position, came preaching a baptism of repentance for remission of sins, people flocked freely to be baptised, confessing their sins. But as the rule, the Lord here shows that it was not those who justified themselves before men that were baptised by John. They disdained to enter the kingdom by the same strait gate and narrow way as was open to the tax-gatherer and the harlot. But there can be no other way to God for the sinner. The grace of the gospel condemns sins and insists on repentance still more than John coming in the way of righteousness; for the gospel proclaims that nothing but the blood of Jesus, God's Son, could cleanse from sins, and that His blood does cleanse us from every sin. How deadly and defiling were our sins that such a propitiation alone could avail! Therein is a test far deeper than John's preaching, excellent and efficacious as it was; for it was repulsive for a moral man and zealous Jew to confess his sins, like a tax-gatherer or a harlot. How intolerable to be put with such on the same common level of guilt and ruin! This is precisely what the gospel does even more thoroughly; and it is therefore of all things most odious to the self-righteous formalist.

When John came, calling men to confess their sins in view of the coming Messiah and the kingdom of the heavens, conscience answered to his call in those who had walked in gross lusts and indifference to the religious world. "The tax-gatherers and the harlots believed him." They knew in their souls that they had led a life of shame and iniquity; and they bowed to a call which they recognised to be of God. But not so those who stood well in their own eyes and in the public

opinion of the day. They therefore annulled for themselves the counsel of God, instead of justifying God by being baptised by John as the despised ones did (Luke 7:29, 30). The self-righteous when they “saw, had no regret afterward to believe him.”

Hence too, since that day, when the gospel is preached, men who are boastful of their religion, their church, or their character, are ever its bitterest enemies. The Jews as the general fact not only refused it but tried to stir up the Gentiles against it everywhere. Nothing in their eyes more hateful than that grace which denied the value of their righteousness, and announces God’s righteousness that He may be just and justifier of him that has faith in Jesus. For this openly declares that there is no difference, all having sinned and coming short of God’s glory; as it also declares to all who believe, that they are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Therefore, being apart from works of law, the gospel is as open to the Gentile as to the Jew, since God is one, Who shall justify circumcision by faith, not otherwise, and uncircumcision through their faith since they believe. Jesus the Lord is the way to the Father: the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And salvation is in none other name under heaven that is given among men whereby we must be saved. Did any wonder at the Lord eating with sinners and the disreputable? His answer was, They that are strong have no need of a physician, but those that are sick. But go and learn what that is, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; for I came to call not righteous but sinners. Do you, dear reader, know Him thus?

11 The guilty Husbandmen

Matt. 21:33-14.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 104-105.)

The parable before us is morally historical. It presents briefly but fully the ways of God with His people of old up to their ruin in the rejection of the Christ, and not morally alone but nationally. The Lord even adds from the scriptures His own consequent exaltation, and their setting aside meanwhile, Himself in humiliation the stumbling-stone of unbelief, but about to return in power as the executor of judgment in this world.

“Hear another parable: There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and made a fence round it, and due, a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and left the country. But when the season of the fruits drew near, he sent his bondmen to the husbandmen to receive his fruits. And the husbandmen took his bondmen, and beat one and killed another and stoned another. Again he sent other bondmen more than the first, and they did to them likewise. And afterward he sent to them his son, saying, They will feel respect for my son. But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, and get his inheritance. And they took and cast him forth out of the vineyard and killed [him]. When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come what will he do to these husbandmen? They say to him, He will wretchedly destroy those wretches, and let out the vineyard to other husbandmen who shall render him the fruits in their season” (vers. 33-41).

It is plain that the Lord here takes the ground, not merely of relationship and conscience as in the

preceding parable of the two children, but of responsibility to render fruit to God Who had done all possible for His people to that end. The prophet Isaiah had similarly appealed in his chap. 5. Here the Lord adds a great deal more, but on the same ground, and with similar result, only yet more plainly proclaimed. For it is not only that the vineyard, instead of grapes, brought forth wild grapes. Here the upshot was growing enmity manifested to the lord of the vineyard. In both what could have been done on behalf of the vineyard that He had not done? The prophet announced that Jehovah was going to lay His vineyard waste; and so it has been, as the state of the Jews proves. The Lord shows the patience that for ages waited on those active among the Jews, if there might be fruit for Jehovah. But His bondmen, the prophets, whom He sent to recall His people to their duty, met with nothing but contempt, ill-usage, and death. Others He sent increasingly, as the evil grew; but they fared alike contumeliously.

Lastly, He sent His Son. The Lord spoke of Himself. But the dignity of His person and the intimate nearness of His relationship to Jehovah gave the opportunity to the religious leaders among the Jews to demonstrate their contempt and deadly hatred to both the Father and the Son, as the Lord says in John 15. Could evil go farther? Other sins, shameful and ungrateful as they were, became in comparison as nothing. “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. He that hateth Me hateth My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other did, they had not had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father.” And they had been fully warned. For they

simply fulfilled what was in their law, “They hated Me without a cause.” It was not only utter unrighteousness, but deadly enmity to Jehovah and His Anointed, to the Son, their own Messiah.

And the Lord, on the near approach of this fatal result of their rebellious alienation from God, Himself puts the question to them, “When therefore the Lord of the vineyard shall come, what will He do to those husbandmen?” And they could not but answer, “He will wretchedly destroy those wretches, and let out the vineyard to other husbandmen who shall render him the fruits in their seasons.” So it is that the guilty own in their consciences their just punishment for positive rejection of One so good and faithful, and of their own obligations to Him, yea, of apostasy carried out to blood.

Is this nothing to you, reader, with the still greater privileges of Christendom? Are you hardening your heart against the truth, and shrinking from the God Who came so near to you in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not reckoning to men their offences, and having put in His servants the word of reconciliation? Beware then of a fate not better but worse than what befell and is to befall the Jews. “Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, this was made the corner-stone: of Jehovah this is, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Therefore I say to you that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits of it. And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust” (vers. 42-44). Such is the danger of stumbling now; such the judgment the Lord will execute on living man when He appears in glory. And the time hastens. See therefore, lest that come upon

you which is spoken in the prophets, “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, if one declare it unto you.”

12 The Marriage feast

Matt. 22:1-14.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 117-119.)

The parable of the guilty husbandmen at the close of Matt. 21 shows the issue of God’s testing men on the ground of His own claims and their responsibility to yield Him fruit. It is just the question raised with the Jew and settled by the rejection of their own Messiah, the Son, yet to be avenged when He comes again.

In the parable with which Matt. 22 begins the Lord handles a wholly different case. It is therefore, what the last chapter nowhere furnished, a likeness of the kingdom of the heavens; and therein God is manifested in the ways of His grace, not man under His just claims. God no longer requires fruit from man, though He may and does produce fruit in those who receive His grace in Christ. But in the gospel it is no question of demanding fruit from man. He is represented as in sovereign majesty making a marriage-feast for His Son. This means a total change in His ways: not God requiring from men what is due, but His own grace blessing them in honour of His Son. “It is more blessed to give than to receive”; and this not the law but the gospel vindicates for God, Who gave His dear and only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have life eternal.

“The kingdom of the heavens is likened to a king which made a marriage-feast for his son; and sent forth his bondmen to call those who had been called to the marriage-feast; and they would not come. Again he sent forth other bondmen, saying, Tell those that have been called, Behold, my dinner I have made ready: mine oxen and my fatlings are slaughtered; and all things [are] ready come to the marriage-feast. But they slighted [it] and went off, one to his own land, another to his traffic; and the rest, seizing his bondmen, insulted and killed [them]. And the king was wroth and, sending his troops, destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then saith he to his bondmen, The marriage-feast is ready, but those that were called were not worthy. Go therefore unto the outlets of the roads, and, as many as ye shall find, call to the marriage-feast. And those bondmen went out to the roads, and gathered together all as many as they found, both wicked and good; and the marriage-feast was filled with guests. And the king on coming in to behold the guests saw there a man not clothed with a marriage-garment; and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in here not having a marriage-garment? But he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind his feet and hands, and take and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few chosen” (vers. 2-14).

Here too we have an historical unfolding, not of the past under law, but of God’s dealings in grace. We begin with the gospel of the kingdom before our Lord’s death in verse 3. Next in verse 4 the gospel goes forth on the ground of His finished work. Only then was the urgent message that “all things were ready”; and then, too, the

rebellious hostility ripened into insult and bloodshed; as also in due time retribution came on those murderers and their city (vers. 5- 7).

But grace must reign and do its wondrous work, whatever the hindrances. Accordingly the offence of the Jew is salvation to the nations, and the loss of the one is the wealth of the others. The Jews but filled up their cup of sorrow, and wrath came on them to the uttermost, as far as the gospel is concerned; and this salvation of God has been sent to the nations, who also will bear, as the apostle added. This luminously follows in our parable (vers. 8-10).

Nevertheless God is not mocked under gospel any more than under law; and contempt of His grace brings an even sorer punishment than violation of His law. The acceptance of God's testimony by faith is and always has been the soul's turning-point from death to life, from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God and His kingdom. And His testimony has ever been to Christ, whatever the measure once, whatever the fulness now. Hopeless effort under law was used to drive to Christ those who were not won by promise. Grace and truth came as a fact through Jesus Christ, Who is both life and righteousness to the believer, as He is the image of the invisible God and declared Him. Christ is all, and in all. This therefore becomes the surest of tests, as it is the fulness of grace.

But the King, when He entered to behold the guests, saw one who had not on a marriage-garment. This was conclusive. The King provided all in His royal bounty; but here was a man who preferred his own clothing. It was no question of anything else. The man's robe might

be splendid or sordid. But it was not the marriage-garment. It was therefore a direct offence against the grace which alone could and did provide according to the king's majesty and magnificence. Nothing could justify such wanton scorn of the king's honour and goodness; nothing could excuse the man's preference of his own things, especially on an occasion expressly to honour the King's Son. The man was speechless at the charge. The outer darkness must be his portion: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

It is not providential judgment like that which befell the city of murderers; it is personal and absolute, away for ever from Him Who is love and light, from Him Whose grace was so thoroughly despised. To render this all the more impressive, a single individual is thus specified, though the moral at the close prepares us for its applying to individuals far and wide. "For many are called (i.e., by the gospel), but few chosen." In result it is but a "little flock"; not because grace was not ample for them all, but because grace is abused and Christ is in so few, though He is all in such as have Him.

Have you then, my reader, received the Christ, Jesus the Lord? If so, "walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and assured in the faith as ye have been taught [in the written word of God], abounding in thanksgiving." See to it that you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new, renewed into full knowledge according to the image of Him that created him: wherein there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all things, and in all. Remember that there is no putting on Christ on high, unless you have put Him on now here below. Here we have the joy

and duty of confessing Christ; as it will be His to confess us before His Father and before the angels.

If baptism be made the marriage-garment, it is only a less destructive delusion than making it the Lord's incarnation. In the one case the baptised in Christendom would be all elect, if it were not a contradiction in terms; in the other case, all mankind would be. The parable is really subversive of both these dreams, and is meant to show that no mere profession can save, that only the reception of God's grace in Christ will stand in that day.

1 A denary was a silver coin, and of far more value than our penny. "The denarius a day was the pay of a Roman soldier in Tiberius' time, a few years before this parable was uttered (see Tacitus, Annal. i. 17). Polybius, ii. 15 6 (but in illustrating the exceeding fertility of the country), mentions that the charge for a day's entertainment in the inns of Cisalpine Gaul was half an as. = one-twentieth of the denarius. This we may therefore regard as liberal pay for the day's work." Alford's Gr. Test. i. 200, fifth edition.

Sixth Series

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1 The Fig-tree

Matt. 24:32-35.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 133-134.)

We have the Lord’s authority for regarding the fig-tree here as the groundwork for its parable. “Now from the fig-tree learn the parable. When its branch is already become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh; even so ye also, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, at the doors” (vers. 32-35).

It is clear that the Lord treats this tree as symbolic of the Jews. So He had done shortly before, and both so

graphically that no believer need miss the meaning. Mark gives details, as often beyond others, illustrating His ministry. Seeing a fig-tree (there was but one, as Matthew says), and being hungry, He came and found nothing but leaves. This was decisive, for it was the season of figs, it was too soon for gathering; so that if none ware there, the tree must have borne none. The Lord therefore said unto it, No one eat fruit of thee henceforth for ever; and His disciples heard. On the morrow, as they passed by, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots; and Peter remarked on it, when the Lord's answer dwelt on the all-importance and the power of faith. There is no obstacle too strong to resist; only the grace that forgives all personal wrongs must accompany the faith of him that serves Christ. And so it has been. Not only have the fruitless Jews, as responsible under the first covenant, lost their religious position, but they are no longer a power. They are scattered and swamped in the sea of peoples.

It was one of the two miracles of the Lord which was not an expression of grace but judicial; and both told the destinies impending on Israel because of their evil and unbelief. The one, as we have seen, was their judgment under legal responsibility as barren after all God's care and claim of fruit. The other was set forth by the destruction of the swine, when the demons expelled from Legion entered and drove the herd into the abyss. So it will be in the latter day when the apostate Jews are given over to uncleanness and energised by the powers of darkness. These were the two exceptions. All the other miracles of the Lord displayed the glory of God and grace toward man.

What then is the parable to be learnt from the fig-tree in our chapter? The Lord is opening to the chosen disciples His appearing for the Jews first (Matt. 24:4-44); then (vers. 45-25:30) His dealings with professing Christians; and lastly (25:31-46) His judgment of all the nations or Gentiles.

It will be seen therefore that verses 32-35 concern the Jewish remnant directly, however we may profit by this as by every other scripture. The Jews will be objects of grace once more, and come under the new covenant in that day. Here accordingly the fig-tree falls under no curse. Far from withering away from the roots, Israel, which knew nothing but misery and ruin from trusting its own righteousness, is cast on the Messiah in repentance and faith; and now mercy henceforward flows as a river. But "the many," the mass, judge themselves unworthy of life eternal and perish with their Antichrist; the godly remnant become the strong nation, and they are "all Israel" that shall be saved. They will have dates which must run their course; and also have successive events which must be accomplished. Times and seasons particularly characterise them.

Here the Lord deigns to give them signs in a way He never did to us of the church who are called to walk by faith, not by sight. So we may observe in the early verses of Matt. 24 and specially in verse 14. Still more emphatic is what follows from verse 15, where Daniel 12 is referred to, and, more than any, verse 11. There is a tribulation without parallel, but no translation to heaven; and the coming of the Son of man is like the lightning. For there is pre-eminently the carcase, whither gather the eagles. Immediately after the tribulation convulsions above and below follow; and then

shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and all the tribes mourn, and they see Him coming to the earth. And His angels gather His elect (who seem here to be of Israel, as in Isa. 65, 66); for over these He will reign in the promised land. The heavenly saints are seen in their own place. Here our Lord treats of Israelitish saints.

The fig-tree is no longer barren; for the Son of man received, and the new covenant with Him, will change all. These are early days; end we hear no more than of the branch tender, and putting forth leaves. The time of fruit will come; but as yet, they only know that summer is nigh. “So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, at the doors.” Grace will not fail to work its due effects.

How is it with you, dear reader? Have you learnt that you are no better than the barren fig-tree? If you have, it is well. For most deceive themselves and are indifferent If you know that you have neither fruit nor life, oh! look to Him by faith Who is life and gives it to all that believe. It is ruinous to talk of your privileges. The greatest is that you have the New Testament as well as the Old. But only Jesus, the Son of God, can avail; only His blood cleanses from every sin, when you will have the seal of His Spirit and bear fruit by His grace. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Thus will you welcome His coming Who says, “Surely I come quickly,” and you will answer, “Amen, come, Lord Jesus.”

2 The Household Servant

Matt. 24:45-51.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 149-150.)

It is the first part in our Lord's prophecy at Olivet which bears directly on Christian profession. This therefore is wholly distinct from the parable of the fig-tree which refers to Israel, as all the preceding discourse did, and accordingly from ver. 15 occupied with the land and the sanctuary, the sabbath day, and the tribulation without parallel for the Jews, with signs before and after, heed being expressly claimed to Daniel the prophet, and illustration drawn from the deluge in Noah preserved through it, not from Enoch caught up before it.

Here begins that which is so general that it applies wherever the Lord's name is called on, Jewish peculiarities being quite dropt. The Lord takes the place of other objects. His service in His house is without restriction or addition the prominent character. Relationship to Him and His rules exclusively. We shall find in the third and last parable of the series His gifts conferred on His servants according to His sovereign will, with which each is called to trade according to the figure of talents committed for profit. But here it is the supply of His house with food in season.

"Who then is the faithful and wise bondman, whom the lord set over his household to give them food in season? Blessed [is] that bondman whom his lord on coming shall find thus doing. Verily I say to you, that he will set him over all that he hath. But if the evil bondman say in his heart, My lord delayeth [to come], and begin to beat his fellow bondman, and eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of the bondman shall come in a day which he expecteth not, and in an hour which he knoweth not, and shall out him in two, and appoint his portion with

the hypocrites: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth" (vers. 45-51).

It is clear that the Lord looks for faithful and prudent stewardship in His absence from him who is entrusted with the charge of His household, and that, when He is come, He will deal with this responsibility. Did the bondman dispense food in due time? Blessed that bondman whom his Lord on coming shall find thus doing! It is His mind and will and grace about His own. Already elsewhere He had assured His own sheep that entering by Him they should be saved, enjoy liberty, and find pasture. It is in the last particular that the bondman is here made responsible; and this would test him. Faith and love alone render any one faithful and wise; they attach the heart to the household through devotedness to the Lord. Loving Him leads out to feeding His sheep and His lambs; as the Lord puts it to Peter, restored and reinstated after his fall: which by grace would only make him more tenderly considerate of others. And him who thus nourishes duly Christ's household He will set at the head of His inheritance by and by, when He returns the Heir of all things. It is only Christianity which is based on the Lord already come and about to return, while His own serve during His absence; and hence the prominence given to this in the third parable.

But solemn beyond expression is the doom of the man who, professing to be his Lord's bondman, arrogates to himself dominion, and is no model to the flock, but lords it as his possession. What can be conceived more opposed to the mind which was in Christ Jesus? He in infinite pity to the lost and to the glory of God the Father emptied Himself, taking a bondman's form, coming though yet in the likeness of men; and found in figure as

a man He humbled Himself, becoming obedient as far as death, yea, death of the cross. The evil bondman, oblivious of all and heartlessly inconsistent, seeks a place of power and pride; he courts the world as one who never died to flesh nor was crucified to the world, but begins to beat his fellow bondmen, and eats and drinks with the drunken. There is both ecclesiastical oppression and commerce with the world, even in its self-indulgent dissoluteness.

Such is just the general aspect of Christendom for long ages, as at the present moment. There way be differences of degree here or there. But the picture applies to Catholics and Protestants nationals and dissenters. They are not separate from the world; nor do they walk in the Spirit, as those that crucified the flesh with its passions and its lusts; they boast in man and his literary elevation and his scientific inventions, like heathen that know not God.

And what does the Lord indicate as the occasion if not cause of so ruinous a departure? “But if the evil bondman say in his heart, My lord delayeth [to come].” No one betrays the evil of his unfaithfulness so much as a faithless professor of Christ. And here the Lord puts His finger on his heart putting off His own coming again as a living practical truth. Abandoning that hope, the heart can soon learn to value and associate with the world, to slight and ill-treat Christ’s household.

What is the end? “The lord of that bondman shall come in a day which he expecteth not, and in an hour which he knoweth not, and shall cut him in two, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites; and there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.” God’s wrath is

revealed from heaven upon. all impiety, and unrighteousness of men holding the truth in unrighteousness. The Jew if wicked is worse than the Gentile; the professing Christian if evil is more guilty than either. His portion shall be, not with bondmen only, but with the hypocrites.

How is it with you, my reader? You, most of you, are neither Jews nor heathen; are you not a professing Christian? Do you not then own your evil if you slight the word of God, and especially the gospel? Any one who disregarded Moses' law died without mercy on the strength of two or three witnesses: of how much worse punishment, think you, shall he be judged deserving that trod under foot the Son of God, and esteemed the blood of the covenant whereby he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? But the door of grace is still open. Oh! flee for refuge to Him Who is set before you, the only yet sure Saviour of the lost. Delay is proverbially dangerous; and nowhere is danger so great as in putting off the word of salvation which God has sent you. For, as He was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, when He sent Him into it, so even when Christ was rejected, God made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made divine righteousness in Him.

3 The Ten Virgins

Matt. 25:1-13.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 166-167.)

Here again we have the mysterious likeness of the kingdom of the heavens while Christ rejected but glorified is hidden on high. Only, as the parable looks

onward specially to the future, when the difference between those taught of God and mere professors will be manifested, the word is “Then shall the kingdom of the heavens be made like to ten virgins,” etc. “Then” refers to the execution of judgment on the evil bondman who embodied the collective responsibility of Christendom, as our parable sets out rather the secret of wisdom or the lack of it individually.

“Then shall the kingdom of the heavens be made like to ten virgins, such as, having taken their torches, went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish and five prudent. For the foolish, when they took their torches, took no oil with them; but the prudent took oil in their vessels with their torches. Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all fell heavy and were sleeping. But at midnight a cry is made, Behold, the bridegroom: come ye forth to meet him. Then arose all those virgins and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the prudent, Give us of your oil, for our torches are going out. But the prudent replied, saying, Nay, lest there be not enough for us and you: go rather unto those that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and those that were ready went with him unto the marriage feast; and the door was shut. But afterwards came also the rest of the virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour” (vers. 1-13).

The ten virgins vividly represent the Christian profession. All took their torches and went forth to meet the Bridegroom Who is coming again. But if anyone have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. The unction of

the Holy One is indispensable. The possession of this, symbolised by oil, depends on having faith in Christ and His work. The foolish never knew their ruin; they were content with ordinances and rites and their own heed to them. To be born anew, to receive remission of sins through Christ's blood, to be sealed with the Spirit, they were strangers: Jews or heathen might want these things; but they had every privilege in their religion, the christian religion, and had no cause for alarm: such was their self-deception.

Alas! as with Israel so with Christendom, the forgetfulness of God's work and departure from Him were complete. While waiting for the bridegroom they fell heavy and were sleeping. The true attitude of the Christian was lost; the blessed hope no longer animated any. They ceased to go forth to meet the Bridegroom, and turned in here or there to slumber. Prudent or foolish, all slipped away from the true hope.

But God is faithful, and, when things are darkest, He arouses the sleepers. At midnight is made a cry, Behold the bridegroom. All awake, when even the foolish become uneasy, for they perceive that the prudent have a power which they have not. Torches may burn brightly for a while; but without oil they soon go out. But the believer has the Spirit only for himself; and none can receive that anointing save through God's grace on the faith of the gospel. Hence the appeal of the foolish to the prudent is vain. They must go to Him who sells on the terms of grace, without money and without price. Sinners must have to do with God. The creature cannot avail. The sinner must face his sins before Him, Who points the lost to the Saviour. Those who are religious after the flesh hate grace and shrink from God's

presence. They may be zealous; they are willing to do “some great thing” if bidden; but to stand before Him as nothing but guilty ones, and to be saved of divine grace like the worst by a dead and risen Saviour, is repulsive to the old man. They may go their way to buy; but this is all we here learn of these self-deceivers.

Meanwhile the bridegroom came; and those that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast. And the door was shut.

Oh, the horror of finding out the truth too late! In vain then to cry, Lord, Lord, open to us! To such as are refusing a like warning and invitation now, His word then will be, Verily, I say to you, I know you not.

My reader, how would the coming of the Saviour find you? Those who really long and watch for the Saviour have already heard His voice and found in Him redemption, the forgiveness of their sins, through His blood. Hence they are sealed with the Holy Spirit of God unto the day of redemption. They know Whom they have believed, as the Good Shepherd knows such as hear His voice and follow Him. Do not trust in any institution, even of Christ, or any observance of your own, or any class of men however honoured, to fit your souls for God’s presence. Nothing but the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses from all sin; but this it does perfectly even now on earth for every believer. And unless you here believe in Him and in the efficacy of His sacrifice for your evil case, flatter not yourselves that He will receive you to Himself or present you to His Father.

But if you are born again and resting on the redemption that is in Christ, you will have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you and strengthening you to render a true witness to

Him who is on high and about to return. “This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth.” Your hope will be as real as your faith, and Christ the object of both. You will not doubt His love, but long for His coming to receive you to Himself, having the oil in your vessel, and earnest to call the thirsty, or whoever will, to drink of the water of life freely.

4 The Talents

Matt. 25:14-30.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 179-181.)

This is the third of the parables in our Lord’s great prophecy, which are distinctively Christian, as compared with the Jewish section (chap. 24:3-44) and the Gentile that concludes all (chap. 25:31-46). All three contemplate an absent Lord, Who is to return, and Whom His own are to expect. The first embodies the professor in one bondman set over the household, either wise or evil, The second is a likeness of the kingdom of the heavens in virgins, five foolish and five wise, who went forth to meet the Bridegroom. All slumbered, but were awakened at midnight. But they only who had the oil in their vessels, the indwelling Spirit, were there to meet Him, and go in with Him to the marriage-feast. This applies not to the future remnant, who are not anointed till Christ appears, but to Christians wholly who are now before them. The third is not such a likeness being in no way the general state, but refers nevertheless only to Christians, as is certain from applying to the entrusted servants while the Lord went

abroad (that is, to heaven), Who meanwhile delivered to His own His goods.

“For [it is] as a man, going abroad, called his bondmen and delivered to them his goods (or, substance). And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to. each according to his own ability, and went abroad immediately. And he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents. Likewise he also that [received] the two gained other two. But he that received the one went away and dug in the earth and hid the money of his lord. Now after a long while the lord of those bondmen cometh and reckoneth with them. And he that received the five talents came up and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst me five talents: see, I gained other five talents (besides them). His lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful bondman; thou wast faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things: enter into the joy of thy lord. And he also that [received] the two talents came up and said, Lord, thou deliveredst me two talents: see, I gained other two talents. His lord said to him, Well done, good and faithful bondman, thou wast faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. And he also that had received the one talent came up and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering from where thou didst not scatter; and being afraid I went away and hid thy talent in the earth: see, thou hast thine own. And his lord in answer said to him, Wicked and slothful bondman, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather from where I scattered not; thou oughtest then to have put my money to the bankers, and I on

coming should have received mine own with interest. Take then from him the talent and give [it] to him that hath the ten talents. For to everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall abound; but from him that hath not, even what he hath shall be taken. And cast out the useless bondman into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth" (vers. 14- 30).

It is plain that the substance which the Lord submitted to His servants for work in His absence means gifts of a spiritual kind. For He delivered to each according to his respective ability. They are distinguished from the ability of each, which was natural, and are suited to it. They are not merely "sanctified capacity," or "theological learning," but a gift from the Lord adapted to the ability of each as the vessel. With His goods they were to trade, "each ministering it one to another, as good stewards of God's manifold race; if one speaketh, as oracles of God; if one ministereth, as of strength which God supplieth, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the might unto the ages of the ages. Amen" (1 Peter 4:10, 11). The reception of a gift was the ground of exercising it in dependence on the Giver, and for His glory.

Accordingly, where this loyalty ruled, one made five talents, another two: such is the figure in the parable. Without faith it is impossible to please God; and this is no less true of service, than of walk, as it is of salvation too. But God sets Christ before us everywhere: no creature's authority can become the object in any of them, save to His dishonour and our own sin and hurt. Confidence in the Master's grace was the animating spring of the true labourers. They bowed to His sovereignty Who entrusted as He saw fit; and they will

in result enter into His joy. The kindred parable of the Pounds in Luke 19 shows individual responsibility, all starting with the like sum, and each rewarded according to the issues of labour. Both are true and important; but each is distinct.

In either case the third servant wronged the Lord. He regarded Him according to his own hard and wicked heart. He did not believe in His grace, and so sought not His pleasure or glory. Such selfish fear as his excludes love. There was no answer to the Master's trust. On his own showing he was inexcusable in hiding the talent in the earth. "Wicked and slothful bondman, thou oughtest to have put my money to the bankers, and I on coming should have received mine own with interest." To yield to fear was to distrust his Lord; and this is fatal. It is unbelief in His goodness. This servant had no sense of grace. A bad unpurged conscience led him to impute to the Lord what wholly denies and mis-represents Him, Who is full of grace and truth. And his end was according to his heart and his works. The evil he falsely attributed to the Master, which was really his own, finds its place in the outer darkness. It rendered him useless for God. He must be cast where the weeping and the gnashing of teeth shall be. His Master's joy was nothing to him.

How is it with you, my reader? Have you bowed to God's word which declares you to be sinful, ungodly, and without strength? If so, you must need a mighty and a gracious Saviour. And God Who pities you has sent in His love His beloved Son-sent Him to die for you, yea, for your sins. Do not presume to think of serving Him till you are brought to God without a spot or stain. Nothing but the blood of Jesus His Son can thus cleanse you: His

blood cleanses from all sin. So His word attests, that you may by faith know yourself made whiter than snow. To doubt this is to dishonour both the Father and the Son; as it is to set yourself against the Holy Spirit Who is here to glorify the Saviour. Those who would bid you distrust God in such mercy are His enemies. Those who curse the proclamation of this truth pronounce a curse which will fall upon themselves when the Lord judges them.

5 The Seed left to grow

Mark 4:26-29.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 197-198.)

This is a parable peculiar to the Gospel of Mark, and therefore characteristic of the divine design. It is as far as possible from having any analogy to the leaven in Matt. 13, which a woman took and bid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened. Christ's service is here set out first and last, marking for the kingdom of God the unexpected fact of His seemingly leaving things to take their course between His action at the beginning and that at the end.

"And he said, Thus is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast the seed upon the earth, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, how he knoweth not himself. Of itself the earth beareth fruit, first a blade, then an ear, then full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is presented, immediately he despatcheth the sickle, because the harvest is arrived" (vers. 26-29).

Matthew gives a complete view in its seven parables of the varying phases of the kingdom of the heavens, and

especially in view of the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews and of its special form, “the mysteries of the kingdom,” while the rejected King is on high, before He returns as the glorified Son of Man in possession of the universal inheritance.

Mark was led to dwell on the Sower, as the fullest expression of the Saviour’s personal ministry, thwarted for the most part, but fulfilling the purpose of grace in such as have ears to hear. Then he records like Luke the solemn admonition that follows. The lamp was not to be put under “the bushel” or under “the bed,” but to be put on its stand. God’s testimony exposes the true character of things, and tests the witness himself; who, if he makes it his own, has more given, and if not, loses what he has. If the lamp was to shine openly, the truth was to be valued personally.

Then Mark alone adds the beautiful comparison of the Lord’s relation to the work which has been cited. He would prepare His servants for the trial of faith that awaited them in His absence. He carefully guards against the difficulty which has often been expressed, and sometimes weakly evaded. For those who know Him reject the unworthy thought that He absolutely abandons all care over His work here below, and yet more, that He Who knows all things knows not how it fares with that on which He laboured. Our Lord took pains to say that the kingdom is “as if”; not that He did not watch and work diligently, any more than that the husbandman does no more than sow and reap, without intermediate interest or services. These dealings are through other scriptures fully revealed, which the parable assuredly does not in any way contradict.

The aim was, while affirming His personal work as ushering in God's kingdom and His gathering the. fruits at the end of the age, to mark emphatically how it should be left while He is on high; but this with fullest confidence that His sowing would come to the just and expected result. We have, therefore, here no thought of seed destroyed by the enemy's power, nor of failure through the flesh, nor of the choking influence of the world, any more than of darnel foisted into the field unawares and spoiling the crop. All goes well, though the great Servant is hidden in God: just "as if a man (after sowing) should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, he knows not how."

Jehovah's messenger had been sent before Messiah's face to prepare His way; but he was imprisoned and slain. Messiah came Himself proclaiming the gospel of God's kingdom, and saying that the time was fulfilled, and the kingdom had drawn nigh. The cross, not the throne, was before Him; and He begins to call servants and to make them fishers of men. For though the unclean spirits obeyed Him, and disease vanished at His touch, even then the men of repute and leading taxed Him with blasphemy, because He forgave sins as God only can. He therefore, knowing all that was to befall Him, provides for the progress of God's work in His rejection unto death, and shows how nothing should hinder its completion.

So, even in Isa. 49:3-6, we have Jehovah saying, "Thou art my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified. But I said, I have laboured in vain. I have spent my strength for nought and in vain: nevertheless my judgment is with Jehovah, and my work with my God. And now, saith Jehovah that formed me from the womb to be his

servant, that I should bring Jacob again to him (though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorified in the eyes of Jehovah, and God shall be my strength); and he saith, It is a small thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I have even given thee for a light of the nations, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."

Similarly here too nothing shall destroy the gracious purpose of God in Christ; and His humiliation on one side and rejection on the other only give it lustre and force. "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." The apparent frustration for a while secures in the end, and glorifies God and Christ all through. It appears as if He who began and will end had no more to do than the man who, having sown his seed, sleeps and rises, yet the seed springs up and grows, he knows not how. God has so ordered this creation that of itself the earth brings forth fruit in the case supposed, first a blade, then an ear, then full corn in the ear. And so it is spiritually, without visible intervention of His righteous Servant on high.

But when the fruit is presented, He despatches the sickle immediately to reap, since harvest is arrived. It is the contrast of His two advents of personal action, with the unseen advance of what He has sown and what He will reap. On this His own can count without hesitation. God's work, of which Christ is the doer, can fail in nothing to glorify Himself.

Have you, dear reader, a sure part and lot in this work? Are you content with flesh and its glory, though God pronounces it all to be as grass? Oh, receive His living

and abiding word, that you may be born again, if you have not received it already" This is the word which in the gospel is preached to you. The Lord Jesus sowed what produced fruit; and this goes on still. It is of faith that it might be according to grace. How welcome should this be to one who knows himself a lost unworthy sinner! The word reveals Christ to you as God's gift; and fruits follow when you receive Him and life in Him. Apart from Him you can do nothing. May grace give you while owning yourself ungodly and powerless without Christ, to receive Him on God's word, that you may go on your way rejoicing!

6 The two Debtors

Luke 7:41-43.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 215-216.)

Among the beauties of this beautiful story is the fact that no name is given to make known who the sinful woman was, now plainly renewed by grace through faith. Many have thought her to be Mary of Magdala. But she first appears only in the chapter following, with a terrible history quite different from the woman "that was a sinner." Others yet more strangely have fancied Mary of Bethany had once sunk into that infamy, because she too at the close anointed the Lord — with marked difference from this. Luke was inspired to leave in the shade, not the trophy of grace, but her name, whose previous life had been so shameful.

Why should any wish to know what the Lord hid? It is enough to hear what she had been; best of all that He who knew and felt all according to God, pleaded the cause of grace, as it was never pleaded before,

pronounced her forgiveness, and sent her away in peace. Whether she had heard the Lord before, or only heard of Him, she came in faith. This drew her to the Lord. This made her brave the Pharisee's scorn. This bent the eyes of her heart on the Saviour only, raising her above all fear of the company. The grace of God in Jesus so filled and transported her soul that at all cost she went to pour her precious unguent on His feet washed by her tears, wiped by her tresses, and covered with her kisses. She came behind as He lay at meat in Simon's house, and thus told her love, and devotedness of that heart, once so debased, now repentant and purified by faith. Not a word did she say with her lips; but the Lord Who knew the hearts of all men appreciated every feeling and every act of a new-born soul entranced with the moral glory of Christ while bowing to light and love of God rising above her many sins. Simon too saw enough to manifest his utter distance from God and alienation from His goodness; he judged as a natural man, confiding in his own righteousness, and condemning the Lord from all that passed yet more than the woman that stood at His feet behind weeping., He had gone so far as to have Him at his house, and felt assured that He could be no prophet who allowed such a woman to touch Him The Lord answered the Pharisee's unuttered thought, and showed Himself not only a prophet of God, but God of the prophets, come in the lowliest humiliation not to judge the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Only, he that believeth on Him is not judged; but he that believeth not hath been already judged, because he hath not believed on the name of the Only-begotten Son of God. The Lord put the case. "A certain creditor had two debtors: one owed five hundred denaries, and

the other fifty. As they had nothing to pay, he forgave them both. Which of these then will love him most?" On Simon's supposition, "He to whom he forgave most," He said, "Thou hast rightly judged," and contrasted the woman's deep, fervent, and humble affection with the Pharisee's scant courtesy, which told the tale sufficiently of those two hearts.

"And turning to the woman, he said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house: thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she wetted my feet with her tears, and wiped them with her tresses. Thou gavest me no kiss; but she, since I entered, ceased not kissing my feet over. With oil thou didst not anoint my head; but she with unguent anointed my feet" (vers. 44-46).

Simeon had in the temple said of Him as a babe that He was set for the fall and rising up of many in Israel, and for a sign spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed. But there was more here. Jesus revealed God's heart, of which the Pharisee proved unconsciously that he knew nothing. The woman had learnt it. His goodness had penetrated her; and her sense of it expressed itself in her profound reverence to the Lord Jesus. There she had met God; there God made Himself known to her as God of all grace. It was not dogma, but a divine person of infinite love Who attracted, filled, and fixed her heart. All her way and bearing testified to her self-judgment, to her faith, and to her love (for she loved much); as Simon's conduct demonstrated, in Jesus slighted and grace misjudged, that he knew not God. But she knew Him, or rather was known of Him.

“Wherefore, I say to thee, her many sins are forgiven. For she loved much; but he to whom little is forgiven loveth little.” Simon had unwittingly sentenced himself. Impossible to know God in Christ without discovering His goodness and our own shameful endless badness. “And he said to her, Thy sins are forgiven.” O reader, have you heard His voice? This is your need; and this is His grace. May you too believe! Are there those who resent such love to the guilty on God’s part? Who resist the Saviour, not knowing that they fight against God to their own ruin? How did He meet this, for well He knew it? “And He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee: go in peace.” May it be your portion.

7 The Samaritan

Luke 10:30-37.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 230-231.)

This parable is the Lord’s answer to the lawyer’s question. And who is my neighbour? A conscience not at case finds difficulties; the heart that is animated by love answers at once, because it finds none. Every sorrow or need makes an appeal to it, and never in vain. Flesh under law being self-occupied, has neither room nor time for others.

“A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, who, having stripped and beaten him, departed, leaving him half dead. And by coincidence a certain priest was going down by that way; and on seeing him passed on the other side. And likewise also a Levite, when he came to the place and saw, passed on the other side. But a certain Samaritan on journey came to him, and when he saw him was

moved with compassion, and came up and bound his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and setting him on his own beast he brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow he took out and gave two denaries to the inn-keeper, and said to him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou shalt spend more, I at my coming back will repay thee. Which of these three, seemeth to thee to have been neighbour of him that fell among the robbers? And he said, He that showed him mercy. And Jesus said to him, Go and do thou likewise" (vers. 30- 37).

Grace and truth in Christ changed all. It was not only from earth to heaven now acting on souls who believed, but love that raised above our own things, imitating God, as the Apostle puts it, like dear children, Christ Himself the motive and power no less than pattern.

Man's sad lot is graphically shown in him who was going down from the place of religious privilege and pride to that of the curse, and fell in with robbers who took his all and beat him, leaving him half dead. Earthly priesthood, and earthly ministry, wholly failed. Only the despised One availed; and none was more despised or hated than a Samaritan, unless it were the One Who exceeds all comparisons. He on His errand of love, far from passing by and shutting up His inmost feelings of compassion, came up and bandaged the wounds, pouring on soothing and cleansing grace, dismounted to raise up the wretched one now comforted, and took him under His care. Doubtless it is the Lord's congenial sketch of practical grace for the lawyer's help; but it is the shadow of His own path day by day, and far indeed from exhausting or even describing what was deepest in His work.

Nor is His love satisfied with thoughtful beneficence for the present; He charges himself with the future in terms all the more striking, because the figure is homely. How full and transcendent is the love which is not bounded by ties of flesh or obligations of earthly duty, but flows from a divine and eternal spring from within, and only finds objects of need without to act on, no person too repulsive, no need beyond the resources of grace. “And on the morrow He took out and gave two denaries to the inn-keeper, and said to him, Take care of him, and whatever thou shalt spend more, I at my coming back will repay thee.” Yes, His provision while absent is adequate, whatever the unbelief may think of it as of Him; and when He returns, what repayment where He is trusted! What forfeits, where He is scorned! Even the lawyer could not but feel the appeal, and own the superiority of that mercy which the Lord depicted and exemplified. If he ever did in like manner, it must have been through the faith that received the Saviour and realised the truth and love of God in Him.

God Himself is now acting on such love, though shown in a way infinitely more profound in giving His own Son up to compassionate, save, and bless the powerless and ungodly. It is no question of a claim but of ruin in man and of grace in Himself: only the work of Christ makes it righteous in God, and us righteous in Christ. Such is the efficacy of His death on the cross.

How does it affect you, dear reader? It finds you a lost and rebellious sinner. Such you have been really, whoever you are and whatever you may have seemed to yourself or other men. You may have sought and provided a religious veil; but it is of no more value in God’s eye than the web the spider weaves. Their webs,

says the prophet, shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works; their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. For none are prouder or more bitter than natural men under a veil of religion. The way of peace they know not, and there is no judgment in their goings. They have made their paths crooked: whose goeth therein knoweth not peace.

All depends for efficacy on Christ alone. He it is Who brings God to man and man to God; but it is vain for me or you or any that hear the gospel unless we believe on Him. This is to submit to the righteousness of God, Who is ever found in His grace, by him who truly owns his sins in the faith of Christ. Oh, fellow sinner, dare to be thorough in confessing what you have done and are at the feet of Jesus Who never rejects one that comes confiding in the call of God. It is what God delights in; it is to vindicate Him and honour His dishonoured Son, the all-worthy One, in the face of every foe, and of all our own sins and unbelief. Do not drop this call to your soul. You cannot pretend that you do not need the Saviour; or that you are now pleasing God Who summons you to believe in Him. Turn to Him therefore at once, and confess your guilt and evil, but doubt not His grace. Look not away till you rest on Him and His precious blood which cleanses from every sin.

8 The importunate Appeal

Luke 11:5-13.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 246-248.)

The Holy Spirit at this point in the Gospel of Luke brings together, as is His manner frequently, two things which

may have been by no means near historically, to illustrate a great moral truth. The value of the divine word, and of prayer. The one closes chap. 10, the other opens chap. 11.

Of His own will God the Father begot us with the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures (James 1:18). So Peter in his First Epistle (1 Peter 1:22) speaks of our having purified our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, being born again not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever. “And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.” Wherefore as new-born babes, we are exhorted, laying aside evil of word, deed, and spirit, to desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby unto salvation, the salvation ready to be revealed at Christ’s appearing. The same word of God that quickened us who believe, nourishes, strengthens, and guards our souls. Paul teaches the same truth. Faith is by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom.10:17). “In Christ Jesus I have begotten you by the gospel” (1 Cor. 1), not by baptism, for he had baptised very few, but by the gospel which they received of him and he preached to them. It was the word which corrected their faults and restored their souls, as we see in 2 Cor. For Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, to a sure and glorious end. Nor is John a whit less explicit; for he shows us the disciples already clean because of the word Christ had spoken to them (John 15). They are sanctified through the truth, which the word is (John 17).

But when we have received the word as Mary did in the love of it, and at the feet of Jesus, we none the less but the more need prayer to walk worthily of God, Who called us to His kingdom and glory. And so we find the Lord, as He is seen continually in prayer, teaching His disciples to pray. For the life we receive in Him, as it is of God, so lives in dependence on Him habitually and in obedience of His will made known in His word. Man, as our Lord cited to the tempter, shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God. My meat, said He to the disciples, is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work; and again, As the living Father sent Me and I live (not merely "by" but) on account of the Father; so he that eateth Me, as every true Christian does, even he shall live on account of Me. Christ thus becomes the believer's object and motive. None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live to the Lord; and whether we die, we die to the Lord: whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's (Rom. 14). And He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live to themselves, but to Him Who died for them and rose again (2 Cor. 5).

Hence the great apostle lays down that every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God, and prayer (1 Tim. 4:4, 5). The word here used goes, no doubt, beyond the ordinary word for prayer and implies that intercourse which is now open to us with God by redemption, and encourages us in all intercession because of the access we have into the grace wherein we stand. But it is thoroughly prayer to God in a way that is as full as it is free which His love sanctions, now that His righteousness is manifested, the word

expressing what comes from Him, as prayer what goes up to Him, in the life of faith.

On the details of the prayer here given, and yet more fully in the Gospel of Matthew, we need say little beyond noticing the efforts of unbelief to assimilate them. Each is perfect for the purpose of God where they are given, the shorter one for Gentile instruction no less than the longer for believers of the circumcision. The petition for ‘he earth is here omitted, as also about that power of evil, which the Jew must know peculiarly to mark the time which precedes their deliverance and blessing at the end.

But what a stimulus the Lord here adds! “And he said to them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and 1 have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot rise and give thee. I say to you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth” (vers. 5-8).

Truly the Saviour needed not that any should testify of man; for He knew what was in man. As really man as Adam, He was always and perfectly above all the taint of fallen humanity, “the born holy Thing.” Not only He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth, but in Him, it could be and is said absolutely, is no sin. And He know what is in God, for God He was and is for ever. He was thoroughly aware of man’s reluctance to draw near to God, and his indisposition to expect good from God. Man

is not a giver himself, least of all does he feel that God gives continually and abundantly in the natural sphere of man's wants. But that God should give His best, the Son of His love, to deliver him from evil and from judgment, to blot out his sins, to give him life eternal, so exceeds all that is in his own heart and all that his conscience justly needs, that he cannot, will not, believe it, even though God has sent the most complete and solemn testimony in the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ His Son. He is averse to the glad tidings, because it makes nothing of man, every-tidings, be thing of God's own goodness in Christ. If it were only a rite or an institution of mysterious efficacy by man and for man, this he could understand; something done for him if not by himself by another, this he could trust, especially if many others accepted the same way. But to own himself only evil, God alone good, most and best of all in giving His Only-begotten that he might live and have Him as propitiation for his sins, this indeed is God's love beyond creature thought, yet the very love we are called to believe in the gospel.

In early days a great persecutor had it revealed to and in him, as he was given to see the glorified Lord and to hear the words of His mouth. What was the immediate effect? "Behold, he prayeth." And so it ever is. Faith in Him leads into new relationships and creates new wants; while the old man is still there, though judicially condemned in the cross and calling for vigilant self-judgment in the practice of every hour here below. But the believer not only was justified by faith and has peace through our Lord Jesus Christ; through Him he possesses access by faith into this grace wherein we stand. No doubt he is called to praise and give thanks

continually, but to pray in his weakness and exposure to a world of evil and a sleepless subtle foe. As prayer is due to our God and Father, so is it most necessary for His children. And the Lord illustrates it even from man, evil as he is, and though appealing at midnight, when difficulties were greatest. Yet then, where the want was urgent, and without any resource to meet it, a mere man does not fail to rise and give, not for friendship alas! but because of importunity. How much more should the believer count on God! "Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened. For every one that asketh receiveth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." God giveth to all life and breath and all things; it is His nature.

Relationship only adds to this. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if [he ask] a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion?" An enemy might, but God is the truest of friends, a Father as none also approaches. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall the Father who [is] of heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him" (vers. 11-13)?

The Lord has in view His own in their new wants and awaiting their special privilege. The Spirit, though ever working in the family of faith, was to be given, as the Son was already; the Son for sinners, the Spirit to saints. The disciples were awaiting the promise of the Father and received the Spirit at Pentecost, when Peter laid down the terms, "Repent, and be baptised each of you on the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). No wonder that they continued stedfastly, as in

other holy functions, so “in prayers,” fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

9 The Blasphemy of God’s Power in Christ

Luke 11:14-26.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 263-264.)

The casting out of unclean spirits or demons has a great place in the synoptic Gospels, and most justly. It fell to the fourth Gospel rather to set out the positiveness of life eternal in Christ and of the Holy Spirit to be sent in His name on His departure. In the Gospel of Mark it is the first miracle recorded, and it often reappears and with no little detail. Our Gospel begins His ministry characteristically with His words of grace to man, and if His own would not hear, to the Gentile; for grace is sovereign. But the special power of Satan over man (never so manifest as when Jesus was here) immediately follows, as we may readily see the prominent place it has also in Matthew’s Gospel.

But Christ’s power in expelling demons drew out man’s hatred and blasphemy. “Through Beelzebub, the prince of the demons, he casteth out demons,” said some; as others tempting sought from Him a sign out of heaven. The folly and wickedness of such an imputation the Lord proved at once. Not only would Satan be at war with himself, but their own sons who cast out demons reproved them. Yet in their case it was rare, in His constant and unfailing, the witness that, if the display of God’s kingdom in power and glory is not yet, that kingdom had come upon them in His person. Alas! the old sentence Was renewed only more stringently their heart grown fat, their ears heavy, their eyes closed as

asleep, lest they should be converted, and healed of God.

Thereon the Lord states first the case of God's gracious power in Him, next the consequence of unbelief in them.

"When the strong one in arms keepeth his own court, his goods are in peace; but when the stronger than he cometh upon and conquereth him, he taketh away his panoply on which he relied and divideth his spoils" (vers. 21, 22).

This the Lord was then doing before all eyes in the land. The acceptable year of Jehovah was manifest, not yet to all the world, but in Him Who in the wilderness had vanquished Satan in simple obedience and by the written word. This is the moral power of the Spirit in man; and the Lord was the blessed witness of it in perfection. This was followed by the powers of the age to come, manifestations then of that energy which will wholly deliver the coming age from the enemy. Long had the strong exercised his baneful, blasting influence, long were his goods in peace. Now the stronger than he was come and had conquered him. His power was broken before the Seed of the woman; he could no longer retain his possessions. Demons, were they a legion, were cast out. Blind saw, lame walked, lepers were cleansed, deaf heard, dumb spoke, and dead were raised.

It is true that the devil was not yet crushed, and had departed from Him but for a season. He had sought in vain to draw Him out of the path of obedience; he would return to kill Him in it. But this would only turn to a greater victory for God and man, not merely over "his goods" in the present, but in the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the whole world. The

question of guilt and evil in the face of judgment and eternity would then he solved as it now is in the precious blood and death and resurrection of Him Who sits at God's right hand in glory.

Still the victory already gained was great, and the ground of confidence for all that would follow in its time, and the wondrous way of God in the cross. If, as Luke says, some from among the crowd, blasphemed; if, as Matthew says, the Pharisees did, and, as Mark says, the scribes, all together show that the Jews did high and low, religious and learned emphatically, to their common and utter ruin, But the Lord points out the crisis for faith. When the worst unbelief works, it is just the moment for bold openness of faith. "He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth" (ver. 23). With this standard the believer too wins the victory. The middle way here is a delusion. Christ alone is worthy of all trust. Neutrality here is fatal. To be with Him is imperative; to gather save with Him is scattering, however fair man's promise or the appearance for the moment.

How is it with you, my reader? "I am (said He) the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath life eternal." Dread then above all things not to be with Him. If you are not with Him, you are against Him. Any or every other companion fails to be a security: Christ alone is so.

And He is the True God and eternal life, so gathering with Him alone stands, and is acceptable to God. All that embraces or seeks the world bears on itself the brand of the enemy, and is in no way of the Father. Nay more,

there is no gathering of saints that pleases God, unless Christ be the test and the centre. And the claim of infallibility for any man but Him Who is God is most daring sin against God, and a most manifest antichrist, denying the Father and the Son, however secure such think themselves.

What then is the consequence? “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he goeth through dry places seeking rest; and finding none he saith, I will return to my house whence I came out. And having come he findeth it swept and adorned. Then he goeth his way and taketh seven other spirits worse than himself; and entering in they dwell there; and the, last of that man [is] worse than the first” (vers. 24- 26).

It is the failing away, the apostasy followed by the man of sin. The unclean spirit of idolatry among the Jews was the precursor and moral cause of the captivity in Babylon. Since then the Jews have been generally free of that evil, conspicuously so after the Maccabees prevailed. But they no less peremptorily rejected Jesus the Messiah. They were against Him, and, instead of gathering, scattered and were scattered as never before nor so long. And they are still “empty,” as Matthew says, empty of the power of God. What avails then to be swept and adorned? The old unclean idolatrous spirit will surely return, with the sevenfold power of the enemy; and how awful the end for the many! A remnant who will then be with Jesus will be graciously owned as His own, and they with Him will be the centre for the gathered peoples of the earth.

In Luke the Holy Spirit does not confine its bearing to “that generation,” but widens it to “man.” And the end

of the individuals and the nations of Christendom will be no better. For God is not mocked. They have not continued in God's goodness and must also be cut off. They are largely idolatrous already, and this will grow to greater ungodliness, to the apostasy and the man of sin for them as for the unbelieving Jews.

Oh! then receive Christ, and the love of the truth that you may be saved, while the door stands open and God calls you to believe in His Son.

10 The rich Fool

Luke 12:16-21.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 276-277.)

Christ puts before the disciples the consequences of Jewish unbelief. The light of God's testimony shines only the brighter. He is the Son of Man as well as the Messiah, and His rejection by the old people of God but opens the door of grace through His death to all the nations of mankind. Here He warns of not Sadducean evil only but of Pharisaic: their leaven was hypocrisy. But as God is light, so everything covered up shall be revealed.

Such is Christ and Christianity. The veil is rent, and the blood of Christ brings the believer to God, Who alone, not man, is to be feared. And the Son of man is the test. Him who Shall confess Him before men will the Son confess also before the angels. For now it is not a question of the earth, but of hell (Gehenna) and of heaven, of things eternal, not seen and temporal. And the testimony of the Holy Spirit is final: he that blasphemes Him shall not be forgiven. The Holy Spirit deigns to teach the believer; no matter what the

emergency, he need not be anxious: the Holy Spirit suffices (vers. 1-12).

Another root of evil is now laid bare thoroughly — covetousness. “Teacher (said one), speak to my brother to divide the inheritance with me. But he said to him, Man, who constituted Me a judge or divider over you?” This the Lord will be in the most glorious way when He comes in His kingdom. It was therefore no unreasonable wish for one, who if he owned Him as Messiah, had no perception of the change His rejection brings. It was in no way for the rejected Messiah to divide earthly inheritances. “And he said to them, See and keep yourselves from covetousness; for, while one may have abundance, his life is not in his possessions. And he spoke a parable unto them, saying, The land of a certain rich man bore fruitfully. And he reasoned in himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have not where to gather my crops? And he said, This will I do: I will take down my granaries, and build greater; and there will I gather all my produce and my good things. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast many good things laid up for many years: rest, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, Fool, this night is thy soul required of thee; and whose shall be what thou didst prepare? Thus [is] he that treasureth up for himself, and [is] not rich toward God” (vers. 13-21).

Are not these evils rife now in Christendom? Do not both abound in what we are apt to think the most favoured lands on earth? Who can deny their sanctioned prevalence among the Anglo-Saxon race? Where are they more unblushing than in England and America? What is a fair show in the flesh but hypocrisy, not merely in Establishments here or there, but quite as really in

the dissenting societies? Where is not the influence of money dominant? Where is “the unrighteous mammon” so much discussed, so earnestly sought, and, as far as given, so glaringly vaunted? Money is treated even by pious men as the sinews of the gospel; just as the world counts it the sinews of war. The entire system of religious societies rests on the pillars of gold and silver. Never was there so deep and open and general an affront put on the Holy Spirit; never did Christian effort rest on so debasing a foundation. Never were souls encouraged so distinctly to make money insatiably that they may give more liberally. In this gold and gain-hunting day are not Christians as assiduous and eager to heap up wealth as the sons of this age? And if they spend on themselves and their families, who reproves worldliness, if there be fairly large gifts for the chapel and the societies, for Bibles, for Tracts, and for Missions, to enumerate no more?

Here the Lord presents the picture of an everyday reality. Covetousness implies no dishonesty, and is not even hard or sharp dealing, being no more than the desire of more: the very spring of modern effort, the motive of bettering himself commended to all from the mechanic to the millionaire. Thus the creature becomes the object, not God; and therefore is covetousness declared to be idolatry. It is man looking down, not up in dependence on God. The rich man was not content, but high-minded and trusted not in God but in the certainty of what is most uncertain. Rich in good works he was not, nor liberal in distributing, nor grateful for the abundance which he had, nor disposed to communicate. He aspired after greater things and planned for nothing but his own ease and enjoyment, as if he had a lease for

ever. God was in none of his thoughts, but read them all. When the rich man called on his soul to be merry over the many goods laid up for many years, the summons came: “Fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.”

O my reader, rich or poor, is this your folly? For it may be in hope, yet more frequently than in possession; and God is not mocked. Many a rich man perishes in his selfish ease; many would-be rich fall into temptation and a snare, into unwise and hurtful lusts which plunge them into destruction and ruin. Oh! look to Him Who, being rich, for our sakes became poor, that we by His poverty might be enriched. The abiding riches of glory we, changed into His likeness, shall receive and use aright. The riches of His grace He offers you now in His redemption. Despise not them nor Him; for this is to brave or court perdition. Confess your true place as a lost sinner before God, that He may give the salvation of your soul now by the faith of Christ, and by-and-by the salvation of your body at His coming.

11 Waiting for the Lord

Luke 12:35-38.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 292-293.)

Throughout this chapter the Lord is withdrawing His disciples, now that His rejection proceeded and His departure approached, from their thoughts and ways as Jews. This is ever wholesome, for it grounds the believer in Christianity, which nature and the world resist. But then it was absolutely requisite and of the highest value that they should be weaned from the old weak and beggarly elements, to learn, enjoy, and live the new

thing. It is not the power of Messiah present and governing here below, but God's word and Spirit. Hence the unseen and eternal things are revealed; hence confession of the truth, of the rejected One, is imperative, as God only is to be feared, and the danger is of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Only the gracious Lord encourages the faith that owns Him by the very things which terrify unbelief. Earthly justice is not His care now; nor should earthly care be theirs. What was the portion of the rich man that forgot his soul?

The disciples are called to confide in Him Who feeds the ravens, and clothes the lilies and the grass, with a glory beyond Solomon's. Why then should they be anxious like the nations of the world? Their Father knows their bodily wants, and adds these things to such as seek His kingdom. Moreover He would have them of good courage; for was it not His delight to give them the kingdom? Hence, far from covetousness, they were called to be kings now in superiority to money. The world was no more their quest, but to use its things in unselfish love. This is to make for themselves an unfailing treasure in the heavens, where also their heart was to be. And thus in practice they become heavenly. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning, and ye like men awaiting their own lord, when he may return from the wedding, that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may immediately open to him. Blessed are those bondmen whom the lord on coming shall find watching! Verily I say to you, that he will gird himself, and make them recline at table, and come up and serve them. And if he come in the second watch, and in the third, and find them so, blessed are they!" (vers. 35-38.)

Here then beyond just question the Lord lays down the attitude of the Christian. Is it yours? He Himself is the test beyond all else. It is not consistent with faith to be worried with anxiety about the things that perish. It is well to be of good cheer, knowing His love and His purpose of glory for the little flock, tried and exposed as it now is. But to be like men that wait for their own lord is a still more positive and decisive test. It presupposes in a personal way faith working by love. Their treasure is in the heavens where He is. They love Him, because He first loved them. They do not forget Him in His absence; they are not merely occupied with their work, for indeed their loins were girt about and their lamps burning, but themselves awaiting their own Lord. Nor again were they discussing dates, nor on the lookout for political change, nor yet with eyes fixed on signs in the sun, moon, and stars. The Christian watches for Christ. He, his life, his righteousness, his Saviour, his Lord, is gone with the promise of coming to receive him to Himself, one knows not how soon. And He has sent His last message since that He is coming quickly.

Therefore would we not doubt but wait, content with His word Who is the Truth, and the Faithful and True Witness. Long as it may seem, He is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, “but is longsuffering toward you, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” As He is waiting, so should we be; and thus we keep the word of His patience, but assure our hearts in the bright hope. Is He not worthy? is not the hope well worth the while? and is it not deep consolation that meanwhile many hear His voice, believe in His name, and with us wait for Him?

O my reader, if it be not so with you, where are you, and what? You well know whether you are waiting for the Lord Jesus; yea others, even the world, can in fair measure judge whether this is your habitual attitude. The Lord recognises no other object of hope in His own. This is also the chief responsibility as His bondmen. Be assured that other duties will be done all the better, because this has the first and constant place. Read all the N.T. and see if this hope be not bound up with every joy and sorrow, with the walk and work and worship of the Christian, who found in Him the object of faith when he was a lost sinner and now as a saint has none other as his hope. If you believe in Him, be not untrue to Him as your hope, but judge yourself in every thing that hinders your waiting for Him day by day.

If you have no faith in Him, how sad is your estate! Perhaps you are so beguiled by the spirit of the age growingly infidel, as to deny His glory as the Son of God and His humiliation as the Son of man. Perhaps you deny His resurrection, if not His death, yea the death of the cross. You deny all this at your peril; and your peril is everlasting punishment. For it is folly to suppose that, if the Son of God came to be propitiation for our sins, God did not give adequate proof to make mankind responsible to receive Him, and verily, fatally, guilty in rejecting Him. To reject a divine Person, Who in infinite love deigned to die in order to save you and me by faith from judgment, cannot be a secondary thing. It is the truth that God now testifies to all in the gospel, which bears the self-evidence of His holy love as no pretended sacred book does comparably. It has been proved to the peace and joy and salvation of millions as guilty and incredulous as you. Why then be so careless, so mad, so

wicked as to fight more against God, and turn His message of mercy, because refused, into a sentence of condemnation righteous and everlasting? Receiving the Lord Jesus by faith, you are entitled by God's grace to salvation, and can then welcome His coming with love and delight; and triumph. You can then join those that are waiting for Him, that, when He knocks, you may open to Him immediately.

Job 38:7 appears to express poetically the joy of the orbs of heaven when first ushered in as the hosts of heaven, with the audible acclaim of the angels, who in this book as in Genesis are called God's sons.

12 Working for the Lord

Luke 12:41-44.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 308-309.)

Christ is the fullest test for every soul of man, for sinner or for saint. He is the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Him; as he that has seen Him, the Son, has seen the Father. For no one has seen God at any time: the only begotten Son that is in the bosom of the Father — He has declared Him. All blessing for the sinner turns on receiving the Saviour. He only is the propitiation for our sins, as He alone gives the believer life eternal.

So also Christ makes manifest the practical difference between one believer and another. Thus of the two sisters with their brother, whom Jesus loved, Mary was shown to have chosen the good part which should not be taken from her; whereas Martha chose rather that much serving which distracted her, and made her grumble

because her sister sat down at His feet, listening to His word.

Not otherwise is it here in the Lord's estimate of waiting for Him with working for Him. Undoubtedly the believer is called to do both. But we readily let slip His mind, and are apt to prefer what gives us importance to what pleases Him most. Now the lack of being filled with the sense of His glory and His grace weakens and injures our service; because it exposes us to the ways, if not devices, of our own activity, instead of dependence on Him and subjection to His word.

Hence our Lord draws the twofold picture of blessedness in this chapter. (1) "Blessed are those bondmen whom the Lord on coming shall find watching: verily I say to you, that he will gird himself and make them recline at table, and coming up will serve them" (ver. 37). And He repeats their blessedness in the following verse. What immense grace on His part! It was love that wrought thus mightily. It was His love that created theirs; His that was seen by faith to be so great in One so glorious that formed and fed theirs, and drew them out in waiting for Him as their chiefest, clearest, and constant hope. At His coming He will not forget their loving and worshipping hearts. He will show in the day of His glory His appreciation of their longing for Him, while others expended it more or less on other objects. It will be His joy, never ceasing His service of love even in glory, to pay them especial honour, girding Himself to serve them.

(2) But there is more than this, though not so near His heart nor so high morally. For when Peter said, "Lord, sayest thou this parable to us or also to all?" the Lord

said, “Who then is the faithful and wise steward whom his lord will set over his household to give them the portion of food in season? Blessed is that bondman whom his lord on coming shall find doing thus: verily I say unto you, that he will set him over all that he hath” (vers. 41-44). Here it is working as distinguished from waiting or watching. It is doing Him service, rather than the eyes of the heart fixed on His coming. His interests may be cared for with zeal, His work done faithfully and with intelligence. Sinners are sought earnestly that they may be saved; saints are loved and tended because they are precious to Him. Neither is the Lord unmindful of the service; nor is God unrighteous to forget the work. For that bondman whom the Lord on coming shall find so doing, He will set over all that He has. And has He not pledged Himself so to act, Who is Heir of all things? The servant shall share in the display of His Lord’s glory, if he serve faithfully now in the day He is slighted.

Yet great and glorious as will be the day of recompence, and the requital worthy of Him Who is now served, however weakly in the face of the world which crucified the Lord of glory, what are such returns, wondrous as they shall be, compared to the inner scene of His love! Then, according to the graphic figure, He will make them recline in the Father’s house and serve them in that loving service that has no end. When Christ our life shall be manifested, then shall we also with Him be manifested in glory. All the world will see and know it. But it is a deeper thing to enjoy His personal love and honour in a way beyond all creature thought and the world’s ken, as He here promises to the bondmen who wait and watch for Him.

O my reader, how is it with you as you read these lines? You may not be conscious of enmity to the Lord Jesus. But are you a confessor of His name? Are you following Him openly as well as believing in Him? Remember the ruler so moral from his youth, who could bear neither to part with his large possessions, nor to follow Christ. It is indeed impossible with men, but not with God, as the Lord said; for all things are possible with God. And what has He done for you and your salvation? — given His own Son to become a man, and a bondman, and a sacrifice that you by faith may lay your hand on that all-efficacious Burnt-Offering. “And it shall be accepted for you to make atonement for you.” For nothing less than this, but even more, does the gospel of God present to you in His name.

Fear not therefore if you draw near in that Name of Jesus which is above every name; fear not; only believe. You cannot make too much of the one Mediator between God and man. God will honour your drawing on His infinite grace, if you draw in the name of the Lord Jesus. The Son of God became man, Christ Jesus, and gave Himself a ransom for all; and the Holy Spirit in the gospel proclaims it now that you may believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved. This is God’s testimony in the good news, and these are its own times. The night comes when none can work and none can hear, when those that refuse to hear must perish. If it be so with you, it is your own sin. God sent His only-begotten Son that you might not perish but have life eternal. Oh! hear His word that you may believe and be saved.

Seventh Series

1 The Wicked Servant

2. The Fruitless Fig-tree

3 What is God’s kingdom like

4 The Uprising of the Housemaster

5 The Guests

6 The Host

7 The Great supper

8 The Lost Sheep

9 The Lost Drachma

10 The Lost son

11 The Prudent Steward

12 The Rich man and Lazarus

1 The Wicked Servant

Luke 12:45-48.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 323-324.)

Instructive and solemn is the picture which the Lord draws of the servant in verses 45, 46, rendered still more full and precise in verses 47, 48, when a notable difference comes to light.

When our Lord announced His departure to the Father’s house, and the mission of another Advocate, the Holy Spirit to be in and with the disciples, He was no less distinct in promising His own coming again to receive them unto Himself, for the same place as Himself on

high. And when gazing into heaven after their ascending Master, they were told. by unimpeachable testimony that He should thus come as they had seen Him go. There is no doubt that in apostolic times the church walked in this hope, and that the mouths of preachers and teachers then spoke of it out of the abundance of their heart. Yet none ever regarded it as a question of date, any more than the Lord Who revealed it as a simple and pure and constant hope from His love to their love. And this difference is the more striking, because, the day of His appearing, which in due time follows His coming for His heavenly saints, is associated with prophecy and its judgments and signs in both the Old Testament and the New.

Hence the earnestness with which the apostle taught the converts, like those in Thessalonica from their first start, to await God's Son from the heavens, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus our deliverer from the coming wrath (1 Thess. 1:10). Not only did He write of His coming with all His saints in 1 Thess. 3:13, but of His coming for them to raise and change them, as a necessarily antecedent action in 1 Thess. 4:12-17. He does much more; for he identifies himself and all saints with it as their proximate hope by saying, not "they" as at a distant future, but "we, the living, that survive" (in contrast with those meanwhile "put to sleep by Jesus") until the coming (or presence) of the Lord, shall not precede those put to sleep. Both were to be caught up together. The aim of the Spirit of truth, Who knew the end from the beginning, and expressly gave the message "in the word of the Lord," was to put the hope over before the heart, made sure of its fruition, but by set purpose not sure when, so that all the saints might be

always looking for it. It was impossible otherwise to have the hope common, constant, and living. Infidels and those under their influence mock, as if it was the apostle's error, at that which was really the perfect wisdom of God in giving "one hope," which never did nor can pass away till His coming shall be its crown.

In the parable the Lord points out from the first that putting off the hope would betray the evil heart of unbelief, the root of other evils.

"But if that bondman say in his heart, My lord delayeth to come, and shall begin to beat the men-servants and the maid-servants, and to eat and drink and be drunken, the lord of that servant will have come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour that he knoweth not, and shall cut him asunder and set his portion with the unfaithful" (verses 45, 46).

It is not a doctrinal mistake (though this is not a slight thing with God's word and Spirit to direct aright), but the far more serious aberration of the "heart," which is too easy where this doctrine may be held. How sad the soul's state where Christ's coming is unwelcome; and the bondman does what his heart likes! Thus is the separative power of the hope lost, and its attraction to Him Who is coming and His word. Violence ensues towards his fellows, who become disagreeable, as the world with its enjoyments become pleasant company. Can any words more graphically sketch Christendom's practical ruin, of which the first symptom was the heart's plea, My Lord delayeth His coming? This will not hinder but rather hasten His coming unexpectedly, Who will punish his disloyalty and assign his portion with the

faithless, notwithstanding all his boast of Christian privileges.

In the verses that follow, the Lord rules, that sad as the heathen's case may be in the day that hastens, incomparably worse is the Christian professor's. "And that bondman who knew his own lord's will and made not ready nor did his will, shall be beaten with many [stripes]; but he who knew [it] not and did things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few. And to every one to whom much has been given, much shall be required of him; and to whom they commit much, of him they will ask the more" (verses 47, 48).

O my reader, forget not that You have an open Bible, hear the gospel, are sometimes troubled when you think of your sins and feel ashamed because you shrink from confessing the Lord's name, as much as you love the world and the things of the world. "The end of those things is death;" after which comes judgment. How will your guilt and the madness of your unbelief seem then when it is too late? Oh, turn not away from Him that speaks from heaven of His cleansing blood, Whose voice will soon shake earth and heaven also. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, end thou shalt be saved." His grace now is as sure to the believer, as His judgment will be shortly terrible for the unbeliever. God is not mocked.

2 The Fruitless Fig-tree

Luke 13:6-9.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 339-340.)

Men are apt to dwell on shocking events, and to measure the guilt of the victims accordingly. So it was when the Lord warned of the crisis for the Jewish people

which His presence could not but bring about. For He was there in the testimony of the truth and in the humiliation of grace, not yet in the power and glory of the Kingdom; He was there for faith to receive, but for unbelief to refuse or despise. If rejection unto death was before Him, they were on the way to the sure dealings of God in judgment. Then it was that some reported to Him the tragic end of the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. But our Lord in answer corrects their own thought of exceptional guilt in that case, and solemnly warns them that, except they repented, they should all perish in the same way. Nay more, He points to the eighteen men, not slain by an unfeeling and truculent Roman, on whom the tower of Siloam fell. Yet were they debtors beyond all the men in Jerusalem? On the contrary He repeats, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” This is God’s voice to sinful man in the present disorder of the world. Man is no competent judge of the tangled scene; but he is loudly called through such events to judge himself before God, in short to repent. And the Lord gives the call divine force: “except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

O my reader, except you repent, worse impends over you than what befell those then occupied with passing sorrows. How often their blood was mingled afterwards with their sacrifices by their own infuriate zealots! Worse, far worse, impends over you than when the burning ruins of the temple buried its multitudes, who vainly trusted the sanctuary instead of repenting of their sins. For what is any judgment in providence compared with the everlasting judgment of God? And what is more inevitable for man? “It is appointed to men once to die,

but after this, judgment." How unutterably appalling for the unrepentant! For it surely means no less than everlasting destruction.

The Lord adds a parable also to enforce the truth. "A certain one had a fig-tree, planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, Behold, three years I come seeking fruit on the fig-tree and find none: out it down; why cumbereth it the ground? But be answering saith to him, Sir, let it alone this year also, until I shall dig about it and put manure. And if it produceth fruit thenceforth,-; but if not, thou shalt cut it down" (vers. 6-9).

Can any doubt be that the Lord has in view the elect nation planted, not casually, but in His vineyard, with every advantage of site and of care? But no fruit was found. Of this there was more than adequate witness. For three years it is waited on for fruit, but there is none. It was worse than useless. It was a nuisance. Cut it down, said the owner. But He Who felt for God's rights and called the guilty to repent felt also compassion for man, and urges the plea, "Let it alone this, year also." New and final measures were to be taken. "If it shall produce fruit thenceforth,-; but if not, thou shalt cut it down."

Alas! we know the issue. No wonder the Lord leaves a blank. What had He not done? What had He not suffered? Even on the cross He cried, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But as they bore no fruit — nothing but leaves, so they in their pride should not be forgiven, rejecting every proof of their need and guilt. Hence they have lost not only their place as a nation but their religious status. The fig-tree is

withered away. It was the people under law; never more shall there be fruit of it for ever. Thank God, there will be a generation to come; and it will believe in Him. That generation, not this, will repent. That generation, not this, will say, Blessed be He that cometh in the name of Jehovah. His blood will wash them from their sins, instead of being as now a curse on them and their children. And He will write His laws in their minds, as He will give them to their hearts, never remembering more their sins and their lawlessnesses. For it is the new covenant of God's grace, not of man's works only to show them worthless and evil.

Meanwhile God is sending His glad tidings to you. to Gentile as well as Jew; yea now to the Gentiles emphatically, for it is the day of grace. He now enjoins men that they should all everywhere repent. Oh! hear the call and own yourself lost that you may receive the Saviour. This He is to the uttermost now toward all that repent. How would it be with you if He were come to judge the habitable earth in righteousness? How could you stand before the Judge? It is now His call that you repent. He waits to be gracious to you in all your ruin and to save you from your sins. He can afford and loves to do it, for His blood cleanseth from every sin.

3 What is God's kingdom like

Luke 13:18-21.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 356-357.)

The kingdom of God is no secret hid in Himself. It is a purpose revealed of old in His word. When Moses and the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea which covered Pharaoh's host, they sang, "Jehovah will reign forever."

But this, like every thing else under the law, for the present failed through their sins. At length they rejected Jehovah's reign, desiring a king "like all the nations." Saul their choice was their sorrow and shame; but God in pity gave them David and Solomon. Even then all was but provisional, and at best but a type of God's Son, the true King, Who alone will make good His throne on the holy hill of Zion.

When the Lord Jesus presented Himself to the Jews, they proved their evil estate by denying and crucifying Him, as their prophets had foreshown. And He Who knew all beforehand told that they should not see Him henceforth till they should say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Jehovah. But they surely will, and He will build up Zion, appearing in His glory. So the nations shall fear Him, and all the kings of the earth His glory. This will be the kingdom in the manifest sense, to which all the prophets gave witness, postponed as yet through Israel's unbelief. When their heart shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away; to this day alas! it remains unremoved.

Meanwhile the Lord in His ministry here below announced the mystery or secret of the kingdom of God (Mark 4:11), while the King, rejected on earth, is absent on high. The consequence is that divine power is not manifested in the removal of Satan and the putting down of all the enemies; it works spiritually in those that believe, whilst a vast system of mere profession grows up and spreads to a certain extent here below. This last and by the Jews wholly unexpected result is what our evangelist was inspired to set out in our Lord's two comparisons.

“And he said, To what is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I liken it? It is like a grain of mustard which a man took and cast into his garden; and it grew and became a great tree, and the birds of heaven lodged in its branches. And again he said, To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened” (vers. 18- 21).

The moral design of our Gospel is well illustrated by the peculiar introduction of the two parables at this point. No intimation marks that they were then uttered. The first Gospel gives them in their place where the seven parables disclose the kingdom of the heavens, or rather its mysteries, as a complete whole. The parable of the Sower is separated from them and given in connection with His own ministry in Luke 8; the others of Matt. 13. Luke does not at all record. Here the object is to enforce the solemn lesson of what man is in presence of “all the glorious things that were done by him” [the Lord] Adversaries might be put to shame; and all the crowd might rejoice. But man is the same as ever, and turns all to vanity and self-exaltation. Christendom with better privileges is not really better than Israel. “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” “Ye must be born again.” “If any one be in Christ, [there is] a new creation: the old things are passed away; behold, new things are come. And all things are of God who reconciled us to himself through Christ.” What are outward changes in His eyes? Yet man, professing man, without life in Christ, can show or effect nothing more.

As the Lord described, such has been the course of God’s kingdom. In chap. 8 Luke tells us of the very different work wrought by the seed that figures the word

of God. Even so it does not by any means produce in result what the Sower desired. For the enemy is not yet dislodged from his bad eminence, and he avails himself of both the flesh and the world to spoil and hinder, besides his own destructive wiles. Still grace gives effect in good ground, and fruit is borne a hundredfold.

But in the parable of the mustard seed which a man cast into his garden, we hear of the lofty growth from the lowly beginning of what bore the Lord's name here below. The symbol of a tree is taken, and of one that from a very little shot up to give shelter to the birds of the sky. So earthly potentates as the kings of Egypt and Assyria are described by Ezekiel, and the king of Babylon by Daniel; only that here stress is laid on the incongruity of what was originally small with its towering development in time. None can deny either fact in Christendom. As the philosophic Guizot says in his Lect. ii. on Civilization, "It was the church with its institutions, its magistrates, its power, which strove triumphantly against the internal dissolution which convulsed the empire, and against barbarity; which subdued the barbarians themselves, and became the link, the medium, the principle of civilization, as between the Roman and barbarian worlds." What a mighty factor on earth the little flock became!

In the parable of the leaven, it is not the rise of earthly power out of what was originally despised, but the spread of doctrine till a given sphere was permeated. In it the creed-work of Christendom is portrayed. There is no thought of vital energy, only of a certain quantum assimilated by doctrine. Certainly grace in power is never so symbolised but doctrine such as that of Pharisees, Sadducees, or Herodians. Of this the natural

mind is capable. The creed of Christendom, truth even, might be held, and held firmly, without faith and in unrighteousness (Rom. 1). The action of the Holy Spirit appears in neither comparison.

O my reader, hear the word of God. Receive Christ, Who alone is the Saviour and gives life eternal. It is “of faith that it might be according to grace.” Ordinances may figure truth but cannot save. On the ground of works you are lost; but Jesus is Lord and Saviour. “Ye are saved by grace through faith; and this not of yourselves [which some might have thought]; it is God’s gift; not of works that none might boast.” Jesus is the way, the sole and sure way, to the Father. Look to Him only, and call on Him. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich to all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. The word of truth is the gospel of salvation to the believer.

4 The Uprising of the Housemaster

Luke 13:25-30.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 371-372.)

Do you believe these plain words of the Saviour? Do you, my dear reader, believe that the time is short, the Lord at hand, and the solemn change impends from grace to judgment? The scripture before us is but one of many like warnings, The day of grace will close with the “falling away,” the apostacy. When once the House-master will have risen up and barred the door, how appalling to stand without and knock in vain! Did it ever

come home that this might be your own case? Evade it not.

The appeal arose out of the question, Are those to be saved few? The prophets had intimated such a remnant in terms as searching as they were repulsive to Jewish feeling. The Lord's words are a direct dealing with conscience. "Strive earnestly to enter through the narrow door; for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and shall not be able." Men are ready enough to do or suffer much for salvation. They welcome a means which allows of their efforts if not. deserts. But "ye must be born anew" is hateful, unless it be within their ability to hinge it on an ordinance, which works without bringing the soul into the presence of God. This is what men naturally dread and shirk. They refuse to face God about their sins. Anything but the repentance which accompanies believing Him that sent Jesus. For He treats man, moral or not, as alike lost, and insists that salvation is in none other than Him Whom man despised and crucified. "For neither is there any other name under heaven that is given among men whereby we must be saved." It is therefore by grace through faith; and this not of ourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works that none might boast. Hence strive earnestly to enter through the narrow door of being begotten by the word of truth. Entrance by any other way, however attractive, is vain and ruinous.

Thereon the Lord intimates the certainty that at an unexpected moment the Master of the house will close the gospel call. "When once the house-master hath risen up and shut the door, and ye shall begin to stand without and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, open to us; and he answering shall say to you, I know you not whence ye

are; then shall ye begin to say, We did eat and drink in thy presence, and thou didst teach in our streets; and he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves cast out. And they shall come from east and west, and from north and south, and shall recline in the kingdom of God. And behold, there are last who shall be first, and there are first who shall be last" (vers. 25-30).

It is the rejection of Christ that tests souls; Christ in humiliation is the stumbling stone. So it was for the Jew then; so it is at bottom now for others. Yetis it thus that He has both glorified God and made propitiation for our sins. Christ crucified is to Jews a stumbling-block and to Gentiles foolishness; but to the called, both Jews and Greeks Christ is God's power and God's wisdom. There could be no gospel of grace without righteousness. Yet scripture is clear that it is not in the sinner to whom the gospel is preached. For "there is none righteous, no, not one." Hence the gospel is God's righteousness, not man's; and its ground is the redemption that is in Christ. And His righteousness is unto all, that they might hear the glad news, and upon all those who believe, that they might know themselves justified by faith.

But this is not all the truth. He, the Lord Jesus — He will appear in glory to judge the habitable earth. In vain will men in that day say, Lord, open to us. He who now calls in love will sentence the guilty. He will say, I know you not whence ye are. For had they heard the word in faith, they had received, not only pardon and peace, but life in Christ. And His life is the only and the sure source of the

fruit of righteousness which is by Him to God's glory and praise. Not receiving Christ to life eternal men are but "workers of iniquity," the baptised no less than the circumcised, the Mahometan quite as much as heathen. Past privileges are pleaded to no purpose. "We did eat and drink in thy presence, and thou didst teach in our streets." Neglected opportunities, slighted mercies, only aggravate guilt. He shall say in reply, "I tell you, I know not whence ye are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." To the wicked, Gentile, Jew, or of Christendom, there is no peace: least of all to those who have heard most.

There indeed shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth, when in the kingdom the unbelieving Jews see their boasted fathers and prophets, but themselves cast out. But there is deep cheer for the despised Gentiles. For the Lord adds, "And they shall come from the east and west and from the north and south, and they shall recline in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last who shall be first, and there are first who shall be last." Do you say, how terrible and true of unbelieving Israel, how blessedly true of the Gentiles who believe? What will it be for you who have heard the gospel, and neglected so great salvation? What possible hope can be in that day! But blessing in faith there is now and ever.

5 The Guests

Luke 14:7-11.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 7-8.)

It is beautiful and blessed to mark how our Lord turns the least things of daily life to everlasting account. This we find in all the Gospels, in none more than in that of

Luke; whose design under the power of the Spirit was to contrast the God of grace with fallen selfish man, that through the faith of Christ and His work he might be saved and walk accordingly. Thus it is that the Lord spoke a parable unto those that were invited i.e. as guests, noticing how they chose out the first places (ver. 7).

“When thou art invited by anyone unto a wedding, recline not in the first place, lest perhaps a more honourable than thee be invited by him, and he that invited him and thee shall come and say to thee, Give this [man] place, and then thou begin with shame to take the last place. But when thou hast been invited, go, put thyself down in the last place, that when he who hath invited thee come, he may say to thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have glory in presence of all that recline with thee. For everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (vers. 8-11).

It is a world of evil, and man is fallen under sin and Satan, which gives occasion to grace and its ways, as God was then displaying in Christ. This tests the heart, which naturally seeks its own things, honour or power, ease or pleasure, money therefore as the means of gratifying self, whatever may be its direction. Here it was present honour that men coveted: and it is as true now as then. The true Light, coming into the world, laid every man bare.

But He has done infinitely more. He, the Lord of lords, and King of kings, was the faithful witness, the living exemplar of all He taught, of all that pleased the Father. Who ever took the last place as He? If born in

Bethlehem David's city, to mark prophetically the "ruler in Israel," none the less was He the One "Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." Yet was He to be smitten with a rod upon the cheek (Micah 5:1, 2), as He was born in a manger, because there was no room for such in the inn (Luke 2:7). As the parents fled with Him into Egypt from the face of the destroying king, so did they return with Him to dwell, not only in Galilee the despised, but in its most despised Nazareth; so that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

So it was throughout the days of His flesh. Son of the highest, and subsisting in the form of God, He did not esteem it a thing to be grasped to be on equality with God, but emptied Himself. He did not and could not divest Himself of deity, but He did of glory, taking a bondman's form, having come in the likeness of men. And who ever humbled Himself as He did unswervingly? Who but He could say, and say with absolute truth, "Lo, I am come to do Thy will, O God?" Others, His servants may have done miracles as mighty, or, as He said, "Greater works than these;" but He and He alone never did His own will, always the Father's. And this is the perfect moral place of man which He took and kept to God's glory.

But more even than this had to be if God were to be glorified about sin, if men were to be saved through faith from their sins? Would He stoop down to a depth unfathomable and bear the divine judgment of evil, so that the guilty might by grace be freed? Therefore it was that having been found in figure as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, death of the cross. Him Who knew no sin God made sin for

you, that you might be made God's righteousness in Christ. It was God's perfect way: no other could avail.

Do you believe this, poor soul, miserable in the sense of your guilt, weary under sin's intolerable load, despairing haply of efforts to do the law of God? Not thus, never thus, can you come to God. He waits to be gracious, He can save to the uttermost; He gives all you need without money and without price, but only through your believing on Jesus, Who only is the way, and the truth, and the life; and He is the propitiation for our sins. How could it be otherwise? Did not the prophet say (seeing the great prediction as though come, seven centuries before the great fulfilment), "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

Believe God's call on you to doubt in yourself, to hear Christ's word (for the law can only condemn a sinner), and believe Him that sent Jesus in love as a Saviour. And what is His message to you? "Verily, Verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath life eternal, and cometh not into judgment, but is passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). The bold unbeliever braves the word of God and refuses to humble himself; the serious unbeliever tries to do better, trusting himself and his powers. The true believer owns himself lost, and finds Christ a Saviour indeed and in truth. Oh! look to Him and live.

To the believer Christ is life as well as propitiation; and because He lives, we shall live also. He is our life now while we are on earth. Thus only do we live to God; and we are called all through to have Him as our object, and

way, our motive, strength, and end. The apostle knew, and, walking thus, could say, To me to live is Christ (Phil. 1:21). Obedience, as He obeyed, is what the believer is sanctified to, in that humility which is content to be nothing in the world as it is. Christ took the last place. Let us who love Him seek to be as near that place as grace enables each.

In the regeneration He will say to each of His own, Friend, go up higher. Then shall the poor and despised apostles sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Then shall they that are Christ's, risen from the dead, reign with Him. The Corinthians sought to reign now, as do most in Christendom. But they were humbled, and by grace humbled themselves. Profit by that lesson; and God will exalt you in due time.

6 The Host

Luke 14:12-14.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 22-23.)

The Son of God was the true Light, Who, coming into the world, casts light on every man. It is not that all are enlightened by Him, but that He set each in the light. So here He lays bare alike guest and host. High and low, Jew or Gentile, Pharisee or Sadducee, priest or philosopher, were far from God; according as it is written, There is not a righteous man, not even one; nor he that understandeth; there is not one that seeketh after God: there is no fear of God before their eyes. If the law spoke thus of Israel, as it did, much more palpably did it apply to the heathen with their religious abominations and their unspeakable demoralisations;

that every mouth might be stopped and all the world be under judgment to God.

Man seeks his own things and his own will; nor is any thing pleasanter to the natural man than to exalt himself. The Lord Jesus brings before us from first to last a mind wholly different. “For ye know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Such was the mind in Him and in all its perfection only there. But it is the mind God would have in His own now; and thus it was Christ spoke as we have here. It is an entire reversal of human thoughts generally, of Jewish feeling in particular. Settled down in the earth as it is, men seek present pleasure, worldly honour, earthly advantages. What did this age give Christ? A manger when born, nowhere to lay His head, and a cross to die on. What does Christ give to him that believes? Eternal life, and everlasting redemption. Life was in Him; and He gives it in Himself. Redemption He obtained by His death, and we have it in Him through His blood, the forgiveness of offences. Hearing His word, and believing Him Who sent Jesus, we are thus doubly blessed. Our evil He takes away, and His good He freely imparts for ever.

Thus believing we can profit by all He was and all He says. He has laid the axe to the root of the tree of self-seeking, and shown the blessing of humbling ourselves in a world quite out of course, in plain denial of a nature that seeks to be uppermost. Here He opens out the beauty of unselfishness in faith, love being the spring, glory the recompence and rest.

“And he said also to him that had invited him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen nor rich neighbours; lest haply they also invite thee in return, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, invite poor, crippled, lame blind; and thou shalt be blessed; for they can not recompense thee; for thou shalt he recompensed in the resurrection of the just” (vers. 12-14).

“It is more blessed to give than to receive,” as He Himself not only said but acted on, Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by demons. If we have not that power, as things have long been, we are called to walk, as He walked, in love, and in distinct testimony of separateness to God from the pride of the world and the selfishness of the first man. Hence His exhortation would form our hearts for His path here below, instead of walking as men according to public opinion, which is just the spirit and course of the age. For if we are His, we are “heavenly” even now (1 Cor. 15:48, 49); as we are destined by grace to bear the image of the Heavenly at His coming.

Let our hearts then go forth to welcome the despised and suffering here below, and to show “the kindness of God” to poor, crippled, lame, blind. And the more too, in order to win their ear through the heart to hear of Him Who alone can take away the guilt and power of sin for eternity, Who alone brings through faith in Himself into the place of sons of God even now. Thus is the believer blessed himself; and those who, touched by unworldly love, receive the Saviour by believing on His name. And both will have their portion, when He comes, “in the resurrection of the just.”

For scripture never speaks of one common, simultaneous, and indiscriminate resurrection. There shall indeed be a resurrection of both just and unjust. But God's word is clear and positive that the resurrection of the just differs not more in character and consequence than in time from that of the unjust. Hence the Lord calls the former a resurrection of life, the latter a resurrection of judgment (John 5:29): the one for such as have believed on Him and done good; the other for those that, dishonouring both the Son and the Father, only did ill, and are judged accordingly. In the great prophecy of the Revelation (Rev. 20:4-15), we find the gap, which severs these two resurrections, to be that special reign with Christ which follows the resurrection of life before the resurrection of judgment.

How is it then with you, dear reader? Had you in your own person spiritually all the disabilities of the poor, crippled, lame, and blind, you are none the less welcome to God's feast, to the glad tidings of His grace. Listen not to the tempter, but to the Saviour. Put not off His call. You are really worse than if yourself had all these bodily ailments together and with no means to alleviate them. For what state can be so awful as that of a lost sinner? And is not this actually yours? He Himself is express that He came to seek and save such. Oh, receive Him now! God's word warrants you. It is the only way a lost sinner can please Him. Doing good will follow here below, and the resurrection of the just at Christ's coming (1 Cor. 15:23). Fear not, but believe God, Who has no purpose so dear to Him as the honour of His Son. Oh, no longer dishonour Him, the Son of His love, the Saviour of the lost!

7 The Great supper

Luke 14:16-24.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 37-38.)

Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God, said one to the Lord. Far different is the real thought, as was shown in the parable. Grace is repulsive to nature; man shrinks from God and slights His call.

“A certain man was making a great supper, and bade many; and he sent forth his bondman at supper-time to say to those that were bidden, Come, for things are now ready. And they all at once began to excuse themselves. The first said to him, I bought land and must go out to see it; I pray thee, have me excused. And another said, I bought five yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to prove them; I pray thee, have me excused. And another said, I married a wife, and on this account cannot come. And the bondman when he came up reported these things to his master. Then the house-master in anger said to his bondman, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring here the poor and maimed and blind and lame. And the bondman said, Sir, What thou didst command is done, and yet there is room. And the lord said to the bondman, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel [them] to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you, that none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper” (vers. 16-24).

The corresponding, though scarcely the same, parable in Matthew 22:2-14 is a likeness of the kingdom of the heavens, which gives prominence to the wedding feast for the king’s son, to the dispensational difference of the Jews, and to the judgment that befell their city. Here

man’s moral roots are more laid bare; and where sin abounded, grace surpassed.

There was no harm in buying land, in acquiring oxen, or in marrying a wife. The evil lay in pleading these things, or any else, to set aside the call of God. The heart is at fault, which makes present interests or even duties a reason for putting God off and neglecting so great salvation. Have you, my reader, no object or pursuit, which stands between you and the knowledge of God and His Son which is life eternal? Be not deceived. Sin gives Satan the means of blinding every soul to the light of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ, as well as to his own ruin and exposure to the Gehenna of fire, where one’s worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Your peril is extreme.

God in the gospel meets you in your need and guilt and danger. He asks nothing, He gives all things; and they are now ready. He provides a great supper; He invites freely. Oh, begin not once more to excuse yourself. Too long have you turned aside. Why should you die in your sins, lost for ever? The Son of man expressly came to save the lost. But it is through faith.

Those who first had the invitation valued what was before them, forgot God’s judgment for eternity. The Lord recorded their folly that you might fear God — the beginning of wisdom — that you might hear and live. He would give you another life, which is only in Himself, life eternal; and this life in Him loves the will of God, as it refuses the baits and bribes of the enemy. It begins with faith-obedience, and is sanctified by the Spirit to obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Thus one becomes a child of obedience instead of

fashioning oneself according to the former lusts in one's ignorance. The ball of God is paramount. He calls one to receive His grace in Christ. This is His commandment that we believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ. The first of rights is that God should have His rights; and He commands us to believe on the Lord Jesus.

See the activity of God's love. He is not content with gathering in the poor and maimed and blind and lame from the streets and lanes of the city. He will have His bondman go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them in importunate earnestness to come in. He insists that His house be filled. What a God is ours! A just God and a Saviour. He is assuredly. Why then trifle, when all blessing is proffered in Christ, when all is and must be ruin where He is refused? For does He not say to you, that none of those that were bidden shall taste of His supper? Are you not bidden? Come, then; for He welcomes in the name of His Son. Come without delay — dangerous everywhere, most of all in presence of your sin and of God's everlasting judgment. Now it is all grace, grace reigning through righteousness unto life eternal by Jesus Christ our Lord. Practical love follows, and practical obedience. It is the first step that weighs. That it might be open to you, it cost the Saviour all in unfathomable humiliation and the sacrifice of Himself for you and your sins. Oh, put. off no more, but believe and be blessed in and with Him!

In vain men talk of a larger hope. There is no Saviour but Christ, nor any way to the Father but Himself by faith. For not to believe is to give very deep insult to God and to His Son. There is another evil yet worse; the abuse of His grace, the attaching of indulged lusts and passions, of unjudged pollution of flesh and spirit, to

that worthy Name. Should such men taste of His supper?

8 The Lost Sheep

Luke 15:3-7.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 53-54.)

Grace, the grace of God, is hateful to man's pride. The self-righteous take offence. What is the good of their decorous behaviour, of their prayers at home, of their public devotions, if they be no better than loose and open sinners? Yet the Lord (Matt. 21:31) solemnly assured the chief priests and the elders of the people, who built on their religious character, that the tax-gatherers and the harlots go into the kingdom before them. They are ready to repent and believe. So here the taxgatherers and the sinners draw near to hear the glad tidings, while the Pharisees and the scribes kept murmuring, He receiveth sinners and eateth with them.

Yes, it was true; nor was He ashamed of divine love to the lost, but gloried in it, and vindicates it against all cavillers. Is God to save nobody? If He save, it can only be by His grace through faith. Let us hear the Son plead His God and Father's title to save sinners.

"And he spoke this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having a hundred sheep and having lost one of them, doth not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after that which was lost until he find it? And having found he layeth [it] on his shoulders rejoicing, and, when come to the house, he calleth together the friends and the neighbours, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I found my sheep that was lost. I say to you, that thus joy shall be in heaven over one sinner repenting,

[more] than over ninety nine righteous, such as have no need of repentance" (vers. 3-7).

Man, selfish man, is not so indifferent about his lost sheep, as he thinks God to be about a sinner. A bad conscience makes him doubt God's love, still more does bad religion. The Lord Jesus alone represents God truly and perfectly. There He was in their midst the Saviour of sinners, the Son of man come to seek and save that which was lost. Did He not proclaim it from the first in the synagogue at Nazareth? Did not the prophet Isaiah predict seven centuries before, that Jehovah's Spirit should be on Him Whom He anointed to evangelise the poor, to preach deliverance to captives, and sight to blind? The miracles of His ministerial life were for the most part signs of His grace to the guilty and wretched: for this His death in atonement would give the ground of God's righteousness; as all proved His unfathomable love for us when powerless and ungodly.

He, the Lord of glory, pursued the wandering sheep till He found it. What did it not cost Him? Teaching the disciples, weaning them from Jewish elements, showing them heavenly things, forming their hearts according to God, exercising their perception to distinguish good and evil, were all blessed to the ninety nine in the wilderness; but what about the lost one? The Good Shepherd leaves the rest safe, inquest of the stray sheep. After it He goes in earnest love, as if He had none else; and having found it, He lays it, on His shoulders rejoicing; and when come to the house He calls together the friends and the neighbours, that they way rejoice with Him over the lost one found, He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. By His stripes were we healed. For we were as sheep going astray. If we

returned, as we can now say, it is only because the Shepherd and Bishop of souls came to seek and save us.

The mere idea never dawned on Pagans of old, north, south, east or west. They admitted sympathy between God and His faithful worshippers; but what must befall the unfaithful? What would make and keep faithful? Their gods, on their own showing, had lusts and passions, evil demons self-evidently, and deserving punishment like their adorers. The true God declared Himself in Jesus, Who came to bring God truly known into the world, and to put sin out of it, as He surely will in its season. As God is light and love, so did the Lord prove Himself to be, Whom none could convict of sin, Who died for sinners, suffered for their sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God. Yes, He is the true God, and life eternal.

Why then stay longer? Are you not away from God? Are you fit for His presence? If you know you are not, what is to fit you? Christ is the way, and the only way, to the Father. But what of your sins? He, Who came in love to reconcile you to God, took the load on Himself; He alone could bear it, and bear it away for ever. And God in the scriptures calls you to believe on the Lord Jesus, His Son, your Saviour. God raised from the dead Him Who died for sins and sinners does not this give you confidence?

You hesitate. Why? Do you love darkness rather than light? Alas! is it not because your works are evil, and your heart is proud, and you therefore hate the light which makes all manifest? Hear then His warning word. You cannot escape the resurrection of the unjust; you cannot escape the Judge of quick and dead. Jesus, Whom

you now refuse as Saviour, will judge those works of which you now boast; Jesus will prove their worthlessness to your everlasting shame, when He sits on the great white throne. What thenceforward must be your portion, if you reject Him now? “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). May you now hear and live.

9 The Lost Drachma

Luke 15:8-10.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 68-69.)

The parable which follows the lost sheep presents the sinner’s case in another form. It is not as that animal foolish and straying, but like a coin without life, a dead thing. Both are true of fallen man. As all are gone out of the way, and none seeketh after God, with destruction and wretchedness in their ways (Rom. 3), so were all dead in their offences and their sins, by nature children of wrath one as another (Eph. 2). But grace goes forth to save and does save; not the creature’s grace, but God’s. This the Pharisees and scribes disliked; but the Lord demonstrates it, and draws the despised near to hear One so capable of telling out the love, of which He was the brightest witness and the richest gift. These parables are a pair, as the opening word indicates.

“Or what woman having ten drachmas, if she have lost one drachma, doth not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently till she shall have found it? And on finding, she calleth together the friends end the neighbours, saying, Rejoice with me, because I found the drachma which I lost. Thus, I say to you, there

ariseth joy in presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:8-9).

Herein is a scene within the house, and a woman is active in seeking out the lost object; as in the former a man strenuous to recover the stray one without. But in both it is divine grace, grace entirely above man or woman, which the Saviour sets before us so vividly; and the lost one is man or woman whom grace seeks and saves.

Is it nothing to you who read these lines that you are "lost"? that you have turned your back on God? and that you are utterly hard and insensible in your alienation? Assuredly He is not cold or indifferent Who so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son; that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have life eternal (John 3). Not hard nor regardless of guilty man is He Who commends His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, — died for the ungodly (Rom. 5). Herein is love, not that we loved Him, but that He loved us and sent His Son as propitiation for our sins (1 John 4). Such is the true God Whose compassion the Lord Jesus here makes known.

He here represents the painstaking of grace by a woman who spares no pains to win back her lost silver piece. She cannot rest about it. If sinners are beguiled by the enemy to disbelieve their ruin, the direct contrast is plain in her. She lights a lamp; she sweeps the house; she searches carefully till she finds it.

It is not otherwise with the Holy Spirit. In the redeemed He is come to dwell, and causes the saints, however opposed in their old natural state as Jews and Gentiles, fitted together, to grow into a holy temple in the Lord,

even now being builded together for God's habitation in the Spirit. Also He takes a most energetic part as well as loving interest in awakening the sinner from the slumber of death. It is He that makes the candle of the word shine into the dark recesses of the heart. It is He that probes the guilty conscience. It is He that discovers the fatal evil of darling sins in the light of God.

Oh, have ye not experienced these gracious workings in your souls? Have you not felt as you read or listened to scripture, that somehow God was speaking to your conscience? Beware of turning a deaf ear to Him Who warns and would win you to Himself from all evil. If He press home the certainty that God will have every work and word brought into judgment, He does not fail to remind you of the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering. Do not longer ignore that the goodness of God leads you unto repentance? What goodness can match His spending the Only-begotten on you? What was it for the Lord of all to become Servant of all — yea, to die as a sacrifice for sinners.

Fear not to lay your hand on that infinite offering for sin. If the blood of bulls and goats could be no more than a witness by the way, if their effect could be but provisional and temporary, it is not so with the blood-shedding of the Lord Jesus. By His blood peace was made for those who had been at war with God; and who can wonder? For His blood cleanses from all sin. It is God's word which so testifies to you. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven? And his voice then shook the earth; but now he

hath promised, saying, Yet once more I will shake not the earth only but also heaven" (Heb. 12).

It may be remarked, that as the first of these three parables points evidently to the Lord Jesus, so does the second to the Holy Spirit, and the third yet more unmistakably to the Father. How blessed is it, that all the divine Persons of the Godhead are engaged on behalf of the lost one that he may be saved! Who can deny that this the Saviour preached when here? And the Spirit has inspired the scripture for you to hear and believe.

10 The Lost son

Luke 15:11-32.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 85-86.)

The Saviour adds a third parable to complete as well as confirm the truth of God's grace in saving the lost who repent. The first set out the heedless active straying of the sinner; the second, his insensible dead state till the Spirit works through the living word; the third uses the figure, not of a sheep or a coin, but of a man to point the fact of an inward work in the conscience, and of the reception the returning soul finds in the Father's love and the privileges of grace.

"And he said, A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to the father, Father, give me the share of the property that falleth to me. And he divided to them the means of living. And after not many days the younger son gathered all together, and went abroad into a far country, and there wasted his property by dissolute living. And when he squandered all, there arose a mighty famine in that country; and he began to be in

want. And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine; and he longed to fill his belly with the husks which the swine were eating; and no one gave him. But coming unto himself he said, How many hirelings of my father's have abundance of bread, and I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go unto my father and will say to him, Father, I sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hirelings. And he arose and came unto his father. But while he was yet a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him much. And the son said to him, Father, I sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said unto his bondmen, Bring out the best robe and put [it] on him; and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fatted calf, kill [it], and let us eat and make merry; because this my son was dead and came to life again, he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry" (vers. 11-24).

Impossible to conceive a sketch more graphically true. The younger son indicates very emphatically the sinner's path from his start in self-will and independency to open profligacy and the depths of degradation. Such were "some of you" even very far; such were most in a measure. We shall hear of another form of sin at least as evil before we have done. But this far country " knows what extreme famine is. No one gave him." But as the wasteful feel the pressure of dire want, so that even swine's fare becomes desirable, God turns all for good in His grace.

O my reader, have you known such an experience? Have you ever tried to shake off parental authority, especially where pious? Have you, when you could, plunged into the pleasures of sin, the more eagerly because you were debarred under a father or a mother's eye? Have you fallen into the depths of immorality, and been "almost in all evil?" And in your misery have you learnt what the world feels toward one who has lost all? "And no one gave him." What! none of those who helped to drain the once full purse? No, not one. So the Lord describes the lost son. Are you like him in sin and misery? May you be also in repentance. For coming to himself he saw the folly, evil, and ruin of his life, His mind is made up. He must clear his burdened conscience, and confess his iniquity. He will go to the One before Whom he had sinned, and have all out with Him, to His vindication and to his own shame.

The terror of the Lord may alarm, but the goodness of God leads to repentance as here and always. It produces true self-judgment in His sight. But whatever the hope of mercy that draws, spite of shame and self-loathing and grief at one's own sin, the grace of God much more exceeds. "While he was yet a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him much. And the son said to him, Father, I sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his bondmen, Bring out the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fatted calf, kill it; and let us eat and make merry; because this my son was dead and came to life again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry."

How incomparable is God's grace! With slow and sad steps came the prodigal, hope mingling with shame and many searchings of heart, in the rags that told the tale of ruin to the uttermost. Not so the father, who saw him a long way off, but moved with pity, ran, fell on his neck, and covered him with kisses just as he was. What was the impression made by such love? If ever such a vile son, certainly there never was such a father. The son speaks out his conscience, but not "make me as one of thy hirelings": the father's love arrests this. Nor was it after all the humility of grace, but rather of law, drawing inferences from his past misconduct.

But in the gospel it is a question of God's love, giving Christ and resting on what is due to Him and His work, before which the sinner's evil vanishes. "Jesus was found alone," the ground of all blessing. Therefore is it God's righteousness, not man's. The best robe is brought out and put on the repentant prodigal, a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. Beyond all re-instatement, the lost son now found is blessed and honoured as never before. He put on Christ, not Adam even unfallen; he became God's righteousness in Him. He feasts, and not he only but all that are of God on the fatted calf; yea God Himself rejoices in it with a joy proper to Himself and far deeper than that of all the rest, put together.

In the elder son the Lord vividly portrays the self-righteous, the murmurers against grace such as the Pharisees and scribes; and they are many in every age, especially where scripture is current and men boast of religion. As he is represented returning from the fields and approaching the house, the music and dancing there struck his ear offensively, when he learnt from a servant

that it was his father's joy over his returned brother (25-27). He was angry and would not go in (28). And when his father went out and entreated (for what will not grace do?), he answers with self-complacency that insulted his father and the object of his compassion as much as it exalted himself. "Lo these many years do I slave for thee, and never transgressed thy commandments; yet never didst thou give me a kid to make merry with my friends. But when this thy son came that devoured thy living with harlots, thou killedst for him the fatted calf" (29, 30). What an answer of patient love the father's! "Child, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead and came to life again, was lost and is found" (31, 32). It is the day of grace, not judgment. He who despises grace will be judged another day.

11 The Prudent Steward

Luke 16:1-13.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 102-103.)

This parable, though addressed by the Lord to His disciples, is a word of warning and instruction to all. It shows, not the way to the heavenly dwellings, but the character of those who get there.

"There was a certain rich man who had a steward; and he was accused to him as wasting his goods. And having called him, he said to him, What [is] this I hear of thee? Render the account of thy stewardship; for thou canst no longer be steward. And the steward said to himself, What shall I do? because my lord is taking the stewardship from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to

beg. I am resolved what I will do that when I have been removed from the stewardship, I may he received into their houses. And having called to him each one of the debtors of his own lord, he said to the first, How much owest thou to my lord? And he said, A hundred baths of oil. And he said to him, Take thy bill [writings], and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then he said to another And thou, how much owest thou? And he said, A hundred cors of wheat. He saith to him, Take thy bill [writings], and write eighty. And the lord praised the steward of unrighteousness, because he did prudently. For the sons of this age are for their own generation more prudent than the sons of light. And I say to you, Make to yourselves friends from the mammon of unrighteousness that, when it shall fail, ye may be received into the everlasting tabernacles. The faithful in a very little is faithful also in much, and the unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much. If therefore ye were not faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true? And if ye were not faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two lords; for he will either hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (vers. 1-13).

In a general way man, especially the Jew, has wasted the goods entrusted to him, and forfeited his place. But grace gives him the opportunity of turning these earthly things to everlasting account. It is sheer folly to hold fast the brief present, regardless of the unending future. The Lord praises not the past waste any more than the selfish unrighteousness, but the prudence that sacrifices

time and its passing interests in view of the unseen eternity and heavenly glory.

Christ by His infinite sufferings for sin and sinners has made this possible. The first man brought in ruin by sin; Israel made bad worse and earned a curse by his transgression and apostasy. Grace and truth came not by law but by Jesus Christ Whom God made sin for us as He bore the curse, that the guiltiest might through the faith of Him go free. He Whose grace opens the way into blessing beyond all thought has been wronged and plundered without measure. It is not the aim of this parable to show the way in which He is vindicated, and the evils of the sinner are blotted out, and His own righteousness by faith takes the place of man's righteousness sought no matter how assiduously, but always in vain. Thus it comes to pass that no flesh can glory, but he that glories truly must glory in the Lord.

It is Christ alone Who, heard in faith, gives a divinely sound judgment of ourselves and of things around us. Conscience alone is powerless to cope with temptation and blinding wiles of the enemy, ever alluring by what is in sight, seemingly fair and desirable. Without faith it is impossible to please God. To believe in Christ, the Word become flesh and dying for us, the Propitiation for our sins, that we might live of His life, how blessed for us! and how worthy of God! This is grace, this is truth. It centres in Christ, the object of faith; Who gives new eyesight to discern, and decision to abandon the sin-stained present, for an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, reserved in the heavens for the faithful.

How is it then with you, dear reader? Are you setting your mind on earthly things? cleaving to the dust in quest of the unrighteous mammon, instead of making friends out of it that you may be received, when it shall have failed, into the everlasting tabernacles?

Every thing like Judaism is on God's part now obsolete. It is no longer a system of earthly rewards or punishments, of a worldly sanctuary, of present ease, honour, or advantage. Heavenly things are revealed by Him Who was then rejected on earth and is now glorified on high. There alone are the true riches. The bait of Satan is the mammon of unrighteousness. This may procure the pleasures of sin for a season, and present results on the earth. But what will the end be? where must go those who in contempt of Christ lived only for that which is to fail?

The steward's prudence is a lesson for disciples. See the promptness of his course and his careful consideration of the debtors, the generosity too which gave right and left. This, and this alone in the unscrupulous steward, is commended for our imitation. What men call ours is really another's (ver. 12). It is easy to be generous with another's goods; and so faith would consider them. Such is Christ's yoke; and His yoke is easy, His burden light. To accumulate and keep or use for self Is unbelief and covetousness. Faith gives freely, makes friends with what is but mammon, and turns it to everlasting account, when, faithful in a very little, we shall have much. The true riches then shall indeed be ours: for with Christ, His own Son, God will also freely give us all things. We are but stewards now, and are exhorted by the Master to the generosity of grace. It is vain, it is impossible, to serve God and mammon.

12 The Rich man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 117-118.)

In the second half of this chapter the Lord still makes known the truth which came into evidence through His rejection. The light of eternal and heavenly things is let in on the present state and life on earth. The first man is fallen, evil and lost. If the Jew pre-eminently had been God's steward, he was unjust, and his occupation gone. Prosperity was no test of divine favour. That which is exalted among men is. abomination in the sight of God. Since John, the Kingdom of God is preached: it is therefore an urgent question of pressing into it, and this on the part of "every one"; for grace opens the door to any. His death was at hand, which gives the believer even from the tribe of Judah or of Levi righteous deliverance from the law; so that there is no adultery, when one 'belongs to Another raised up from the dead, in order to bear fruit unto God, as the apostle wrote to the Roman saints.

How solemn and momentous the issues in the unseen world!

"Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, making good cheer splendidly day by day. And a certain pauper by name Lazarus was laid at his gate-way, full of sores and desiring to be filled with the things that fell from the table of the rich man; nay, even the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the pauper died and was carried away by the angels into the bosom of Abraham. And the rich man also died and was buried; and in Hades lifting up his eyes being in torments, he seeth Abraham afar off

and Lazarus in his bosom. And calling he said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame. But Abraham said, Child, remember that thou in thy lifetime didst fully receive thy good things, and Lazarus likewise evil things; but now here he is comforted and thou art in anguish. And besides all these things, between us and you a great chasm is fixed, so that those desiring to pass hence unto you cannot, nor those from that side may cross unto us. And he said, I beseech thee then, father, that thou wouldest send him unto the house of my father (for I have five brothers), that he may thoroughly testify to them, lest they too come into this place of torment. But Abraham saith [to him], They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one from the dead go unto them, they will repent. And he said to him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, not even if one rise out of the dead will they be persuaded" (vers. 19-31).

The Saviour depicts a man easy and luxurious in a world of misery, without faith in a world of sin, morally decent, outwardly religious, but living to self and practically infidel. Who did not know it in Israel? Who is not familiar with it in Christendom? Lazarus represents the contrast of the pious beggar laid hard by with none to pity his bodily sores but the. dogs. The Conqueror of death lifts the veil. Then appears the truth for eternity: Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, the rich man that enjoyed himself in torments! What mattered the funeral pomp? or if the poor man had not even a grave? The angels carried the godly soul to the bosom of God's friend; the rich man left the vain and transient show of this world,

and opened his eyes in the flame of Hades, aggravated by the sight of the blessed afar off — yea, of him there who on earth awakened only his disgust. Now he implores of his father Abraham that Lazarus might allay his burning tongue with the merciful touch of water at the tip of the finger!

It is not a picture of resurrection to come, but of what instantly follows death, though expressed in figures drawn from the body through which we now derive our sensations. The believer once wretched is comforted, the godless is in anguish. Like the parable before, it reveals not the means of salvation, but the character and end, whether of the saved or of the lost. Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. If we suffer with Christ, we shall also be glorified with Him. To try to reign now is a danger and delusion: if we endure, we shall also reign together. Even Christ is not reigning yet, but rejected by man He is waiting on the Father's throne.

The latter verses (27-31) bring out the all-importance of faith; as the Jew, long favoured, is now the standing witness of ruin through unbelief. The testimony of God in His word, O.T. or N., is the ground of faith. Even a Lazarus sent from the grave would not avail to convince those who do not listen believingly to Moses and the prophets. In fact another Lazarus was raised by the Lord Jesus not long after; but instead of convincing the Jews, he only provoked the murderous nature of the chief priests and the Pharisees (John 11:47-53). The carnal mind is enmity against God, and rises, proudly and most of all, against His grace in Christ. Yet by grace only are any saved through faith. Hence it is by hearing the word of truth; and this is now in the richest form and fulness,

the gospel of our salvation, as the apostle calls it. For God has gone beyond all thoughts and wishes of man in raising up Jesus our Lord from the dead, Who, as He was delivered for our offences, was raised for our justification.

It is Christ's death and resurrection which alone could save. Therefore is it God's righteousness, not man's, that He might be just and the justifier of him that believeth on Jesus.

There is no other way, no other salvation.. To the poor is the gospel preached; but it had not been God's gospel, unless it were equally open to and reliable for the rich. For the truth of Christ is mighty to make the lowly boast in his elevation, and the rich in his humiliation. To Him be the praise and the glory now and evermore. Amen.

Assuredly for you, my readers, no great gulf is fixed between God and you. Christ is still speaking from heaven as a Saviour that you may believe; and as faith comes by a report, so the report is by the word of God. Your guilty conscience may well dread an impassable gulf; but there is a perfect way, a safe bridge fixed between God and you; and Christ is that way. Oh! take it now, this way to the Father in the Son; for the Holy Spirit deigns and loves to proclaim the glad news to you.

Eighth Series

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2 The Persistent Widow

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4 Christ returning to Reign

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10 Christ the Bread of Life

11 Eating Christ’s flesh, and drinking His blood

12 Christ the corn of Wheat

1 Unprofitable Bondmen

Luke 17:7-10.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 133-134.)

One needs to be saved by Christ before one can serve Him. Salvation is of grace and by faith. It was Christ Who alone bore the burden. We contributed the sins, and nothing else; but awakened by the word and Spirit of God we repented and believed the gospel. How is it with you, dear reader? Beware of going on in dark uncertainty. The true light already shines since the Son of God came. Turn not your back on Him, lest the true character of yourself and your works should be shown as they are. Be honest Godward. Confess yourself a sinner,

and your deeds evil. Receive Jesus as the one divine Saviour, expressly sent by and from God to save the lost. We were indeed bondmen of sin; but set free from sin by the Saviour, we would henceforth yield our members in bondage to righteousness unto holiness, each the Lord's freedman, now Christ's bondman.

We are in a world of snares, pitfalls, and evils. Christ is not only the Saviour but the sole path of safety. Hence an exercised conscience, and a spirit of compassion become those who confess Christ and are saved by grace. Self- judgment is the fruit, a careful walk, and readiness to forgive. As we may not weary of well doing, so neither should we of pardoning. Stumbling-blocks abound and work mischief; woe to him through whom they come! A terrible death were better than to cause one to the least disciple. Our Lord's call is, "Take heed to yourselves." Let fidelity to God rebuke sin; let grace forgive it to the repentant, were it seven times in the day. Do we not know it without limit in Christ? It is the kingdom and patience now. By-and-by it will be power and glory, when He reigns.

No wonder that the apostles said, "Lord, increase our faith." All things are possible to him that believes. Were their faith minute as a grain of mustard, He would have it count on God's power that answers the call for His glory, which roots up a tree, say this mulberry, and plants it in the sea obediently. Man may be weakness itself; yet is it God's purpose in and through man to glorify Himself. Is not the Lord Jesus the sure pledge and the manifest proof of it?

Bought with a price (and what a price!) we are here to obey in all lowliness and meekness. God loves to work in

us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. While faith is encouraged to the utmost, self-complacency is absolutely condemned and excluded. Brokenness of spirit is the fitting preparation for the energy of faith. The Christian here is simply witnessing Him Who is not here, his Lord and the Lord of all. We are not fellow-workers with God, but under Him. We are His fellow-workers, but in entire subjection to Him, in no way on a level with Him. The wording in the A, and R. Versions of 1 Cor. 3:9 and 2 Cor. 6:1 is equivocal and dangerous; if interpreted as it often has been to put God and His servants on a common plane, it is evil and presumptuous. This, scripture repudiates and the new nature surely resents. The parable which follows reduces such a claim to dust.

“But which of you, having a bondman ploughing or keeping sheep, will say to him when come in from the field, Come in straightway and recline at meat? But will he not say to him, Make ready what I shall sup on, and gird thyself and serve me that I may eat and drink; and after that thou shalt eat and drink? Is he thankful to the bondman because he did what was ordered? I judge not. Thus ye also, when ye shall have done all the things ordered you, say, Unprofitable bondmen are we; we have done what we were bound to do” (vers. 7-10).

It is a shameful perversion of serving Christ to make it either a ground of acceptance with God, or a measure of ease or rank among men. Bring in the Master, and behold every such plea exposed as evil and vanishing away. Even Christ pleased not Himself, but according as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on Me. And the great apostle of the Gentiles loved to style himself “bondman of Jesus Christ.” What

an overthrow of human feeling and worldly pride for him, the free-born citizen of Rome, so to introduce himself to all that were in Rome beloved of God, saints by calling! So indeed to the utmost was it with the Lord of all, Who, subsisting in the form of God, did not esteem it robbery to be on equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking a bondman's form, becoming in likeness of men, and being found in figure as man, humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, death of [the] cross.

Here the Lord lays down the servant's place, so readily slipping out of our light hearts. He had shown what faith ever so small can do through God's power. Here He would remind us that we are His bondmen. A great honour it is for us, yet a great reality. It is fellowship with Him in what His love led Him to become.

Time was when we were enemies of God. Death and judgment were then our sure and appointed lot. He interposed and by His sacrifice changed all for those that believe. His love that made Him a bondman constrains us to the same service of love. Whatever our privileges, this is our place: servants not only of Him but for His sake. Has not grace made us debtors to all, to saints and to sinners, to countrymen and to foreigners, to wise and to unintelligent? But pre-eminently and unalienably and always are we Christ's bondmen. In this let us not forget that he who loveth his life shall lose it, and that he who hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. Let us remember that the rule for anyone who may serve Christ is to follow Him, and the issue will be that where He is, there also shall His servant be, and honoured of His Father.

Assuredly the Lord owes us no thanks. It is our privilege as our duty to serve Him in all things great or small, day and night, sick or well. We are His altogether and evermore. Is a master “thankful to the bondman because he did what was ordered? So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all the things ordered you, say, Unprofitable bondmen are we; we have done what we were bound to do.” Never did man speak like this Man, our Master. Others without an exception have thought, that it was enough to confess ourselves unprofitable when we fail to do our duty; He teaches us to say it, when we shall have done all the things ordered us.

How completely His word destroys the vain and unbelieving dream of works of supererogation! Not a single saint was other than His bondman; not a single right work done by anyone of them but was his duty to do. They were God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God before-prepared that they should walk in them. What short-coming themselves found in what others deemed the best! Whatever they were, they had only done what they owed to Him.

2 The Persistent Widow

Luke 18:1-8.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 149-150.)

The closing verses of Luke 17 are occupied with the appearing of the Lord, when He comes in His kingdom and executes judgment on the quick. Hence the comparison is with the days of Noah and of Lot. It is not the heavenly hope dawning, as in Luke 12:32-38; but “the day that the Son of man is revealed” (2 Thess. 1),

when the birds of prey are gathered together over the corpse.

In moral connection with His coming in personal judgment of the earth the Lord intimates the urgent value of prayer.

“And he spake also a parable to them that they must always pray and not faint, saying, There was in a certain city a certain judge, not fearing God and not regarding man; and there was a widow in that city and she kept coming unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he refused for a while; but afterward he said in himself, If even I fear not God and regard not man, yet because this widow is troublesome to me I will avenge her, that she by forever coming may not worry me. And the Lord said, Hear what the judge of unrighteousness speaketh. And shall God in no wise avenge his own elect that cry to him by day and night, and he is long suffering over them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Howbeit, when the Son of man cometh, shall he indeed find faith on the earth?” (vers. 1-8).

As God’s call is the warrant of faith, so faith is exercised in prayer, and rests always on the unseen in the midst of seen experience. And when things are most trying through the prevalence of evil, those that believe are encouraged the more to cry, How long, O Lord? He puts faith to the proof; He can never deny Himself, nor disappoint His people. But endurance is to have a perfect work, that they may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The figures employed were the best possible to encourage: on the one hand a judge of unrighteousness neither fearing God nor respecting man, on the other a

widow wronged by an adversary near enough to inflict so much the greater evil, because he should have been her protector. Yet her persevering cry wore out the judge’s indifference. He could not stand her continual appeal, and, to escape the annoyance, he let her have justice. The Lord reveals the thoughts and motives of the judge’s heart, and draws the believer’s attention to the way in which even now God’s providential ways act in the most reckless and unprincipled on behalf of the oppressed.

But how much more will it be when God rises up in judgment of the world, as He surely will in the person of the Lord Jesus at the end of the age Then will He shine forth as the Judge of the earth: and the elect will have their cry by day and night at length heard, and the wicked triumph no more. They speak arrogantly now, they boast themselves. They will slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. But Jehovah will not cut off His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance. For judgment, instead of diverging to the right or the left, shall return to righteousness, and all the upright in heart shall follow it. So it will be in the day of the Lord’s appearing. She who had long played Him false and sought many lovers will take by repentance ‘the place of the desolate widow, and shall forget the shame of her youth, and the reproach of her widowhood shall He remember no more. For her Maker is her husband in that bright day; and the Holy One of Israel is her Redeemer; the God of the whole earth shall He be called, as indeed He is, and she shall know. He may be long suffering over His own elect in their tribulation; but He will avenge them speedily in that day. For in His hand is a cup, and the wine foameth; it is full of mixture,

and He poureth out of the same, Surely the dregs thereof all the wicked of the earth shall wring out, and drink them; and the horns of the righteous shall be lifted up when those of the wicked also shall be cut off. But it will be a dark hour, not only in the land but elsewhere, and faith seems then extinct as regards public profession up to that mighty intervention.

O my reader, forget not that you still hear the gospel. Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. Him Who knew no sin God made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in Him. Such is His testimony to you. It is not a promise or a hope; it is the most wondrous of all facts in the grace of God; and you, if you have not already believed God as to it, are now called to believe on Christ Whom He gave and sent that you might be saved. To Him and His work of redemption does the Holy Spirit now bear witness in the gospel, which is God's glad tidings to every one that believes. Trifle not with grace so unparalleled. To put it off is to trifle with the will of the Father, the work of the Son, and the witness of the Holy Spirit. Can there be more glaring or guilty unbelief?

Why do you now delay? The atoning work is done. Be it known to you therefore, that through Christ is preached to you forgiveness of sins; and in virtue of Him every one that believes is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. This was no defect of His law, which indeed was God's law and must condemn, not justify, the sinner. But the gospel is from God the good news of Jesus the Lord His Son, the Son of man come to seek and to save that which was lost. Beware then, lest that come upon you which is spoken in the prophets, Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and

perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye will in no wise believe if one declare it to you.

3 The Pharisee and the Tax-Gatherer

Luke 18:9-14.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 164-166.)

From the widow's pertinacity prevailing over the injustice of the wicked judge the Lord drew the assurance of God's avenging at length the cry of the elect. Here He turns to God's pitiful estimate of a contrite spirit despised by haughty self-righteousness. What an encouragement to the poor self-judging one! What a warning to such as presume on their own fancied superiority! Both parables illustrate the moral light here cast on man as he is by the Son of man. They are characteristic of Luke who alone gives them.

"And he spoke also this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and set all the rest at nought. Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee, the other a tax-gatherer. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus to himself, O God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men, rapacious, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax-gatherer. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I gain. And the taxgatherer standing afar off would not lift up even his eyes unto heaven, but kept smiting his breast, saying, O God, be merciful to me, the sinner. 1 tall you, this [man] went down unto his house justified rather than that; because every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (vers. 9-14).

How deeply “Jesus Christ, the Righteous,” resented the spuriousness of a sinner claiming righteousness! how He pitied the soul that really felt its sinfulness before God! He is the Saviour of all that believe the gospel, the Judge of all that disbelieve. Simple yet graphic is the scene, and the sentence sound, sure, and conclusive. But in the haze that overhung the temple the Pharisee had as high a repute as the tax-gatherer had none.

There the Pharisee took a position and poured out his complacency in himself. “O God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men.” Not a word about his sins or even his need. Not a suspicion of his guilt and ruin. He is lifted up with the sense that he was not this or that, extortionate, unjust, adulterous, “or even as this tax-gatherer.” Nor that only; for he boasts his religion. “I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I gain.” It was another Cain. Oh, the many that go in the way of Cain! They come before God as they are; they offer their fasts and their tithes, as they feel assured they are better than the rest of men. What have they done to offend God? Why should they doubt His acceptance of them?

So it is that men still deceive themselves, or even make God a liar, as the apostle expresses it. They cloak their own sins; they denounce other people’s sins; but God is not mocked. His word is that all sinned, and do come short of His glory. But Abel bowed and brought his sacrifice. Fruits of the ground man laboured on could not avail for sin. Death must come between God and the sinner. So Cain righteous in his own eyes had no right sense of his ruin; Abel who was righteous duly felt and owned ruin in his offering, whereas Gain’s denied it. In a word Gain trusted to self, Abel to Another. Sin or death

was nothing to Gain, but great to Abel's faith that looked for the Saviour.

And what of the tax-gatherer? He, standing afar off, would not lift up even his eyes to heaven, but kept smiting his breast, saying, O God, be merciful to me, the sinner. It was his evil that pressed on his spirit, as he cried to God. Not a thought had he of good deeds done, of bad ones avoided. He did not dream of hiding himself in a crowd of sinners or a vague confession. He singled himself as the sinner if ever there was one. What did he know of others? or, even if he had a sight knowledge, he knew himself far better and overwhelmingly. "O God, be merciful to me, the sinner." His light from God might be small, but it was real; and as it disclosed his own sinfulness, he owned himself the sinner. He looked out of himself to God about his condition, without a word of self-commendation, or of comparison with others, or of excuse. No, he was the sinner, and before God he lays himself as he is. On God, a God of grace, he relies in simple real acknowledgement of his ruin.

It was the fear of God, and the beginning of wisdom; and the Lord recognises it accordingly. "I tell you, this man went down unto his house justified rather than that." Hence the general principle follows, "because every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

It was not "justified by faith" so as to have peace with God. The Lord does not describe one who had heard and believed the word of truth, the gospel of salvation. There was not, nor could be yet, the presentation of the great work of grace, Christ's work. God's righteousness in Him had yet to be manifested. But the tax-gatherer was

brought where all the godly in Israel had been before him, to look away from himself to God's mercy; he was believingly taught as a sinner, where the godly outside Israel were taught to renounce self- dependence. See a saint like Job thus broken through severe discipline for his greater blessing: "I have heard of thee by the hearing. of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5, 6).

For sinners or saints repentance there is and must be. Even he whom Jehovah commended as a perfect and upright man, that feared God and eschewed evil, needed it, as He alone turned the fiery trial to that good end. For Job thought too well and much of what grace enabled him to do, and exalted himself in consequence. The enemy failed wholly to shake him. Jehovah touched the weak point through his friends (more ignorant of God and of themselves than Job), who at length humbled himself deeply and was exalted in due time. This was when he prayed in a spirit of grace for his proud and harshly judging friends. What a contrast with the Pharisee! There the tax-gatherer was led in his measure, a case of true repentance, if not so deep as that of Job: both precious in the Lord's eyes. "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than that."

In justification through Christ's blood are found no degrees. By Him all that believe are justified from all things (Acts 13:39). Here it was faith and repentance, and hence a state morally right before God (which the Pharisee's was not), though short of the clearance and liberty which faith in the gospel brings.

4 Christ returning to Reign

Luke 19:12-27.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 180-181.)

The disciples, little knowing God's mind, were impatient for His kingdom. They thought it was immediately to be manifested. They forgot that "first must He suffer many things" and enter into His glory. They overlooked reconciliation by blood as the basis of all: how else could God he glorified or man be saved? The Lord said therefore, "A certain man of high birth went unto a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. And having called his own ten bondmen, he gave them ten pounds (minae), and said to them, Trade till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent an embassy after him, saying, We will not that this [man] reign over us. And it came to pass on his coming back again, having received the kingdom, that he bade these bondmen to whom he gave the money to be called to him, in order that he might know what each gained by trading. And the first came up, saying, Lord, thy pound made ten pounds more. And he said to him, Well [done], good bondman; because in a very little thou wast faithful, be in authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound made five pounds. And he said also to him, And be thou over five cities. And the other came, saying, Lord, behold, thy pound, which I kept laid up in a napkin; for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man; thou takest up what thou didst not lay down, and reapest what thou didst not sow. He saith to him, Out of thy mouth will I judge thee, wicked bondman. Thou knewest that I am an austere man, taking up what I laid not down, and reaping what I did

not sow; and why didst thou not give my money into a bank, and I on coming should have got it with interest? And to the bystanders he said, Take from him the pound and give [it] to him that hath the ten pounds. (And they said to him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say to you, that to every one that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not even what he hath shall be taken from him. Howbeit those my enemies, that would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay before me" (vers. 12-27).

Redemption by Christ's death must be first, and heaven be opened for the redeemed where He is exalted as its answer. He would receive the kingdom as all things not from man but from God. But He will surely return, having received the kingdom. Then will He take account of their service to whom He gave gifts for trading in responsibility to Him during His absence. For we are here in view, not of His receiving His own to Himself for the Father's house, but of His appearing and His kingdom. And they are rewarded according to their fidelity, one more, and another less. It is not gifts differing according to God's sovereignty, but all alike entering their Lord's joy as in Matt. 25; but here each receives alike a pound and is rewarded respectively according to the different result of their work. The two Gospels present the two sides, but are both true. Both show us also the "evil bondman," without a particle of faithfulness. And why? Because he had no faith in his Lord's grace. On the contrary, he insulted Him Who is full of grace and truth as "an austere man," selfish and dishonest as his own heart; and his end is accordingly.

There is reward then for work that pleases the Master, Who will be no man's debtor, but surely requites all in

the coming day. Each bondman shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. But there is a foundation requisite for every one who thus builds; and other foundation can none lay than that laid, which is Jesus Christ. There is and must be faith in His grace for any one to serve Him truly. This the faithful bondmen had, and in the faith of Him they were devoted to His service. This faith the wicked bondman had not, and therefore he served not. He cared only for himself, he wronged his Master and gave the lie to His grace. But he could not escape righteous judgment, and out of his own mouth he was condemned: as those who believed in the Lord's grace receive a righteous reward in the kingdom of glory for their good works.

Take notice, my reader, that it is no question here of heathen but of professing Christians, of the service due to the absent Lord before He appears in His kingdom. Faith in Him, faith in His grace, can alone avail you. Alike is the turning-point for every soul that hears His word; it is the spring of acceptable service, no less than of salvation. How could it be otherwise? The Lord is the Son of man Who came to save the lost at all cost for Himself. God will not tolerate slighting His own Son. Not to believe on Him at God's word is to dishonour both the Father and the Son; and as men thus receive not life eternal, they must come into judgment, and hence inevitably into the second death. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." O unbeliever, what bliss do you not lose? what woe do you not gain?

Then the Lord speaks of another guilty class; not the wicked servant, but His citizens sent an embassy after Him when He went on high, saying, We will not have this

man reign over us. They are the Jews that hate Him, instead of professing to serve Him. When the true servants shine in the honours of the kingdom, what will be their portion, His open enemies that would not have Him, Messiah their king, reign over them? Those who repent not will fall under His destructive judgment. Bring them hither, says He in the parable, and slay them before Me. For when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and to be marvelled at in all them that believed, there will also be the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven, rendering vengeance to those that know not God, and to those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Jews that hate and Gentiles that despise the Saviour must suffer the due reward of their rebellious unbelief and their evil deeds. How would it be, how is it, with you that read these words? Do not assume that God is indifferent, like you.

5 The Shepherd of the sheep

John 10:1-6.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 198-199.)

The similitudes of the Fourth Gospel differ from the parables of the other three, and have another name. They are sayings by the way or proverbial allegories, and like all the doings and sayings of John's Gospel, they set out the Lord personally, the grace and truth which came by Him. Here is the first of the cluster.

"Verily, verily I say to you, He that entereth not, by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbeth up elsewhere, he is a thief and a robber; but he that entereth by the door is shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice; and he

calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out. When he hath put forth all his own, he goeth on before them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice. And a stranger they will in no wise follow, but will flee from him, because they know not the voice of strangers. This proverb (or, allegory) spoke Jesus to them; but they understood not what things they were which he spoke to them" (vers. 1-6).

With the solemn formula that occurs so often in his Gospel, the Lord introduces His description, not of the shepherd of the sheep, but of a thief and a robber. He does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up elsewhere. God distinguished the door by plain marks that the sheep might discern the Shepherd, Who came from and was sent by Himself. For they were precious to Him no less than to the Son. And the Son was zealous for the Father's house and would enter by the appointed way and none other. He, the mighty God, deigned to be the Messiah, the Shepherd of Israel, and so to become the Seed of Abraham, the son of David, and born of the Virgin. Through Micah (Micah 5:2) Jehovah named Bethlehem as the place of His birth. Out of it should He come forth unto Him that was to be ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Nor was the time left vague. Through Daniel He fixed it by weeks (of years) to elapse, from the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem (issued by Artaxerxes Longimanus), after which Messiah should be (not born nor manifested nor reigning, but) "cut off and have nothing." So also He does not fail to announce in this chapter as in John 3:14 too.

Others sought their own things by craft or violence. He came in a love unmistakably of God, in an obedience

that left nothing to desire, always doing in an evil world the things that pleased the Father. Prophecy pointed Him out no more plainly than the grace and truth which came by Him, or the signs of beneficent power which studded the path of light that could not be hid. He entered by the door, and “to him the porter openeth.” The Spirit of God deigned to work in this as in all others to glorify the Lord. Notably we perceive this by the testimony of Simeon, and of Anna a prophetess in early days, but above all by John the Baptist the divinely appointed herald of the Messiah, when the time drew near for His public ministry.

It was for him who was but “a voice of one crying in the wilderness” to say, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Nor was it in vain for those given to see according to God. For “the sheep hear his voice;” and as He said in John 5:25, “they that hear shall live.” There was faith, without which it is impossible to please God; and with faith life. For life was in Him from everlasting to everlasting. It belonged to His eternal person as the Word and the Son (John 1:3, 1 John 5:11); and when He took the place of man, as the Sent One, the Father gave Him to have life in Himself, yet not for Himself simply, but that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have life eternal, and this in hearing His voice (vers. 24, 25). It might not yet be life in resurrection, but it was life eternal; for it was in the Son, and the Son has none other for the believer. Verily, verily I say to you, He that believeth on Me hath life eternal (John 6:47). There is no exception. A robber just converted, and an apostle behind none, have just the same life. Christ lived in both; and He is the true God and the eternal life.

But what tender care in the Shepherd! “He calleth his own sheep by name.” His love is in the fullest way personal. His interest is in each personally, and He would have all to know it. What could evince it more than His calling His own sheep by name? So the apostle wrote, for those who believe as well as himself, He loved me, and gave Himself for me.

A change is next announced of great moment, especially for Jews. He “leadeth them out.” God had given His ancient people much advantage every way. But they had received not His Son, the Shepherd of Israel, hating Him to the utmost, and about to cry, Crucify Him, crucify Him. And He, knowing the end from the beginning, leadeth His sheep out of the fold, more and more the den of thieves and robbers, already the seat of His enemies. It might be done through the violence of others, as when the blind now seeing was cast out by the reviling Jews. But in effect He leadeth them out, as would be true for all His own in due time.

But there is more; and it is of transcendent importance. “When he hath put forth all his own, he goeth on before them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice.” Later in the chapter He explains how this was to be. He would give Himself for them. It would be by nothing less than His death and resurrection: such was His love, and such their need. Thus only could they be secured, or fitted for the new place of blessing. For even Caiaphas soon after prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation, and not for that nation only, but that He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad (John 11:51, 52) — a yet larger view than ver. 4 presents, and needing ver. 16 to supplement it. And what a safeguard for their difficulties

and dangers grace provides the sheep! “They know his voice.” This enables them to “follow him,” as it preserves them from misleaders.

“And a stranger they will in nowise follow, but will flee from him, because they know not the voice of strangers.” So the Lord lays down the truth for His own. He does not here state the possible wandering of any sheep, but presents the only way of life. Others might occupy themselves with errors and evils, a pursuit not without danger of defilement, The wisdom of the Christian is to he content with His voice which gave him life from the first, and to delight increasingly in Christ to the last fleeing from a stranger and knowing not the voice of such.

It was a deep allegory, and looked on to that which was not yet accomplished. We need not, then, wonder that as yet the Saviour’s words were not understood.

6 The Door

John 10:7-10.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 212-214.)

In the previous verses our Lord speaks of Himself as the Shepherd of the sheep entering the fold of Israel by the door or God-appointed means.

Here, for the best reasons and the fuller display of the grace and truth which came by Him, He presents Himself as the Door of the sheep, rather than of the fold.

“Jesus therefore said to them again, Verily, verily, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All as many as came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: through me if any one enter,

he shall be saved, and he shall go in and shall go out, and he shall find pasture. The thief cometh not but that he may steal and slay and destroy; I came that they might have life, and have [it] abundantly" (vers. 7-10).

The fold is here left aside. What could Judaism avail for the saints any more than sinners? Christ is the door of the sheep. They might be cast out like the blind man whom He caused to see. Where were they to turn, and whither go? "I am the door of the sheep." He is the entrance to the new and abiding blessings of God for His own, the entrance to the God that blessed them, yea, to the Father, as they learn in due time. He is the object of faith now more clearly than ever; as He had been truly, if dimly, since sin came into the world. All believers looked to Him that was coming, the Messiah; but now He is revealed as incomparably more.

Had any claimed the sheep? "All as many as came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them." For God protects His own. They might boast and say that they were somebody, like Theudas; they might draw after them a people in revolt like Judas of Galilee. But they were thieves and robbers; and none followed whom the Son made free, only Abraham's seed but not his children.

In ver. 9 He describes Himself in fewer words which convey far more, "I am the door." It is not merely "of the sheep"; it is for any. "I am the door: through me if any one enter, he shall be saved, and he shall go in and shall go out, and he shall find pasture." Can words be more precise or more full? Can blessing for a needy soul be more suited, rich, and secure? He is the door absolutely, away from all evil into all good.

It is Christianity in contrast with Judaism or any other earthly religion. To enter through the door is to believe on Jesus the Son of God. He that does is on His word assured of salvation; “he shall be saved.” This, mark it well, is given to him that enters through Christ. No such assurance attends another than the Son of God. He is the Saviour, and none else. The church consists of the saved, but cannot save: only Christ can and does. A false church may set up to save; the true church repudiates such a pretension as a lie and a blasphemy. She is but the body, He is the Head; she is the bride, He the Bridegroom. She, being true, is jealous of His honour; she rejects with horror all thought of setting herself in His place as of Satan. She has the Spirit now, as He had when here; but the Spirit does not glorify her but Him. All her privileges are in virtue of Him, and are rightly turned but to His praise.

Salvation then, as it is of God’s grace, is through Christ. “Through me if any one enter, he shall be saved.” It is not for the Jew only but for the Gentile also; it is for “any one.” But he must enter through Christ. Through Me if any one enter, he shall be saved. He may be baptised and be lost; he may take the Lord’s Supper, and be lost. If any one enter through Christ, he shall be saved. This He declares; and His words shall endure when heaven and earth pass away.

O my reader, do you believe His words? Do you believe on Himself? Unless He were what He is, unless He were Who He is, neither you nor any other sinner could be saved. But being the Son and becoming the sacrifice for sin, salvation is now open to the poorest of sinners who believes on Him. “Through me if any one enter, he shall be saved.” He is the door; and He tells you so. Have you

heard Him and entered? Have you taken Him at His word? This is to believe. Do you then believe on the Son of God?

Nor is salvation all that He is now giving. He gives liberty: or as He says here of “any one” that enters through Him, “he shall go in and shall go out.” It is in contrast with the penned-up condition of the sheep under Judaism. The law genders bondage; it could not confer freedom. Only the truth, the Son, makes free; and “if the Son therefore makes you free, ye shall be free indeed.” So here “he shall go in and shall go out.” This is divine emancipation, to us without money or price, to God at the cost of His Son.

There is yet more. For we need now, not salvation nor freedom only, but food; and this He next guarantees. He that enters through Christ “shall find pasture.” As He had before taught, the best food is Himself not incarnate only, but dead for us, so that by faith we eat His flesh and drink His blood. This is what most nourishes the soul, communion with His death.

O my reader, turn not a deaf ear to God’s glad tidings. Fear to treat such a Saviour with indifference. Beware of putting off to a more convenient season. God is not mocked. To slight God’s law was bad; to neglect His gospel is a great deal worse. The enemy is busy and near. “The thief cometh not but to steal and slay and destroy.” This Satan loves, and his servants are many. “I came,” says the Lord, “that they [believers] might have life, and have it abundantly.” Here He makes a brief transition to His death and resurrection, that the saved might enjoy life, as they do now, in the power of His resurrection.

7 The Good Shepherd

John 10:11-18.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 230-231.)

Very direct are these words of the Lord. What blessing to receive them in faith! what guilt and ruin to despise Him and them!

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep. But he that is a hireling, and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming and leaveth the sheep and fleeth; and the wolf seizeth them and scattereth. Now the hireling fleeth because he is a hireling, and he hath no care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know mine own and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: those also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall be one flock, one shepherd. On this account doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again: this commandment I received of my Father” (vers. 11-18).

In Isa. 40:11, of the Lord Jehovah it is said, “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom — shall gently lead those that give suck.” Here He Himself goes much farther. He proves Himself the Good Shepherd by laying down His life for the sheep: none other would, nor, if any other be conceived, could it avail with God or for man.

Rejected He was, with hatred for His love; but nothing turned Him from His purpose of grace. He was the Good Shepherd; and as such He lays down His life for the sheep. Such love bespoke itself divine; it characterised His person and God's nature, but in man, which alone made it possible. Beyond doubt only thus could they be, only thus were they, reconciled to God; but here His laying down His life is the evidence and acme of devoted love in Him, Who acts freely and never was more consciously God than in His atoning death.

What a contrast with him who is a hireling and not a shepherd; whose own the sheep are not! Beholding the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and flees, while the wolf seizes and scatters them; And so it is, because a hireling he is and careth not for the sheep.

But Jesus only is the Good Shepherd here. Others there have been who love the sheep in their measure, and so feed and tend them. But here where He is thus introduced, they have no mention but mush vanish away. They were not entitled to call theirs the sheep, which in fact are "the flock of God." The sheep were Christ's own. Even if the wolf should catch any, not even the wolf shall catch them (the same word) out of Christ's hand. To kill the wolf would have been incomparably easier than to lay down life for them; and this He did, Who had no sin but love, no fear any more than selfish object, Who always did the things pleasing to His Father. And as the Good Shepherd He could say, "I know mine own, and mine own know me; even as my Father knoweth me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." It is the fullest evidence of His devotedness in love for them. His knowledge of them, and theirs of Him, He compared with the Father's knowing Him and His

knowing the Father. What can be conceived so satisfying and perfect?

Gracious and powerful is the love the O.T. reveals in Messiah for His flock, “His beautiful flock” as it will surely be. But what is even that to a loving and mutual knowledge of the Shepherd and the sheep, so intimate that it could only be matched by the Father’s and the Son’s knowledge of one another! In this case is absolute and intrinsic excellence beyond thought or question; in the other, oh! what and how many faults on our side! But love in Him never fails; and we are entitled to count on it in our knowledge of Him as in His of us. This is grace divine, superior to all that it finds, and everlasting.

Such is the depth of the Good Shepherd’s love; but He intimates a width far beyond His disciples’ thoughts. “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring [or, lead], and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become [or, be] one flock, one shepherd.”

Thus He points to the call of Gentiles by the gospel. If most of the Jews turned a deaf ear, many Gentiles have heard and do hear. For no criterion is truer than this. As He deigns to lead them also, “they shall hear my voice.”

O my reader, how is this with you? His voice is not of one crying in the wilderness like His herald. He, when here, frequented not the wilderness only but the hillside, and the riverside, and the villages, and the towns, and the cities. He preached the gospel to the poor emphatically; and when His work here was done, He charged His servants to preach the gospel to all the nations, the whole creation. Had Jerusalem been most guilty? To all, said He, “beginning with Jerusalem.”

Is not this glad tidings to you, whoever you are, whatever you may have been? Redemption depends on the Redeemer, not on the redeemed, save that they "hear His voice." Oh! then repent and believe the gospel. Never can you truly worship or serve Him, till you receive Him, believing on His name. In vain is every other resource; nay, to trust any ordinance, in order to reconciliation with God, dishonours both the Father and the Son. When you have Him as your life, they find their place.

Of one great added privilege the Saviour speaks here. "They shall (Jews and Gentiles) be one flock, one Shepherd." It was a quite new thing from God: "one flock" (not "fold" as formerly), "one Shepherd." Oh, how sad the change man has made! and how guilty the excuse to cloak it as one flock consisting of many folds! Why do Christians thus defraud the Lord, disguise or corrupt the word, and forfeit their own fidelity and their own fuller blessing? Not so. To set up a fold now is no better than Judaising. There is, as the Lord's will and truth, but one flock, as there is but one Shepherd in the supreme sense. And every Christian is bound to own this One and no other rival. In Him all the fulness dwells.

But let us hear also His own wondrous words. On this account doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again." Christ here omits "for the sheep" and presents His death as in itself furnishing a motive to the Father's love. None but He could; none but His divine person. As such He declares, "no one taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power [or, title] to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." None but the One Who is both God and man in one person could thus speak; and so while He speaks as

divine, He does not fail to remember the place of sent One and servant He had taken. “This commandment I received from my Father.”

8 Feet-washing

John 13:1-15.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 244-246.)

The Lord was going on high. Of this He treats henceforth till the closing scenes on earth. It was an immense surprise to the disciples, who looked for His restoring the Kingdom to Israel at that time. His departure to the Father would begin that new order of things which we know as Christianity.

“Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being come, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s [son] to betray him, [Jesus] knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he came from God and goeth unto God, riseth from supper, and layeth aside his garments, and having taken a towel girded himself; then he poureth water into the bason, and began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. He cometh therefore unto Simon Peter. He saith to him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and saith to him, What I do, thou knowest not now, but shalt come to know hereafter. Peter saith to him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, if I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith to him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my

hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is wholly clean: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew him that should betray him; on this account he said, Ye are not all clean. When therefore he washed their feet and took his garments, reclining again he said to them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me the Teacher and the Lord; and ye say well, for I am. If I therefore the Lord and the Teacher washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For gave you an example, that ye should do even as I also did to you" (vers. 1-15).

It was a new and profound testimony to His love-love to the uttermost: not in His work on the cross in suffering once for their sins, but in His provision for His beloved ones against every defilement by the way. In this act of washing the disciples' feet we have mystically His advocacy with the Father if any one should have sinned. Was the devil then goading on the traitor? Our Lord Jesus shows what His love would do in heaven for His failing ones. He would fulfil all the meaning of stooping to wash their feet. The glory conferred on Him, the infinite purity that returned to God as unstained as when He came out from Him, only attested His grace and adequacy to their need and what was due to divine majesty. It was a question of restoring communion interrupted by defilement; and the Lord met it by a way as unfailing for the saint, as His atoning death for the sinner. "This is he that came by water and blood, Jesus Christ."

Here it is not blood but water. As His blood alone could cleanse us from all sin before God, so do we need what the water typifies. According to His mercy God: saved us through washing of regeneration and renewing of the

Holy Spirit. Thus are we bathed or washed all over, a new creation in Christ. But this does not dispense with the need of washing for the feet, soiled by walking through this miry world. Only Christ could effect either; and He does effect both through the Holy Spirit and the word. He is the Advocate with the Father.

Saints are apt to misunderstand this, as we see Peter did; and the Lord corrected his hasty thoughts. How much had Peter to learn! how much have you? The Lord's gracious work in heaven is as indispensable as His work once for all on the cross. Not that regeneration is repeated. "He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet." Peter, who understood little as yet, soon learnt what it is to defile his feet, and what it is for the Saviour to wash them. For indeed He prayed that Peter's faith should not fail, though his faithfulness did deeply. But His grace restored him, and made him afterwards such a strengthener of his brethren as he never was before. When Peter reached the lowest point of the mire, "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord." What a witness to this service which the Lord now carries on above for His failing ones on earth! It is the washing of water by the word, which applies for our regeneration at the start, and for our restoration at every occasion of need. It it were not so, one could have no part with Christ; but this He secures by His constant love in washing our feet when defiled.

O my reader, are you then bathed? Are you regenerate and renewed by the Spirit? If not, there is but one door, but one way. Jesus alone can avail you. Believe God's word concerning Him. This is faith, without which it is impossible to please God. All things, says He, are

possible to him that believes. Such are washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. Otherwise you are still in your sins. If you only profess the Lord's name, but believe not in your heart, so much the more awful is your case.

Abide no longer under the wrath of God, as you do if not subject but disobedient to His Son. He is as willing as He is able. Turn not from His grace. He refuses none, but accepts every one who comes to Him, and will raise him up at the last day. From first to last the Lord Jesus undertakes for the believer. His sheep, as He declares, shall not perish, nor shall any one seize them out of His hand.

How wonderful it is that we who believe are called to like grace with one another! Christ would have us wash one another's feet. Is this our way, or our desire, before our God and Father? It is vain, unless we be spiritual. Such alone can restore a fallen brother in a spirit of meekness. Be it ours thus to seek grace from our God.

9 The vine

John 15 (B.T. Vol. N2, p. 261-262.)

The disciples were used to regard Israel as the vine of Jehovah's planting. He brought it out of Egypt and planted it in the land on which His eyes rested. But the Psalm (80), which tells us so, mourns its actual devastation by the wild beasts of the field, and beseeches Him to visit this vine, as He will by the Son of man. Here the Lord meanwhile sets aside Israel altogether, and substitutes Himself for that empty vine. Christ is the True Vine, and His Father is the Husbandman. This is clearly, not His office in heaven as

Advocate (John 13), nor His coming as our Hope to place us with Himself in the Father's house (John 14), but His relation to His own on earth for fruit-bearing. Christ is all.

Hence we see throughout that it is the responsibility of the disciple to depend on Christ, to cleave to Him, to refer all to Him. Thus only is fruit borne to His praise, and the Father glorified. Throughout our abiding has the first place, and it is a question of "if." The very reverse appears invariably where God presents salvation by grace.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh it away; and every one that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it that it may bring forth more fruit. Already ye are clean on account of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you: even as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abide in the vine, so neither ye unless ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye the branches: he that abideth in me and I in him, he beareth much fruit; for apart from me ye can do nothing. Unless one abide in me, he is cast forth as the branch and is withered; and they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask whatever ye will, and it shall come to pass for you. In this is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit, and ye shall become disciples to me" (vers. 1-8).

Luminous as these words are, bias has misunderstood them, Calvinists and Arminians wresting them, each to his scheme. Both start with the assumption that the figurative language means union with Christ, or

membership of His body. But His body is never taught in our Gospel nor indeed by any but the apostle Paul; and though union is elsewhere, it is not here, but communion. Union is a settled fact in the spiritual realm, on the basis of Christ's death (John 11:52) and by the given Spirit's power (John 17:11, 21, 22, 23). But communion is conditional, and hence may or may not be, as it depends on abiding in Christ.

For this reason it is not a question here of believing on Christ to life eternal, but of abiding in Him and bearing fruit. Man's will for this wholly fails; the chosen people have no power more than others; the law is in vain; and so is the church. Angels, saints living or departed, the Virgin, are but sinking sand. Christ is the True Vine, Christ only. The branch cannot bear fruit of itself; apart from Him it can do nothing.

It is the responsible position of all that call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. All such have left Gentilism or Judaism for Christ. It may be a heart or a lip confession of Christ; but those that confess Him are all branches in the Vine. He is the True Vine; but they may not be true branches. If they abide in Him, they bear fruit; if they do not, they are sooner or later taken away. They may leave Him, or, if put away, they may never be restored either inwardly or outwardly. So we read (John 6:66) that many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him. So it was going to be manifest in Judas, one of the Twelve. They were branches in the Vine; they confessed His name. But if they did not abide, they hence bore no fruit for His Father, The truest branch needs pruning, or cleansing, by the Father, that it may bear more fruit; but every branch that is true bears fruit. Those that are untrue prove it by not abiding in Christ, and hence by

bearing no fruit, self- confident and active though they may be.

The Lord Jesus is life eternal to those that believe on Him. This however is not the subject which is here treated of. It is rather how to bear fruit; and abiding in Christ is its source and way. He is not only life, but the rule of life; and as He is absolutely what He also speaks, His word expresses it fully. By His word were they begotten afresh; on account of it they were already clean. To abide in Him, and have His words abiding in them, draws out in suited prayer and ensures the answer. There is thus much fruit to the glory of the Father, and Christ is not ashamed of them as His disciples. Not to abide in Him, after knowing and confessing Him, is worse than never to have heard, and leaves those who abandon Him as dried up branches of the Vine, only fit for the burning. Such souls never had life in the Son.

How is it then with you, dear reader? Do you yearn after fruit acceptable to God the Father? Is it in your heart to serve the Lord Jesus? You cannot, unless you abide in Him. If you strive to abide in Him in order to service and fruit-bearing, it will be a failure. And the Lord here solemnly warns of failure, as He explains the secret of realising. Begin with taking the place of a guilty and lost sinner that you may be saved through grace by believing on Christ. Thus only is life eternal given. “Verily, verily I say to you, He that believeth hath life eternal.” “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of life eternal.”

The responsibility of bearing fruit attaches to all who confess Christ. If you believe on Him at God’s word, you have life in Him, and will respond to His call of abiding

in Him; if it be but confessing Him on evidence satisfactory to your own mind, you will play fast and loose, and turn away on pressure or to please yourself. This is the reverse of abiding in Him, and it is the prelude to everlasting judgment.

10 Christ the Bread of Life

John 6:35-51.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 277-278.)

From the sign of the miraculously multiplied bread the Lord turns those who sought Him to the true bread which the Father gives out of heaven. They had been of a mind by force to make him King; He would receive the kingdom only in due time from His Father. He therefore goes up on high meanwhile to pray. But now on the other side He explains that during Israel's unbelief it is no question of accomplishing their hope now, but of receiving life eternal for resurrection and the heaven to which He was going. It is Christianity in short, and not yet the kingdom restored to Israel.

"Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He that cometh unto me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said to you, that ye have both seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me, and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out; because I am come down from heaven, not to do my will but the will of him that sent me. And this is the will of him that sent me that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father that everyone that beholdeth the Son and

believeth on him should have life eternal; and I will raise him up at the last day" (35-40).

The Bread of life is not a rite or a sacrament, but the Incarnate Word. He is the object of faith presented, that needy, famishing, souls may have life eternal. The manna in the wilderness was a witness to Him, little as they knew who ate of it and died there. The Lord Jesus is the Bread of God that comes down out of heaven and gives life not to Israel only but to the world. Him the Father God sealed. But so it was the right time to unfold a higher and larger work as the Son of man, rejected by the Jews. Faith receives in Him this rich gift, life eternal. The unbelief of man, yea of the chosen people, only brings out more grace from God the Father in the Son.

But the blessing is only to faith. "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." Nothing but coming to Himself by faith can avail. Those who saw Him without believing were no better for it but the worse. Those who resort to images of Him find only a blind. Those who lean for life eternal on any ordinance, even of Him, set up a rival to their shame. He is the object of faith for life eternal. "He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father that sent Him." And the Father's will is that all honour the Son, even as they honour the Father: if they honour Him not by faith unto life eternal, they must in His judgment of them to everlasting perdition.

It is beautiful to see how perfectly the Son of the Highest becomes His Servant, now to save, as by-and-by to administer the glory. He chooses none for saving; He leaves all with Him Who sent Him. "All which the Father

giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." On the one hand is the security of the children; on the other is the free grace of the gospel. For this has Christ come down out of heaven, Who alone could give either effect according to the Father's will, that none of that He had given should be lost, and that every one who believeth on the Son should have life eternal, Christ raising all up in the last day. For He brings to view not the present power of the kingdom on earth, but life for the soul now, and for the body resurrection.

When the Jews murmured incredulously, the Lord urges the more the need of the Father's drawing those He Himself should raise in the last day, and cites the prophets accordingly. Then He sums up with His solemn asseveration. "Verily, verily, I say to you, He that believeth on me hath life eternal. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and died. This is the bread that cometh down out of heaven that one may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven: if one eat of this bread, he shall live for ever" (vers. 47-51).

The Incarnate Saviour thus stands before us, the food of faith in the wilderness world. Have you, dear reader, gone to Him? For He is thus revealed in the written word that you might come to Him and believe on Him. Life is in Him for sinful man, in Him only for him that believes on earth, in Him life eternal for the most guilty, untoward, and proud. So He assures us without hesitation or condition, save that we believe on Him. And this is the one thing the sinner does most of all pleasing to the Father, jealous as He is for His glory Whom man despised for His grace. "Whosoever denieth

the Son, hath not the Father either; he that confesseth the Son hath the Father also." All that is good follows faith through grace.

May this be your present and everlasting portion!

11 Eating Christ's flesh, and drinking His blood

John 6:53-58.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 293-294.)

There is a marked change in our Lord's discourse. He turns from His incarnation to His death. In both cases He speaks of eating. It is the well-known figure of scripture for appropriation or communion. He was not only the Living Bread that came down out of heaven, that one might eat and live for ever. He would give His flesh for the life not of Jews only but of mankind, or as He says "for the life of the world."

But not a trace of ordinances is in either. It is a question of Himself, first living, then dead. He only was entitled to speak of giving life to the world. He through Whom the world came into being, He could quicken the dead; and such was and is the moral condition of all through sin (John 5:24, 25). He, the new Man, is the object of faith giving life. And it is for any, for the Gentile as well as the Jew. Baptism and the Lord's supper have their place by the Lord's institution till He come; but scripture attributes quickening to Him, not to them. In Him, not in them, was life. It is a falsehood of Christendom to claim an attribute which is His for a rite in the hands of men who thereby arrogate a dignity not only unreal but profane. All through this discourse, as in all other scripture, notably in John's Gospel at large and in his

great Epistle, life is in the Son; so that he who believes has the Son and has life, as he that has not the Son of God has not life.

Only now He insists on faith in Him dead. This was yet more repulsive to unbelief than faith in Him living. But the Lord did not soften the truth to make it more palatable. He presents it in pointedly strong terms, peremptorily demanding its reception. Did the Jews contend with one another, saying, How can a man give us his flesh to eat? “Jesus therefore said to them, Verily, verily, I say to you, Except ye shall have eaten the flesh of the Son of man and drunk his blood, ye have no life in yourselves. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath life eternal, and I will raise him up at the last day; for my flesh is truly food, and my blood is truly drink. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, he also that eateth me, he too shall live because of me. This is the bread that came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died: he that eateth this bread shall live for ever” (vers. 53- 58).

Till His death there was no atonement. Sin was not yet judged in an adequate sacrifice, nor was God vindicated, still less glorified. In the cross He was; and remission of sins could be proclaimed in the name of Jesus Christ. Whosoever called on the name of the Lord should be saved. Hence faith in the Incarnate Word, wherever real, received the wondrous tidings of His death, as alone reconciling a sinful soul to God. Fallen man had no title to life eternal; and He Who was eternal life died for sin and to bear the sins of all who believed, that they might have that life without the sins blotted out by His blood.

Therefore did all, who received Him incarnate from God, welcome the more deeply Him that died for sins and to sin, that every inconsistency with the new and divine life might be cancelled. How thankfully did they eat His flesh and drink His blood! Those who stumbled at Him thus dead, refusing to eat His flesh and drink His blood, proved thereby that they had no due sense of His grace nor of their own ruin by sin. Their professed faith in Him incarnate was unreal; had it been true, they would have hailed with deeper satisfaction His going down into death to do away with every effect of sin. From this they revolted, because they had no such conviction of their own evil, no such assurance of His love, even God's love.

But the Lord intimates more, and lets us know that if one has eaten His flesh and drunk His blood, he will not be content with once partaking of Him; he will continue to find in Him that best food. "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath life eternal, and I will raise him up at the last day." For His flesh is true food and His blood is true drink (as some of the best MSS. here say). "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him." To have thus partaken of Him dead is life eternal, but more than this: to make Him dead our habitual spiritual food is to ensure the communion of His love to the uttermost. Thus does one abide in Him and He in him; and one lives, not only through Him but on account of Him, as He lived on account of the Father, the motive and reason of being.

We may observe too how carefully the Lord in verse 58 binds together the incarnation and His death. This is quite inconsistent with a rite; it is His person living and dead, the one source of life eternal to the believer. If a rite be fancied here, it would involve the twofold and

fatal error: that none who failed to partake of the Lord's supper could have life; and that he who does partake of His supper has life eternal and must rise in the resurrection of the just.

O my reader, be not deceived. The Lord's supper indeed refers to Christ's death, to which this portion of John 6 refers. But He speaks only of faith in Him Who died for sin and sinners, that they believing on Him may have life. Therefore not to the communicant as such, but to the believer is the Lord's assurance of life eternal. Turn away therefore from every substitute for Himself, Who is the only Saviour, the one substitute for your sins. Sacraments are admirable signs, but ruinous when they displace Christ and faith in Him.

12 Christ the corn of Wheat

John 12:24.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 308-309.)

A very characteristic truth in the Gospel of John is the Son of God come, the Word become flesh, Who is life eternal and gives it to the believer. But nowhere have we a fuller witness to the efficacy of His death. His work is for us as necessary and as blessed in itself and in its effect as His person: God's glory is concerned most nearly in both (John 1:29; John 3:14, 16; John 6:51-58; John 8:28; John 10:9-11, 15-18; John 11:51, 52; John 12:32).

At this point of the Gospel testimony is rendered to Him in three aspects: first, as marked out Son of God in power by resurrection, in John 11; secondly, as Messiah, King of Israel, David's Son and David's Lord, in John 12:12-16; and lastly, as Son of man with rights over all

flesh, yet (as we see in our text) about to die to have others sharing His blessedness and glory. Let us consider this last particular a little more fully.

The Son of God was in the world which He had made; yet the world, boasting of its knowledge, knew Him not, the highest, best, most momentous of all knowledge. He came to His own things, for He was also Messiah, “the born King of the Jews”; yet His own people, if not so ignorant, were more guilty still than the world, and received Him not. Hence, when certain Greeks, of those coming up to worship at the feast of Passover, made known through disciples their desire to see Jesus, He answered, saying, “The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say to you, Except the corn of wheat falling into the earth die, itself abideth alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit.” The entire vista of His humiliation unto death and of its blessed result opens before Him and receives suited expression in these wondrous word.

Have you then heard Him in faith? Are you not nearly and deeply concerned? The rejection of the Son, Who is also Messiah, leads in marvellous grace to the fulfilment and disclosure of God’s counsels. The Jews and the world at large were verily evil, openly proved enemies. His speaking to them as He did left them without excuse for their sin; His working among them as none other had done made other sin as nothing in comparison: for, as things were, they had both seen and hated both Him and His Father. Did the Jews by hand of lawless Gentiles crucify and slay the Lord of glory? It was by the grace of God He tasted death for every one. The greatest wrong of man confronted the love of God; which triumphed over sin and Satan in effecting redemption by His blood.

Then, in being raised from the dead, He only and now is the Second man and Last Adam, by Whom all that believe are justified. Thereon, when the Jews refused the gospel of Him dead and risen, the word of salvation was sent to the nations or Gentiles. It is here for you now. He came to do God's will in His death as the perfect offering and sacrifice, which sums up yet surpasses all others. And again it is God's will that the glad tidings of remission of sins and life eternal should come to you. "Hear, and your soul shall live." Did not God say, even of old looking onward to Him. "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters"? Be reconciled to God.

Where man saw in the cross shame, and the deepest shame, the Saviour saw glory. If this was moral glory, heavenly glory is its answer: "Wherefore also God highly exalted Him." "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified." So we read in Psalm 8. If the rejected Messiah of Psalms 2, 8 go down into death (compare Heb. 1, 2), He is the Son of man also crowned with glory and honour on high, though now we see not yet all things subjected to Him. But we by faith see Him in heaven, the pledge that they shall be. This will be when at His coming He raises those that are His to reign with Him, as 1 Cor. 15 declares. And it Agrees with what He Himself here says, "Except the corn of wheat falling into the earth die, itself abideth alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit." That the victims of sin might be delivered, sin itself judged, Satan vanquished for eternity, God Himself glorified in man, and His love free to bless perfectly, He, the true grain of wheat, fell into the earth and died. Without that atoning death the glory had been His alone. But now what abundant "fruit"! They that are His are cleansed whiter than snow by His

blood; they live of His life; they are children of God, and shall never perish. They are sealed by the Spirit. Through Christ they have the entry by one Spirit unto the Father; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

The Greeks, like all Gentiles indeed, were apart from Christ, having no hope, and godless in the world; and it would soon be proved that the Jews, notwithstanding their great privileges, were no better but guiltier and therefore worse: all alike children of wrath. Neither living grace nor almighty power in Jesus could meet the desperate need. Nothing short of atoning death could avail. Without death He abode alone; but dying He bears much fruit in resurrection. And how scripture teems with testimony to this truth!

Oh, is it not a great thing to he part of His much fruit”? How blind, wretched, and sinful, to despise Him Who alone makes it good? What must it be to wake up to the awful evil of unbelief, when it is irretrievable?

Ninth Series

1 The Demoniac Mute

2 The Withered Hand healed

3 The Blind and Dumb

4 The Five Thousand fed

5 Jesus walking on the sea

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1 The Demoniac Mute

Matt. 9:32-34.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 326-327.)

This chapter as a whole shows us not only divine power in goodness displayed in Jesus as in Matt. 8; but how it was received by those who had religious reputation among the Jews. The more He wrought in grace, the less acceptable was the Messiah. Did He forgive the sins of the paralytic? Scribes within themselves resented it as blasphemy. But He who read their hearts answered their wicked unbelief by bidding the man arise, take up his couch, and retire to his house.

So the call of the tax-gatherer to follow Him, and the defence of the disciples to the fault-finding followers of John and the Pharisees, vindicated God's grace. New wine needs new skins. The condition of God's ancient people was, like that of the ruler's daughter, one. of death; but He Who went to raise her up, and at length did so, was open to the touch of faith which got healing at once. Two blind men that appealed to His mercy as Son of David received their sight at His hand and word. These were but samples of what He could and would do for Israel, if there had been faith; but the leaders were increasingly hostile, whatever might be the marvel of the crowds, and His fame spread in all that land.

There remained a final proof. "But as these were going out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed by a demon. And the demon having been cast out, the dumb spoke; and the crowds wondered, saying, It was never seen thus in Israel. But the Pharisees said, He casteth out the demons by [or, in the power of] the prince of the demons" (vers. 32-34).

Nothing slackened the gracious dealing of our Lord, so long as the door was open. The blind who now saw were no sooner going out, than men brought to him a man not only dumb but a demoniac. Luke 11:14 presents the awful peculiarity of the case yet more precisely: "And he was casting out a demon, and it was dumb." It was not simply the human infirmity: a dumb demon possessed the man. This made it altogether beyond ordinary resource. A spirit evil or good has power that man cannot resist. As with the unhappy man, so with the unhappy people and especially their religious chiefs. At length the people had not a true word to utter of their divine Messiah. His great grace, and their great need,

drew out first from the leaders the imputation of blasphemy. Now it reaches a lower depth still opening to devour them. For what can be more heinous than to impute to the Holy One the power of the wicked one? Blasphemers themselves they charge blasphemy against Him, and under Satan's power they impute it to the energy of the prince of demons that He cast out the demons.

Before they were carried to Babylon, Israel had totally failed as Jehovah's servant. Their witness was not to Him but to graven and molten images, to which they said, Ye are our gods. Who so blind and deaf as they to whom Jehovah had laid bare His mighty arm and from the heavens made them hear His voice as no other people ever did? And therefore Jehovah gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers. Now they had Jehovah Messiah present in their midst in the power of beneficent goodness, and in a grace which anticipated the kingdom; and their alienation became yet more deadly. The same unbelief which sought after strange gods (only not nonentities because they were demons), rejected and blasphemed their Anointed, Who was in truth Jehovah. Where not thus active, the people were just as the demoniac mute. Under the power of the enemy they were dumb for Him Whose praise fills the heavens as it will the earth and all the creation.

How is it with you, dear reader? Are you confessing with your mouth the Lord Jesus? Blessed is it, when also the heart believes on Him to righteousness; for then, and not otherwise, is confession made to salvation. He Who created man is Lord and Redeemer. God calls you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus shall you be saved — thus only; for there is none other name under heaven

to save. Other refuge is vain. Other means are a snare and a lie. He is the true God, and eternal life. For the sinner, under Satan's power, only He can avail; but He avails at once and unfailingly. It is true that He is not here, but risen. It is true that the Jews slew Him, hanging Him on a tree; but God exalted Him by His right hand as Leader and Saviour, accepting His death as sacrifice, the only efficacious sacrifice, for sins. The grace now shown exceeds; it reigns through righteousness unto life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Do you speak of your subjection to Satan's power? Looking to Jesus, life is given. He also Himself likewise took part in blood and flesh, that through death He might annul him that hath the might of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who in fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. In His name, then, resist the devil; and he will flee from you. He is a conquered enemy through Him Who bore your sins and brings you every spiritual good.

Believing in Him, how immense is the change! As living stones, you are being built up, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood (which Aaron's sons were only in outward form), to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. What is the worth to God now of sheep or oxen? of incense, or of first-fruits? All such things had their place before He came Who makes us to see that they are no more than the beggarly elements of the world, and that the body is of Christ. The Christian is a true worshipper, he only. They all can worship the Father in spirit and truth in the hour that now is. The multitude keeping holiday, without knowing the Father, without faith in the truth, without having the Spirit, are

spurious and in the dark. The true worshippers the Father seeks at this time, who must worship God in spirit and truth, for they alone walk in the light as He is in the light. Assuredly they are no longer dumb. Does any among them suffer evil? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise.

May this be your lot! Grace alone can make it yours, the saving grace of God which appeared in our Lord Jesus, and blesses through faith in Him.

2 The Withered Hand healed

Matt. 12:9-14.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 341-342.)

The sabbath like everything else was turned by Jewish unbelief against the Messiah. But like everything else the sabbath only told to His glory against man's sin, shame, selfishness, and pride. At that time (Matt. 12:1) the Lord went through the cornfields on the sabbath, and His disciples, being hungry, began to pluck and eat. Seeing this the Pharisees reproached Him, but He vindicated them by David's act in 1 Sam. 21 generally, and in particular by the priests who do their work in the temple blamelessly on the sabbaths. What value had the show-bread if the anointed of Jehovah and his men were hunted for their life? Yet says He, "a greater thing than the temple is here." Had they known too what Hosea 6:6 means, they would not have condemned the guiltless. "For the Son of man is lord of the sabbath." The rejected Christ is the Son of man about to come from heaven in judgment. They were guilty not only of transgressing the law, but of refusing Jehovah's Anointed. So He enters on

a higher and larger glory which supersedes their boasts and judges their sins.

On a subsequent sabbath he exposes their evil state, hypocritical and murderous.

“And when departed thence he went into their synagogue; and, behold, a man having a withered hand. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath? that they might accuse him. And he said to them, What man of you shall there be who shall have one sheep; and if this fall into a pit on the sabbath, will he not lay hold and raise it up? How much then doth a man exceed a sheep! Wherefore it is lawful on the sabbath to do well. Then he saith to the man, Stretch out thy hand, and he stretched it out; and it was restored sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him” (vers. 9-14).

Here it is not the authority of His person in which He will judge not the Jews only but all the nations; it is the character of Him Who is good and doeth good, let His people be as false and faulty as they may to their ruin. In vain for His people to plead the sabbath against Him Who is lord of it; still more vain to forbid on that day His active goodness for needy suffering man. The poorest Jew was not debarred by the sabbath from extricating his sheep from the pit. God had compassion, if they had none, for their brother fallen under a worse calamity; and here was He anointed of Jehovah to bind up the broken-hearted, let Pharisees rage and plot as they might. “Lo, I am come to do thy will, O God.”

Mark presents the scene yet more vividly; for he tells us that the Saviour directed the man to “Stand up” before

He uttered His fuller and withering questions: “Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?” And when they held their peace but with malice to the uttermost, He looked round about on them with anger, distressed at the hardening of their heart. What right had selfish murderous men against God’s grace? Such they showed themselves; for they went out of the synagogue to plot, Pharisees and Herodians, deadly enemies of each other, against the Son of God, His servant among sinful and suffering men, to minister as none else could, to save souls as well as life.

Oh! how is it with you who read these lines? Is not your case still more deplorable than his of the withered hand? Is not your heart withered Godward? Is it not active only as the source of uncleanness in every kind which defiles you? Do you love your own will and way? and what is this but sin, hateful to God and destructive to you? Yet for you Jesus, the Son of God, came; for you He died. And He died not for any imaginary good in you, but for your sins, too many and too real. Fear not then to commit yourself, just as you are to the Saviour. Hide not any thing of your evil from the eyes of your heart; let your conscience confess all out to God: Christ is the only meeting-place between the sinner and Him. He is all-embracing for such as come as sinners; and as surely a Saviour as they are lost.

Therefore of God’s word doubt not, but look to Jesus in your guilt and unworthiness. Seek only to be in the truth of your sins before God; and you will find Christ in the truth of divine grace toward your soul.

If it be so with you, this is true repentance toward God, and true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The merit, the

grace, the efficacy, the power are in Him. The pardon and peace, the life and blessing, are yours on believing the glad tidings of God about His Son. Till you believe on Him for life and salvation, you have nothing to do with practical love and holiness, incumbent as they are on the Christian. First be settled in faith.

3 The Blind and Dumb

Matt. 12:22-30.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 357-358.)

Sometimes demoniacs met the Lord, as in Matt. 8:28; sometimes as here and in Matt. 9:32 one was brought. This made no difference to the Saviour's gracious power: He cast the demons out. In the case before he was dumb; now it is one blind and dumb, who was healed all the same.

"Then was brought to him a demoniac blind and dumb; and he healed him, so that the blind [man] spoke and saw. And all the crowds were amazed and said, Is this the Son of David? But when the Pharisees heard, they said, This [man] doth not cast out the demons but by Beelzebub, prince of the demons. And knowing their thoughts he said to them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan casteth out Satan, he is divided against himself: how then shall his kingdom stand. And if I by Beelzebub cast out the demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if by God's Spirit I cast out the demons, then hath come upon you the kingdom of God. Or how can one enter into the house of the strong [man], and plunder his goods, unless

first he bind the strong [man], and then he will plunder his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth" (vers. 22-30).

Aggravated as the malady was, it only furnished the fuller occasion for the Lord Jesus. The growing rejection by Israel, and especially by their chiefs, made more clear Who He was, and what they were. It is hard at first to learn that God's people on earth may be slaves of Satan, spiritually as blind and dumb as the demoniac brought to the Lord. But He that healed the man in circumstances so desperate is yet more willing as He is able to deliver from the still deeper and worse captivity through sin and Satan's power.

"All the crowd" were amazed and said timidly, It is not the Son of David, is it? But the Pharisees repeated yet more strongly the deadly slander which they had uttered before (Matt. 9:34), "This man doth not cast out the demons but by Beelzebub, prince of the demons." It was not unbelief only, but its darker form, when the beneficent power of God cannot be disputed, and is imputed to the evil one as its source. Such is the inevitable lot of such as enjoy religious reputation as orthodox and righteous without living faith. If they encounter Christ, as here, they must either be subject to the testimony given to His person, or attribute the power of God's Spirit He wields to the arch-enemy. The more people know of divine things, the more fatally they sin against the truth if they brazen out in unbelief; for it then takes the shape of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which shall not be forgiven either in this age or in that which is to come.

Here the Lord pronounces the mind of God. Consciously knowing their thoughts He exposes their malicious absurdity. Whether for kingdom, city, or house, to divide against itself is ruin. If Satan therefore casts out Satan, as they said, he is divided against himself: how then shall his kingdom stand? But as no Jew doubted for a moment its subsisting till Messiah come in power and glory to judge and destroy it, such a plea refutes itself as untenably inconsistent and false. The Lord did not anticipate that glorious day, but was then bearing witness that He is the destined vanquisher of Satan by this sample of the powers of the age to come. When it comes, Satan will be cast into the abyss, as he will be into the lake of fire and brimstone when it ends. But Jesus proves Himself always opposed and superior, though it be only as then in the day of witness.

Further, the Lord appeals to the evidence of God's power in opposition to Satan in Israel; for never has He left Himself without witness. By what power did they act? "If I in [the power of] Beelzebub cast out the demons, in whose [power] do your sons cast them out? Wherefore they shall be your judges." Their folly was as clear as their malice. Were they now and definitively to become God's enemies? "But if I in [power of] God's Spirit cast out the demons, then hath come upon you the kingdom of God. Or how can one enter into the strong one's house and plunder his goods, unless first he bind the strong one? and then he will plunder his house."

Thus all turns on our relation to Christ. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth." Jesus is the standard. If I am not with Him as God's object and centre for me, I am against Him. He is not only Messiah but God and Jehovah, yet

man. Such a One could not be here below without testing all that saw or heard of Him. If I receive Him, it is salvation, for He came to seek and save the lost; and as saved by grace, I am bound to serve Him all the more, His willing bondman yet His freedman. But He is no less the centre for all one seeks to gather. If it be not to Him in our service, we lack the divine centre. We may be earnest and busy; but the result is only “scattering” in God’s estimate, which ought surely to be ours as believers.

How is it then with your soul, dear reader? Are you with Christ? Have you heard His voice, and do you follow Him? Blessed are you if you have thus received Him. It is life eternal, as He declares.

Take care then that you have Him as your centre, God’s centre, not only for your soul but for your work. It is on God’s part for gathering to, as well as for saving. No other name but His is revealed of God for both purposes, which indeed meet in Him.

4 The Five Thousand fed

Matt. 14:14-21.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 372-373.)

Only one Gospel connects our Lord’s retirement with tidings of John the Baptist’s death. The herald’s lot only precedes that of Jehovah Messiah’s Whose time was not yet come. In the Gospel of Mark (Mark 6:30, 31) He would give a little rest apart with Himself to His sent workmen. Those who serve Him need not look for better things. In Luke there is no such account, but the fact of John’s execution alluded to, as the effect of the report which reached Herod of the Saviour’s gracious power.

But Jesus was the same in the desert as in the city, the compassionate healer of the sick. Nor this only; for when the disciples at evening would dismiss the crowd to buy themselves food, He says to them, They need not depart: give ye them to eat. But looking not to Him they were powerless.

“And they say to him, We have here but five loaves and two fishes. And he said, Bring them hither to me. And he commanded the crowd to recline on the grass, took the five loaves and the two fishes, looked up to heaven, and blessed; and having broken he gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the crowds. And they all ate and were filled; and they took up what was over of the fragments, twelve baskets full. And the eaters were about five thousand, apart from women and children” (17-21).

He was the true Solomon, though Israel did not yet sing the son. of Ascent. Yet He was there, and not David’s Son only, but Jehovah Who chose Zion and will there dwell. Was He not in their low estate giving the manifest testimony that He would abundantly bless her provision, and satisfy her poor with bread? Their unbelief might and did put off the kingdom; nevertheless He was there, the King, and no failure in Him of grace or power. How little those nearest to Him drew on either by faith! How promptly He met the need beyond all thought of men or saints!

This however is revealed for you, my reader, as it was then shown to the needy, that they and you might look to Him and be saved. Beyond doubt the soul is more than the food; and none ever pressed this so much as Himself. None warned as He to fear Him Who is able to

destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. But who like Him assured guilty man that God so loved the world as to give His beloved Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish but have life eternal?

The day comes fast when He will make good every promise, as He will also inflict the judgment which in every form the Father committed to Him, because He is Son of man. As such He was despised and rejected; as such He suffered to the utmost and is exalted on high. But if His sufferings will bring vengeance on His foes, they do also bring salvation to those who believe, and none the less, because they like all others were lost till they believed.

It is not yet the day when He will ask nations for an inheritance, and break them with iron sceptre, as a potter his vessel. Then shall His name be excellent in all the earth, as well as His majesty above the heavens. But it is given now among men, and none other under heaven, wherein we must be saved. He alone is worthy; He is God as well as Jesus Christ the righteous Man. The Word became flesh to glorify His Father and God, Son of man to save the lost. Such a sign as He then wrought was proper to show His compassion to the needy and distressed in Israel. Was it not meant to let you know who read or hear the word, that He pities your deeper need, and is no less ready to bless you with the bread of God, in order that you, believing on Him, may never hunger or thirst more?

This, His discourse to the crowd that followed after Him, as we read in John 6:1, clearly points out. It is His express application of it to you who read now as to those who then heard. Why then should you doubt that He will

make good His word? He declares that the believer has life eternal; He declares elsewhere that His sheep shall never perish, and that none shall pluck them out of His hand. He and the Father are not more one in divine nature than in divine love, to keep His sheep, however exposed in this world to the enemy's malice.

The grace of Christ is sufficient for you, great as is your weakness; indeed it is made perfect in weakness. Fear not therefore to trust in Him. Believe God Who sent Him, that those who receive Him may live eternally, and that those who believe not may be judged everlastingly. He is the giver of life because He is Son of God; He is the executor of judgment because He is Son of man. One or other must be your portion. He gives you life if you believe; He will judge you if you reject Him. It is unwise, it is full of danger, it is in the highest degree sinful, to reject the gracious and saving message of God in Christ to your soul.

5 Jesus walking on the sea

Matt. 14:23-33.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 4-5.)

Bright was the witness, as it is still, to the rejected Messiah. This glory is great, but He is greater still, Immanuel and Jehovah; and it shines out the more that men despise Him.

"And having dismissed the crowds, he went up into the mountain apart to pray: and when even was come, he was there alone. But the ship [or boat] was already in the midst of the sea, tossed by the waves for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them walking on the sea; and when the

disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is an apparition; and they cried out for fear. But Jesus immediately spoke unto them. saying, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answering him said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come; and Peter, going down from the ship, walked on the water to come unto Jesus. But seeing the wind strong, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught hold of him, and saith to him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they had gone up into the ship, the wind ceased. And those in the ship came and paid homage to him, saying, Truly thou art God's Son" (vers. 23-33).

Whatever His own title, and it was truly divine, our Lord had become man, and loyally maintained His dependence on God, of which prayer is a signal expression. It is peculiarly prominent in the Gospel of Luke where His humanity is most brought before us in all its lowliness and sympathy, in all its piety and obedience. And it has its due place in Mark's Gospel of His service. But the disciples on the tempest-tossed sea were as distressed as their boat, and the wind was contrary, so that they toiled in vain at the oar. He waited long enough for them to realise their danger and their powerlessness, and came unto them, walking on the sea. Troubled at what they thought an apparition, they cried for fear, but immediately He bade them take courage. "It is I: be not afraid."

Reader, have you never heard His voice? It sounds in the written word in His own tones of love and compassion. It is for you to hear and live by believing them. The

blessing is expressly for faith to receive. When you, judging yourself for your sins, look to Jesus at God's warrant, remission is yours. You are reconciled to God and justified by faith. You are called thenceforth to walk as a child of God and sealed by His Spirit till the day of redemption, when your bodies will have the power of Christ's life, as your souls have now (John 5). All other ways and means are a delusion. Baptism and the Lord's supper are His institutions, most expressive of His death, and of your blessing thereby. But faith is by hearing, and this by God's word. He is best honoured in His Son's honour.

No doubt the enemy stirs up storms of every kind to alarm and endanger the disciples; but what of that, if the Lord sees all with watchful eye and fails not to give His guardian presence? This will be true and sure for His Jewish remnant in days to come as well as then when He was on earth; so is it assured to the Christian and the Christian assembly now, however few they may be. He, Who has His way in the whirlwind and in the tempest, with the clouds as the dust of His feet, was there in the person of Jesus walking the waves to say, Be courageous. It is I: fear not. They ought to have known already that winds and waves obey Him, their Creator.

Peter yields a little intimation of what was at hand. He quits the boat at the word of the Lord, and goes to meet Jesus on the sea; as the church did gathered to His name, apart from the Jews and the Gentiles (1 Cor. 10:32). But he quickly displays the instability of his faith. To the Christian also Christ is all. If we look away from Him, we begin to sink as he did. What, if the storm raged and the waves rose ever so high? Had the sea been smooth instead of rough, could Peter have walked

across it? But he saw the wind strong and began to sink, with the cry, Lord, save me. And the Lord's outstretched hand was the answer, though there was the loving reproof, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? Such is He to us now, faithful, gracious, and superior to all circumstances. But we have to walk by faith, not by sight. Yet if our faith fail, He does not fail to deliver.

By-and-by He will rejoin His Jewish disciples in their unequalled trouble at the end of the age, bespeak a calm which is not the church's portion while on earth, and bring at once the old ship into the desired haven... For heaven and for the earth, for the church as for Israel, Jesus is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

6 The Canaanite woman

Matt. 15:21-28.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 20-21.)

It is in the First Gospel we find this most instructive incident, which reveals the Lord, not merely as minister of circumcision for God's truth, but as the display of His sovereign grace where God's curse lay, and Satan's power.

"And Jesus going forth hence retired into the parts of Tyre and Sidon; and, behold, a Canaanite woman coming out from those borders cried out, saying, Pity me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is grievously possessed by a demon. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and asked him, saying, Dismiss her, for she crieth out after us. But he said in answer, I was not

sent save to the lost sheep of Israel's house. And she came and paid him homage, saying, Lord, help me. But he said in answer, It is not good to take the children's bread and cast [it] to the dogs. But she said, Yea, Lord; for even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters. Then Jesus in answer said to her, O woman, great [is] thy faith: be it done to thee as thou willest. And her daughter was healed from that hour" (Matt. 15:21-28).

The Lord withdrew from the proud religionists of Jerusalem, who made void the law of God for the sake of their tradition. He also laid bare to the disciples that only the plants of His Father take root, while all that issues from man's heart is defiled and defiling. The sinner needs God's grace to save him. This is shown in the otherwise desperate case of the Canaanite, and her daughter sorely possessed of a demon.

Here may many a soul learn why the Lord does not accede to its appeal. Hers was deep and earnest; yet He answered her not a word. What claims on the Son of David had a Canaanite woman? When He reigns, there shall be no more a Canaanite in the house of Jehovah of hosts (Zech. 14:21). When the two blind cried early or late, saying, Pity us, Son of David, He touched their eyes, which were then opened according to their faith (Matt. 9:27-30; Matt. 20:30-34). But repentance has its place as truly as faith; and God will have the soul to judge itself aright. "Cursed be Canaan" is the word from of old; and yet was she not now asking His pity Who is to avenge and deliver Israel!

How many today have said the words, "Father,... forgive us our sins"! Yet they too have received no answer; nor

would they assert, any more than they believe, that their sins are forgiven. They have gone on ground wholly untenable. They are not His sons by faith in Christ. They are not born of water and Spirit. They stand on law, supplemented by ordinances. They are unrenewed, serving divers lusts and pleasures, a prey to the power of darkness. They do not cry to God in the truth of their estate, but imitate the language of disciples, which they might own they are not in heart, Have we not experienced it ourselves? Our state was below the Canaanite's.

The woman of Canaan evidently knew that no Israelite ever appealed to Christ in vain. She had faith in Him; but she had overlooked her own dismal position. Theirs were "the promises"; but what had she? Not promise, but curse. And He Who is the truth would have her feel it. Not so the disciples; they would have Him dismiss her. This was far from His heart. They disliked the discredit of her importunity, and wished to be rid of her. He meant to bless her; but it must be in the truth as well as the grace of God. For this He waited, and she as yet had no answer; but He answered them, "I was not sent save to the lost sheep of Israel's house."

Now faith where real perseveres; and the woman came and did Him homage, saying, "Lord, help me." He is indeed Lord of all: this is truth without assumption of privilege. To such an appeal He does reply, "It is not good to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs."

Thus does His grace help her to see where she was lacking. The light of God shines into her heart; and she bows at once. For she said, "Yea, Lord; for even the dogs

eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters." She apprehends where and what she really was, and takes her true place before God. She had forgotten that she was not a "sheep" to claim the succour of Israel's Shepherd. She was truly a "dog" before Him, no better than a little dog or whelp. Yet while no longer hiding this from her soul but confessing it freely, she rejoins, "Yea, Lord; for even the whelps eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters."

Oh what refreshment did such faith give to our Lord Jesus! She savoured the things of God. She appreciated, believed, enjoyed the grace of which she was the object. And the Lord owned her "great faith," and gave her all she wished.

How is it with you, dear reader? Have you learnt that you are no better than a dog before Him? Or are you, while in your sins, claiming to be His sheep? Own yourself a sinner, and Him the only Saviour, that you may be saved. He is the same Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon Him. Why should you stand without? A better voice than Laban's invites you to come in and be blessed. All depends on Him; but it is not yours save by repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Till then we have no known divine answer to our cry.

7 The Four Thousand Fed

Matt. 15:32-39.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 37-38.)

The miracle here does not merely attest again the divine Messiah's presence and power on behalf of His needy people. Each has its own characteristics for our

instruction. Both prove His ready and almighty resources. Had each miracle appeared in a different Gospel only, the sceptics would have insisted on discrepant accounts; but God has cut off such an objection, because Matthew and Mark record both, Luke and John only the first of them. The miracle wrought twice signifies, if one may apply Joseph's interpretation (Gen. 41:32), that the thing is established by God, whatever be man's unbelief. The distinctions are marked, but in no way favour those of old who imagined a reference in the former to the Jew, in the latter to the Gentile. Both express Messiah's grace to the chosen people.

What then is the true difference? It is defined in detail, as well as in broad features. There were five loaves and two fishes in the first, seven loaves and a few fishes in the last, five thousand fed in one, and four thousand in the other; the surplus then filled twelve baskets, now seven. The very baskets employed had in each instance a differing appellation, meaning respectively a hand-basket and a creel, as expressed without confusion in each account, and maintained in our Lord's recall of both in Matt. 16. The larger distinction will appear presently, though it may here be added that the first was in the spring when the grass was green, the second some months later; and that in the second the crowd had stayed three days, whereas in the first we do not hear of more than one day.

"And Jesus, having called his disciples unto him, said, I have compassion on the crowd, because they continue with me already three days and have nothing to eat; and I would not let them go fasting, lest they faint in the way. And his disciples say to him, Whence should we

[have] in a wilderness so many loaves as to fill so great a crowd? And Jesus saith to them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few small fishes. And he commanded the crowds to lie down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves and the fishes he gave thanks and broke, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the crowd. And all ate and were filled, and they took up what was over of the broken pieces, seven baskets full. And those that ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. And having let go the crowds he went on board the ship and came over into the borders of Magadan" (vers. 32-39).

On the first occasion the disciples took the initiative, and proposed the dismissal of the crowds to buy themselves food in the villages. Their faith was weak indeed. How sad to overlook His presence who was pledged to satisfy Zion's poor with bread! Even His call that they should give them to eat failed to awaken any sense of His fulness. So He took the provision they despised, and abundantly blessed it to the five thousand, and more; yet there remained over of the broken pieces twelve baskets full. Now this answers to the twelve apostles, being the number of full administration by or in man. But it was only a sign in His rejected testimony to Israel; and sending His disciples to go before Him to the other side, on dismissal of the crowds, He went up into the mountain apart to pray, the figure of His priestly place on high. After this comes the wondrous scene of Peter leaving the ship to join Jesus on the water, which is peculiar to Matthew, as alone expressive of the divine design by that Gospel, and having nothing like it on the second occasion.

Here it is the Messiah yearning over His famished people. They were guilty; but He commiserated their distressful state, and gave His disciples a fresh opportunity of drawing on Him by faith. Alas! they were slow to learn. “Whence should we have in a wilderness so many loaves as to fill so great a crowd?” He was there, and full of compassion; but unbelief, even in believers, is ever blind. The seven loaves which He took and distributed through His disciples, and the surplus in the seven baskets here named, point to spiritual, not to administrative fulness. All was ordered of God, all is meant to teach man, if he has cars to hear. It is Jehovah-Messiah acting in His own perfection. Here there is no going on high to pray; nor is there a rejoining the disciples for the other side, when and where all who once rejected Him welcome Him and His beneficent power, as will be in the consummation of the age.

How is it with you, dear reader? Whatever engrosses you, whatever interests you, the first and deepest of all questions is, How are you treating Jesus? He is the Lord of glory, the Son of God Who became man to die for you. How do you regard Him? It concerns you now, and for all eternity. He died to save sinners; but the blessing is for those that believe. If you believe not who have heard His name, you are far more guilty than heathen who have not heard. God the Father resents all dishonour done to His beloved Son, and has given all judgment into His hands, because He is Son of man (John 5), to punish all men who despise Him. Is it not then of incalculable moment that you bow to Him Who will be your Judge by-and-by, if you refuse Him now as Saviour? Remember that His judgment is eternal. Yet how righteous is it also! For the unbeliever in the gospel is not impenitent only

but despises God’s grace. How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

8 The Transfiguration

Matt. 17:1-9.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 53-54.)

In the midst of His service of humiliation our Lord was for a little transfigured. It was not like Moses whose face shone from his nearness to the divine Presence. Our Lord was with His own here below. A week before He prepared them for seeing the Son of man coming in His kingdom. After it He takes with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and brings them up into a high mountain apart. “And His face did shine as the sun, and His garments became white as the light. And, behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah talking with them.” It is a miniature of His kingdom wherein will be the risen and changed saints with others in their natural bodies, and the Lord the centre of all.

Yet it would seem that the divine aim of Moses and Elijah being there was to mark the surpassing glory of the Lord before Whom the chief representative of the law and the most honoured of the prophets gave place and vanished away. The personal glory of Jesus is most conspicuous as elsewhere in this Gospel. He is Son of God and Son of man.

Peter counted it a great thing to see His Master with saints so renowned and glorious. “Lord,” said he to Jesus, “It is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He made the natural but fatal mistake of equalising all three. Yet he who had only

so short a time before confessed His Master to be not only the Messiah, but the Son of the living God, ought not to have so erred. So easy is it to forget what flesh and blood never truly knows, what is revealed by the Father; just as then too he could not bear to think of His going to Jerusalem, suffering many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and being killed but raised the third day.

Here it was not the withering rebuke of the Lord Who knew that all blessing for man and glory for God, in a ruined world, hung on His rejection. It was the Father's voice out of the excellent glory. "While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and, behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son in Whom I found my delight: hear ye him." The Father then displayed His jealousy for the honour of His Son. He would not allow the law-giver or the law-restorer to be put on such a level. They were servants and to be honoured in the place He set them. But His beloved Son! — there were His delights; and if Christ went down in love infinite to suffer as man, and as man to be exalted, the glory of the eternal Son was precious beyond all thought of man in His Father's eyes.

It is the Son Whom we are to hear. See how the great truth is attested in the Epistle to the Hebrews, both in Heb. 1:2, and in Heb. 12:25. Equally explicit is John 5:25 for quickening, and in John 10 for every day; and not only for the sheep led out of the Jewish fold but for other sheep, Gentiles, not of this fold. Dear reader, does not this reach to you? If the blessing is immense, what is the loss? And what must be the fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries and the indifferent? For Himself has said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,

and they follow me; and I give to them life eternal; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand." On the other hand "he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

When the disciples heard the Father's voice, they fell on their faces and were sore afraid. They were far from knowing yet His love; but He, Who brought it in His own person, was at hand to strengthen their hearts. "And Jesus came and touched them and said, Arise, and be not afraid." Not less now but more does Jesus cause His word to come home in the power of redemption to those that believe. And the God Who sent Him would fill us with all joy and peace in believing, that we way abound in hope in the power of the Holy Spirit. Is it thus with your souls? Can you. say that you have heard the voice of Jesus by faith, and that you are "not afraid"? This is His will, not only for the three who then heard, but for all that believe the gospel of God. Perfect love casts; out the fear that has torment, and creates the fear of reverence. It is the effort of the enemy to work on the conscious guilt of man that he may distrust the words of Jesus; it is the work of the Spirit from the beginning to efface it all. The entrance of that word dispels darkness before the light of God to the soul, and enables the heart to receive "Be not afraid."

"Lifting up their eyes, they saw no one save Jesus only." Visions were always rare; such a vision is unique. But for the heart's comfort, and the right direction of the eye, there is nothing to compare with having Jesus the Son of God to hear. So has God the Father ruled: "hear Him." And He abides the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. May we by faith look to "Jesus only." It is not only

at first that the soul may be saved by faith, but for every day and hour after we do believe. For the only right walk is by faith, and the fight of faith is the only good fight, in which Jesus is the one unfailing Captain. Other fights we may have to our shame, where flesh is not judged, and Satan gains advantage for the moment. To Jesus then may we ever look, to “Jesus only.”

9 The Lunatic Son

Mark 9:17-27.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 69-70.)

What a contrast with the manifestation of the excellent glory on the mountain was the actual state of man even in the favoured people here below! Jesus the Son of God was there; yet that the disciples knew not so by faith, as to avail themselves of His victory over the enemy!

“And one of the crowd answered and said, Teacher, I brought unto thee my son having a dumb spirit; and whensoever it taketh him, it teareth him, and he foameth and gnasheth his teeth, and is withering away. And I spoke to thy disciples that they should cast it out; and they were not able. And answering them He saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I bear with you? Bring him unto me. And they brought him unto Him; and when He saw him, straightway the spirit tore him, and falling on the ground he wallowed foaming. And He asked his father, How long time is it that this hath come to him? And he said, From a child. And often it cast him both into fire and into waters to destroy him; but if thou hast any power, help us in thy pitifulness toward us. But Jesus said to him, If thou hast power (is) to believe: all things

are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out and said, I believe: help mine unbelief. And Jesus, seeing that a crowd was running up together, rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, Dumb and deaf spirit, I command thee, come out of him and enter no more into him. And having cried out and torn [him] much, it came out, and he became as if dead, so that the most said, He is dead. But Jesus laying hold of him by the hand raised him up; and he stood up" (vers. 17-27).

It was indeed a mighty deed: and so it fell to our Gospel above the others to give most details. There are differences in the evil spirits; and only to prayer and fasting did the kind in question yield. The lack in that respect was grievous in the Lord's eyes. The distressed parent did not despair, and turned from the failing disciples to Him Who never fails. How humbling when believers thus dishonour their Lord! "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I bear with you?" This was the overwhelming fact. That the crowd, that the scribes, should have no faith, was bad enough after such ample witness of the gracious power of God in His Son, servant of all need in man, marked out from the first in doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil. Did He not give the twelve, and more than the twelve, authority over the unclean spirits? How was it then that these put shame on His name by failing to draw on Him?

"Bring him unto Me" says the Saviour. Even so, He lets all see the depth of the child's need, the malicious power of the enemy. He manifests His interest in all that dismays the heart of man. He enquires, not as if He did not know the reins and the heart, but that the tried soul

may learn the reality of His compassion. He teaches the feeble suppliant that the question of power turns on faith; for faith God will have, whatever may be His own grace. What possible good morally could power insure without believing? On the other hand, all things are possible to him that believes. So even the disciples had to learn; and the father, through his necessities believing the lesson at once, tends to the right way under the Lord's guidance. "I believe: help mine unbelief." How wholesome for the believer to feel and own his unbelief!

How is it with you that read these words? Have you found out what a deadly thing is unbelief? Have you received the declaration from God that you till brought to Him live in the lusts of your flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and are by nature children of wrath, even as the rest of mankind? Judaism did not hinder this of old, whatever its great privileges; nor does Christendom now with its still greater advantages. And has Satan no power over such as are dead in trespasses and sins? Do not such walk according to the age of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience? If men but saw by faith, they would discern themselves thus in a plight more appalling than that of the lunatic child under the power of the dumb and deaf spirit. For in itself it was for the life that now is; whereas Eph. 2:1-3 describes for both time and eternity.

But the Lord, as He wrought in power then, is also the Deliverer according to the rich mercy of God and the great love wherewith He loves. God is now showing the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus, as He assures us He will in the ages to

come. Let me, following the apostle, entreat that you receive not the grace of God in vain; for vain it undoubtedly is, if you have not faith in God through our Lord Jesus for your own soul as a guilty sinner, powerless in yourself before Him. But He hearkens to the cry of need and distress; yea He sends His word and works in manifold ways to make souls sensible of their ruin, that they may cry and He may answer in the glad tidings of His gospel. Now too it is a day of salvation; and the casting away of Israel is the world's reconciliation. For their fall is our wealth, their loss is our rich gain.

How awful then for men in Christendom to live only for present enjoyment, money, ease, honour, power, like the heathen who know not God! He Who for sins suffered unutterably, not from man only, but from God's judgment on the cross, is the Author of everlasting salvation to all those that obey Him; and faith in God's testimony to Him is the beginning of that blessing which shall never end. Oh, take heed, and put not off the call of grace, which you may not hear again! The spirits, now in prison and awaiting, not another deluge, but everlasting judgment in the resurrection of the unjust, once heard the Spirit of Christ in Noah's preaching while the ark was in preparation. Beware lest you, who have heard a far fuller expression of divine mercy in the gospel of Christ, frustrate the counsel of God against yourselves. For God is not mocked in the end, however men cheat themselves in thinking that He heeds not their words and ways now. Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts as in the provocation, throughout the day of the temptation in the wilderness.

10 The Fish, and the Temple-tax

Matt. 17:24-27.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 85-86.)

What had the Lord said in John 8? It is the Son only Who, being free in the highest sense, sets free those who are His disciples abiding in His word. All else, however boastful, are but slaves of sin, the lowest of all slavery. The slave passes; the son abides for ever; but this he derives solely from the eternal Son, though not without faith in the truth which He in grace tells out, as indeed He was it and came that we might hear and receive it. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

So here what ineffable grace! "Lest we cause them to stumble, go unto the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and having opened its mouth, thou wilt find a shekel: that take and give to them for me and thee."

Now it is His omnipotence that is proved; for what else could make itself forthwith obeyed by a fish passing through the paths of the sea? Who but God in man could or would have caused it to rise to Peter's hook with a silverling in its mouth of the exact amount for the temple? Whom but the Son did it befit to say in His grace, lest we cause them to stumble"... give to them for me and for thee"? The grand truth is breaking through the clouds of a self-destroying Israel and Judaism, that the Son was emptying and humbling Himself not only to rescue, but to associate with Himself every one that believes in Him. What grace!

This association, as the gospel tells, is based not only on the divine glory of His person, but on the

accomplishment of an everlasting redemption. This He found, as Heb. 9 declares, by His own blood. And as it is attested by His ascension glory, so it is the glad message sent to you, my dear reader, if you have not already received it unto salvation. This, and no less, it bears, and, on God's authority and in His love, assures to every sinner who repents and believes the gospel. God is thus honouring His Son, as well He may; for He and He alone perfectly glorified Him, even as to sin on the cross, as before in all respects.

Oh! persevere not in that unbelief which is the most radical and hateful of all evils. Listen no more to the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan: why die the second death? Christ is the way, the truth, and the life: are you so infatuated as to prefer the pleasures of sin for a season, and make shipwreck for eternity? Can it be that you turn a deaf ear to Him Who suffered once for all for sins, and will not come to Him that you may have life?

The New Testament presents no miracle more striking and instructive than the one before us. Its place too in the First Gospel and there only is precisely appropriate, if the Holy Spirit meant here to bring out the divine glory of Christ, along with His grace in associating the believer with Himself; when, rejected as He is by the Jews, the church and the kingdom of the heavens should replace the things even promised by new things.

"And when they came unto Capernaum, those that receive the half-shekels came to Peter and said, Doth not your teacher pay the half-shekels? He saith, Yea. And when he entered into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? The kings of the

earth, from whom do they receive toll or tribute? from their sons or from other folk? He (or, Peter) saith to him, From other folk. Jesus said to him, Well then the sons are free. But lest we cause them to stumble, go unto the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and having, opened its mouth, thou wilt find a shekel: that take and give to them for me and thee" (vers. 24-27).

Peter, like most disciples and like all naturally, was slow to distrust himself and to wait on the Lord and His word. He was quick, being zealous for the law, to assure those who took the redemption money (not the tax-gatherers so repulsive to Jewish feeling) that his Master was the same. He did not when questioned bear in mind, either what the Father had revealed to Him of the Lord's personal dignity (chap. 16), or of the glory conferred on Him for the coming kingdom (chap. 17): Jesus was too good an Israelite to neglect the heave-offering to Jehovah, the atonement for the soul! Peter forgot that Jesus was the true temple of God and the true God of the temple; he knew not yet that the visible temple was doomed, as ready to vanish away. He still savoured the things that are of men.

The Lord therefore anticipated him on entering the house by the question, From whom do the kings of the earth take toll or tribute? from their sons, or from other folk? He could not but answer, From other folk; and the Lord rejoined that therefore the sons are free.

The Lord had just shown His omniscience, as He showed every creature subject to Him. He proved to Peter that He knew what had not reached His ear. He graciously corrects His servant's mistake and leads him once more

into the truth. He was God, the Son, equally with the Father and the Holy Spirit; but He speaks and acts in perfect grace; as indeed otherwise where could Peter or we be? He says, Then are the sons free. On Him, Who alone is the Son eternally in personal right and title, depends the blessedness of the sons. We are by grace sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus, not Peter only but now, once Jews or Gentiles, all God's sons, all one in Christ Jesus; and because sons, God sent out the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So that each can hear, Thou art no longer a slave but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

11 The Deaf and stammering man

Mark 7:32-37.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 100-101.)

This is one of the two miracles peculiar to the gospel of Mark, the other being the cure of the blind man of Bethsaida (Mark 8:22). They both illustrate the prophetic service of the Son of God. He had come to the lake of Galilee.

And they bring to him [one] deaf and hardly speaking, and they beseech him to lay his hand on him. And having taken him away from the crowd apart, he put his fingers to his ears; and he spit and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven he groaned, and saith to him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the bond of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke aright. And he charged them that they should tell no one; but the more he charged them, the more abundantly were they publishing [it]. And they were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done

all things well; he maketh both the deaf to hear and the speechless to speak" (vers. 32-37).

The minute accuracy of the Holy Spirit in recounting Christ's miracles is admirable. This case differs from others, in that the sufferer is not said to have been absolutely mute, but to have had an impediment of speech, or speaking with difficulty, as well as deaf. Nevertheless the Lord takes especial pains with him. The manner reveals the divine Servant's grace. There was no question of His power. Ordinarily He healed all that needed it in a moment, no matter how extreme, as when an unclean spirit was the cause of the dumbness rather than physical inability or defect. Here He was pleased to manifest His tender interest in detail, and His compassionate love no less than His power to heal. He does much more than what those besought who brought the patient to Him. Putting the hand on the needy one was the usual sign of blessing; and less than this, a word, would have been enough, if so the obedient Lord had seen fit to God's glory.

But He took him aside from the crowd apart. For here it is not the crowd He thinks of, any more than the haughty scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem. Just before He had met the desperate need of the Syro-phoenician on behalf of her demoniac daughter on the borders of Tyre and Sidon. Now He had come through the midst of the borders of Decapolis, where, as the prophet had long before predicted, light was to shine for a despised remnant when darkness brooded over the mass with city and temple dead to the rejected Messiah (Isa. 9:1, 2). So apart from the crowd He took the deaf man, and put His fingers unto, if not into (as the preposition may mean according to the sense required),

his ears. But more than this; having spit, He touched the tongue of the stammerer.

He marked in both acts how all depended on bringing Himself personally to bear on the actual wants. He who wrought was man, but no less was He God, the Son incarnate and on earth, in His pitiful love serving God and man. It was not only that He applied what came from within Himself to the man's tongue, but looking up to heaven He groaned, and saith to him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. Power truly went out of Him, and love was its spring in devotedness to God Who is as truly light in His nature as love is the character of its energy, which His own service was manifesting. And thus, if He deigned to touch the man so intimately, He looked up to heaven whence He came in a love that abides unchanging and above all evil, yet groaned in deep sense of it, whilst He said to him, Be opened.

The afflicted man was but an emblem of the state of Israel, unwilling alas! and unable through unbelief to hear God, or to speak out their own misery and His praise. But as brought to Him he set forth the remnant on whom light dawned in a region and shadow of death. And "straightway" (a word so characteristic in the Gospel of His service) his ears were opened, and the bond or tie of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke aright. If the unbelief of the people and its chiefs made their blessing impossible, the poor of the flock prove the all-suffering of His gracious power, and reap the great blessing of faith, be it ever so small. And the love which so wrought will encourage a remnant in a future day, who will re-commence the Jewish history in the land, till it become a strong nation in that faithfulness which is unwearied and will never forget the promise.

For the present all was vain; and He charged them to tell no one, but the more He did, the more a great deal were they its publishers. Yet, true as it might be in word, it was not faith in the heart, but rather extreme astonishment. Even so what a comment on Christ's service! "He hath done all things well; He maketh both the deaf to hear and speechless to speak."

But how is it with you who now read God's testimony to Jesus His Son? Have you heard His voice? For He still speaks in His word; and they live who hear Him; and they follow Him, for they know His voice. Amidst the Babel tongues of Christendom they know it, and there is none like it; for it reveals to their souls God, and God as Father in quite a new way proper not to man even innocent but to the Son already come Who has given us understanding that we may know Him that is true. Truth is in none other; but He is not only the truth, but the way and the life. "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house." His word cannot deceive, His word only; and what he has done is according to the same perfection; above all is that work which He wrought on the cross, by which we that believe have now received the reconciliation.

12 The Blind Man of Bethsaida

Mark 8:22-26.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 117-118.)

This is the later of the two miracles peculiar to the Gospel of Mark. As in the former the Lord led away the deaf man, who could not speak aright, from the crowd apart, so here He took hold of the blind man's hand and conducted him out of the village. The mass of the Jews

had already had ample signs in testimony of Who and what He was. It was but for greater hardening of their hearts to see more. They might get their sick healed, they might eat of the loaves He made and be filled; but even the most orthodox sought from Him a sign from heaven, tempting Him; so that He could only groan in His spirit and say, Why doth this generation seek a sign? Had He not given them countless signs? In the sense of their unbelief, which a Syro-Phoenician woman's faith rebuked, the Lord leads aside from the multitude, though He still acts in compassionate grace. This could not fail where they bring distressful need before Him, the Servant not more righteous than gracious.

"And they bring him a blind man, and beseech him that he might touch him. And taking hold of the blind man's hand, he led him forth out of the village, and having spit on his eyes, he laid his hands on him, and asked him if he beheld anything. And having looked up he said, I behold men, for I see [them] as trees, walking. Then he laid his hands again on his eyes, and he saw distinctly, and was restored, and saw all things clearly. And he sent him to his house, saying, Neither enter into the village, nor tell [it] to any one in the village" (vers. 22-26).

It is the gospel of His service; and here, at; throughout, we are made to behold the perfect manner in which His mighty works were done. It is not only the power of God ever ready to heal the sick and those oppressed by the devil. The way in which He answered every such appeal was worthy of the Son of God become servant to glorify God and win man. He put His fingers to the deaf man's ears, He touched the ill-speaking tongue. He laid His hands upon the blind man outside Bethsaida. There was no necessity for any such actions. He had but to speak,

and it was done. But love is far beyond power; and when man has power to wield it in ever so limited a range, how little he thinks of love! Least of all does he, conscious however scantily of his sinfulness, look for love from the God he slights and dreads. The Lord in the way He wields divine power manifests divine love, and as Man in the midst of men. Nor is there the smallest ostentation but its marked absence: all is done in genuine simplicity as well as tenderness.

We may notice too that in the two miracles the Lord uses His own spittle, as He did also in the cure of the man born blind (told us in John 9). Whatever the reality and lowliness of the humanity He had taken up in His grace, there was divine efficacy in His person; and the sign of this He applies in all three cases, each having its own distinction. When He touched the tongue, He looked up to heaven with a groan, and says to the man, Be opened; and immediately the happy result follows. When He mixed clay with what came of Himself and anointed the born-blind man's eyes, He told him to go to Siloam and wash; and only then did he come seeing. Here the very intent was to mark by the twofold act of laying His hands on his eyes that the Lord would not have the cure partial. It was much to behold men, like trees, but walking. Yet the Lord would not let him go thus; He would give him to see distinctly. He therefore laid His hands upon his eyes, so that he was restored and saw all things distinctly. It was simply the way of love that the blind man might know the deep interest of His heart Who might have dispensed with any or all of these circumstances, and have effected the perfect cure with a word. But what a blank for the man and for our hearts, if it had been only so!

Indeed the instruction was great for the disciples who were then in a measure learning of His ways with Whom they were, and learnt far more when He was gone and the Holy Spirit come. The former was no unmeet emblem of Israel's state, and had a sample of the powers of the world to come when the weak remnant shall become a strong nation, with ears opened and tongue loosed to speak Jehovah's praise. The latter in the partial cure might well remind the disciples that they during His earthly ministry did not see more clearly than the man when His hands were laid on him once. How different when God raised Him up from the dead whereof they were witnesses! Then, He being exalted by the right hand of God, and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit, how great the blessing! Faith needs to have its perfect work, as well as patience. How often men stop short!

How is it with you who read these words? How are you treating Him, His words, and His works? You have to do with Him, whether you will or not. For the hour now is, when the dead have the voice of the Son of God sounding in their ears, and they that hear live. For this He when here prepared men. If He be the rejected Messiah, He is the Son of man and thus the destined Judge of mankind. How would it be with you if the hour of His judgment were come? Could you stand unabashed and unscathed before Him Whose eyes will be then as a flame of fire? Who searches the reins and hearts? Who will reward each according to his works?

What thanks shall one render, when one believes that the same Jesus is the Son of God, not only the true God but eternal life, ready and willing to give life eternal to you who can find it no where else? This is the way, the

best way for a saint, the only way for a sinner, to honour the Son. It is to believe on Him; for indeed He is the way, the truth, and the life. Thus believing you do not come into condemnation, but even now have passed from death unto life. So He declares; so may you believe, and never be confounded.

Tenth Series

1 The Widow's Son raised

2 The Unclean Demon cast out

3 The woman with a spirit of Infirmity

4 The Dropsical Man Cured

5 The Ten Lepers

6 The Lord at Bethesda

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1 The Widow’s Son raised

Luke 7:11-17.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 134-135.)

As this is a miracle peculiar to the Gospel of Luke, it strikingly illustrates God’s design therein. Luke alone tells us of the penitent woman sent away in peace, of the good Samaritan, of the tax-gatherer in the parable self-judging and contrasted with the self-righteous Pharisee, of the prodigal son, of Zacchaeus, of the converted robber: all of them cases of overflowing grace. So it is here where the gracious power of God manifested itself, and this in the man Christ Jesus, and with marked

commiseration of human grief. All this and more was in the Saviour, as God would have all men know.

“And it came to pass the day after that he went to a city called Nain, and there went with him his disciples, and a great crowd. Now, as he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, there was carried out dead, an only son of his mother, and she a widow, and a considerable crowd of the city was with her. And the Lord seeing her had compassion on her, and said to her, Weep not. And coming up he touched the bier (or, open coffin), and the bearers stopped. And he said, Youth, I say to thee, Awake. And the dead sat up and began to speak; and he gave him to his mother. And fear visited all; and they were glorifying God, saying, A great prophet is arisen among us, and God visited his people. And this report about him went out in the whole of Judea and in all the surrounding country” (vers. 11-17).

The power in which the grace of Christ acted was not limited to sickness, even so extreme as leprosy or paralysis. It was not confined to Israel: faith drew it out mightily in answer to Gentile appeal. Here without an appeal we see it supreme over the ravages of death, and with exquisite tenderness toward sorrow otherwise hopeless. Outside the gate of Nain, still called Nein, and mounting the steep declivity of Jebel Duhy, or Little Hermon, with its many sepulchral caves, the Lord and His disciples, with a great crowd following, met another great crowd drawn together by the funeral of a young man, a widow’s only son. With a heart full of pity He said to the mother, “Weep not.” They were words in vain from other lips. To men it is appointed once to die; and the young man was really dead, as the inspired physician attests. Man born of woman is of few days,

and full of trouble. There is hope of a tree, even if it wax old and the stock die in the ground; through the scent of water it will bud and put forth boughs. But man dies and is prostrate; yea, man expires, and where is he? The waters retire from the lake, and the river water dries up; so man lies down and rises not: till the heavens be no more, they awake not, nor are raised out of their sleep.

But now the Second Man was here, the last Adam. The Kinsman-Redeemer was hard by, and uttered words of hope to the widowed mother, stricken afresh and without hope. The strong one fully armed, who had the might of death, thought to keep his own credit and his goods in peace; but a stronger than he had come upon him and overcome him, and would take from him his whole armour wherein he trusted and divide his spoils. As a sample of this the Lord touched the bier, and the bearers stood still; and His voice was again heard. This time He spoke to the corpse, Youth, I say to thee, Awake.

Never was such a call uttered or heard before. The great prophet Elijah prayed and stretched himself over and over again on another widow's child; and Jehovah hearkened to Elijah's importunate supplication (1 Kings 17). He too that asked and received a double portion of Elijah's spirit with no less prayer and urgent effort laboured for another dead child, and was heard for his faith. So in later N.T. days Peter ventured not to say to the body of the deceased disciple, Tabitha, Arise, till he had knelt down and prayed, any more than Paul when he fell on the dead Eutychus and enfolded him in his arms.

How different His bearing Who alone is the Resurrection and the Life! "Youth, I say to thee, Awake." Yet He Who by the act thus done was marked out Son of God in

power by resurrection of a dead man, habitually called Himself the Son of man, as it is carefully shown in John 3. And He Who subsisting in the form of God counted it not rapine (or, prize to be clutched) to be on equality with God, in the perfection of human affection gave the youth (no longer dead but sitting up and speaking) to his mother. How able, how willing, is He to help the tried! How suited and ready to sympathise with our infirmities!

Do you, my reader, answer that this was a miracle, and therefore exceptional? Learn then that, though true miracles, His miracles, like His words were written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name. Be assured then of a love in a human heart infinitely beyond man's, even the love of God shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us. His voice now appeals to you in the gospel. For the hour now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live. O you that read, hear Him and live. Why should you die? Why despise grace and truth in not bearing them? Listen to Him again: "Verily, verily, I say to you, He that heareth My word, and believeth Him that sent Me, hath life eternal, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life" (John 5:24).

2 The Unclean Demon cast out

Mark 1. 23-28; Luke 4:33-36.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 148-150.)

This miracle which Mark records as well as Luke may be noticed as the first wrought publicly on one a demoniac. Indeed it has a striking place in the opening of our

Lord's service in the second Gospel, which is devoted to that display of its exercise. What truths are more needful for man to hear than that he is in one way or another under the thraldom of Satan? and that the name of Jesus alone avails to deliver him? Only it is as beautiful as it is blessed to see that the third Gospel depicts from the vision of Isaiah the grace and power in which He came, before manifesting man's wretched subjection to the enemy. It was given to Luke only to tell us of that matchless scene in the synagogue at Nazareth, before the solemn lesson that soon followed at Capernaum. How quickly men turn from wonder at grace in God and His Son to the wrath and hatred of their own offended pride! How slow to allow that their own will opens the door for their slavery to Satan!

"And there was in the synagogue a man having a spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried with a loud voice, Eh! what have we to do with thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Didst thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out from him. And the demon, having thrown him down in the midst, came out from him, without injuring him. And amazement came upon all, and they spoke together one with another, saying, What [is] this word? because with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out" (vers. 33-36).

No doubt this case like others in the Gospels exhibits the aggravated fact of possession. It was not derangement here, but Satan's command of mind and body. Yet it is also observable that what is ordinary and presents none of the humiliating horrors of possession may be really more ruinous eternally. So we may infer from the

Gadarenes, who were not drawn to Jesus by the deliverance of him that had the legion, but on the contrary besought Him to depart from their borders. In any way, how awful is the subjection! How gladly should men hail the true tidings God sends of a Deliverer in Jesus! Only believe on Him; believe God about His Son. Do you not need Him desperately? None less, none other, than Jesus can defeat Satan or save your soul.

Think of the fearful identification of the unclean spirit with the man, which his language reveals. “Eh! what have we to do with thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Didst Thou come to destroy us?” There is no creature in the universe which affords a lair so congenial for a demon as a sinful human heart. As long as you are far from the Lord, you are near and open to the power or wiles of the spirit of evil. He is your great enemy; the Lord Jesus is your greater friend. Reject not the Saviour to your ruin. Be assured that He will receive you; if you cast your soul on Him, He will in no wise reject you. He came to seek and save the lost. If you own yourself lost, as indeed you are, He is just the Saviour for you.

There is another notable word. “I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God.” Yes, He was and is “holy,” even as God is, the Holy One of Israel. And this most appals these unclean spirits, a Man, yet the Holy One of God! No wonder, that they believe and shudder. How portentous that sinful man when he hears neither believes nor shudders! yea, yet worse, that he believes after a sort without a shudder even at his own state and sure doom, if he abides as he is in his sins, neglecting so great salvation.

But “Jesus rebuked him,” refusing a demon’s testimony; as the apostle did at a later day. God testifies by His word, as He was then testifying in Jesus, His Son and Servant; and the Holy Spirit is now sent forth to bear witness of Jesus, that you may believe on Him and be saved.

Not content with rebuking the demon, He commanded him to hold his peace and come out from the man he had made his prey. And the demon was compelled to obey. If he threw the man in the midst, as evidence of the powerful spirit, he came out from the man without doing him hurt, to the praise of the Lord Jesus. It was not “word” only, to which they were used; but this word was with authority and power in Jehovah’s servant, His chosen. Amazement came on all then; but for a sinner to believe is far better still.

Oh! is not this the Saviour that you want? He that died to annul him that had the power of death, He died for you, that your sins might be blotted out and yourself justified by faith in His name. “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” Such was the due time with God: why is it not your due time? What could God do more to meet your danger and your need? How could He better assure you of His deep compassion? No other sign could match what He has already given in the Crucified? Why should you ask or look for any other? Be sure God gave the very best.

3 The woman with a spirit of Infirmity

Luke 13:10-17.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 167-168.)

This is a miracle which fell to Luke alone to record; and it sets before us the Man Who was Jehovah's fellow accomplishing His mission of grace in the midst of a race not only indifferent or hostile to God but hypocritical. Their perverse iniquity leads on those who ought to be intercessors to become adversaries.

"And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, a woman having a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and she was bowed together and wholly unable to hold her head up. And Jesus, seeing her, addressed and said to her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands upon her; and immediately she was made straight, and was glorifying God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus healed on the sabbath, said in answer to the crowd, There are six days in which one ought to work; in these therefore come and be healed, and not on the day of the sabbath. The Lord therefore answered him and said, Hypocrites! doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall and leading it away water [it]? And this [woman], Abraham's daughter as she is, whom Satan bound, behold, eighteen years, ought she not to be loosed from this bond on the day of the sabbath? And as he said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed; and all the crowd rejoiced at all the glorious things that were being done by him" (vers 10-17).

The sabbath had often furnished occasion to prove the evil state of the people, especially of those in repute among men, as in Luke 6:2, 7, 11. Here the Holy Spirit introduces the grace of our Lord, where the context tells of God's moral judgment of Israel, tested and aggravated by His presence, Who went about doing

good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil. But what was God and His grace to such as sought no glory but their own? They were only provoked by a love which condemned their ungodly self- seeking. Their heart was far from Him, and its deceits were veiled from themselves by religious forms. It is not the righteous, still less the self-righteous, but sinners whom our Saviour calls.

While teaching in a synagogue one sabbath, the Lord beheld a woman, so long bowed down that she could not look up, and yet coming to hear God's word. Without an appeal from her or any other, He addressed her with words of wonder-working compassion. "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." Not content with what had fully sufficed, "He laid his hands upon her; and immediately she was made straight, and was glorifying God." He had vanquished the strong one, and would take from him all his panoply wherein he trusted, and would divide his spoils. The Lord was entitled to proclaim release to the captives, and to set at liberty those who were bound.

The ruler of the synagogue, instead of owning and blessing God for His manifested goodness and power, was "indignant," hating the grace which he could not deny, and thus proving himself to be under a deeper slavery to Satan than the delivered woman. His wickedness was all the worse for the zeal, in his answer to the crowd, he affected for the sabbath. "There are six days in which one ought, to work; in these therefore come and be healed, and not on the day of the sabbath." It was God Who had wrought in and by His Son; and would he shut one out from His mercy on that day? to

say nothing of her lying in the bitter bondage of the enemy so many years.

“The Lord therefore answered him and said, Ye hypocrites! [for he had not a few who shared his half-hearted unbelief] doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead it off to watering? and this [woman], Abraham’s daughter as she is, whom Satan bound, behold, eighteen years, ought she not to be loosed from this bond on the day of the sabbath?” It was irresistible for the conscience; and hearts were gladdened by grace as evident as the truth. “All his adversaries were ashamed; and all the crowd rejoiced at all the glorious things that were being done by him.”

He, the Lord, has done a far greater and more enduring work. He has given His life a ransom for many. He has suffered once for sins, Just for unjust, to bring you to God, Who points you to Him for a greater deliverance, even redemption for the body with glory on high. Acknowledge then your desperate need; for you too are so bowed down by Satan through your iniquities, that you cannot truly look up. To your guilt and misery add not the hypocrisy of pleading religious obligations, when God proclaims in your ears the glad tidings of His Son, the Rescuer from the wrath to come. Neither working on the six days, nor rest on the seventh, can efface your sins; nor can the synagogue avail, nor saints or Virgin more than yourself, but “Jesus only.” He is the “one Mediator between God and men” (1 Tim. 2:5). “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house” (Acts 16:31). “In none other is there salvation; for neither is there any other name under heaven that is given among men, wherein we must be saved.” So said

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit to the rulers of the people and elders (Acts 4:12). So say not those who falsely claim to be his successors or their abettors.

4 The Dropsical Man Cured

Luke 14:1-6.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 187-188.)

It is plain that the Spirit is in this context setting out the moral ruin of men who flattered themselves, as far as possible from believing that the kingdom of God was to be taken from them, and given to such as should bring forth the fruits thereof. The various incidents of the chapter bring to light man in his evil confronted by the grace of God in Christ. So it is in the opening scene.

“And it came to pass, when he went into the house of a certain one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on a sabbath, that they were watching him. And, behold, there was a certain dropsical man before him. And Jesus answering spoke unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath, or not? But they were quiet. And he took, healed, and let him go. And [answering] he said unto them, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a well, and will not straightway draw him up on the sabbath day? And they were unable to answer again unto these things” (Luke 14:1-6).

Neither love nor truth animated these religious chiefs. Under the cover of hospitality, they were hostile. They sought evil, but only proved it in their own ill-will. The dropsical man there present gave the Lord occasion to assert God’s title to do good.

Had not Jehovah said before the law, “If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of Jehovah thy God, and

wilt do that which is right in his eyes, wilt give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put upon the Egyptians; for I am Jehovah that healeth thee" (Ex. 15:26). Yet what was the witness of the dropsical man before the Lord and before them? And what meant all manner of disease and of sickness in the land of Israel, as it were crowding round Him to be healed? And why from all Syria brought they all that were sick, suffering under various distempers and torments, and those possessed by demons, with lunatics and paralytics? It was not Jehovah-Rophi who had failed, but man generally and Israel in particular. If the sabbath was a sign between Him and them, how came it, in shining, to disclose such misery and suffering? Why with an object before all eyes to draw out pity and humiliation, were these chiefs, Pharisees, doctors of the law, blind to His glory Who was the Son of God, blind to His grace Who went about doing good and healing all that were overpowered by the devil, for God was with Him? Yea, God was in Him, reconciling the world to Himself, not reckoning to them their offences; and they were watching Him with eyes fuller of hatred to Him than to the Gentiles they most despised! Was this then their sabbath honour?

The sabbath was a precious sign from the beginning, and, filling the very centre of the law, the sure pledge of what God would accomplish in due time. But what of man's ways before the law, and under the law? What had he been to God during all the six days? What were his works before Him, and what his life? Did he love Jehovah with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might? Did not the presence of His Son, a man

among man, prove the very reverse? Alas! man, sinful man, cannot enter God's rest. His works are evil. There is judgment, not rest, for him; death, and judgment.

The Lord therefore made a special point of healing on a sabbath. All the Gospels attest it, and repeatedly (Matt. 12:9; Mark 1:21, 3:1; Luke 13:10; John 5:9, 9:14). Here, as in chap. 13 cases are special to Luke as displaying divine grace, hateful to the self-righteous. The incurably sick man was the true testimony to man's state. Christ answers the selfish and unbelieving rancour of their hearts by His question. They were abashed and afraid to speak; but their will remained unbroken. And He laid hold of the man, who had not even appealed to Him (that the grace of God might all the more appear), healed him, and let him go. But He added a withering word to those hard and self-complacent sinners, "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a well, and will not straightway draw him up on the sabbath day"? This was notorious. And had God no interest in healing a sufferer or in saving a sinner? This they virtually denied, and hated Him Who came to give it effect.

And you, dear reader, if you believe not on Him, are in worse case than the dropsical man. Are you not a lost soul? Face your actual state before God; do not palliate; do not forget. In vain the medicine-man; in vain yourself or others; in vain, the saints, the angels, or the virgin. But "the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." So He said Who is the truth. It is God's word; believe Him, and receive the blessing, even peace and joy in believing. Own the truth of your sins: this is repentance. Own the truth of His grace; this is faith, It is the way of Christ to the Father; and there is no other way from God and to God for a sinner.

5 The Ten Lepers

Luke 17:11-19.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 201-202.)

The Lord in this miracle sets forth the grace, which was soon to supersede the law publicly, as even faith might in a measure enjoy personally. So this Gospel shows the Lord preparing the way in word and deed for the Christianity that was at hand, when Judaism died in His death.

The miracle was striking in its breadth and in its originality, if one may so say. It was not now a single leper prostrate at His feet, and His hand touching him in gracious power as Jehovah-Messiah. Ten leprous men together appealed as they stood afar off, calling aloud for His compassion, and not in vain before Him who came to save that which was lost. But let us hear the instructive account of divine pity and much more here only recorded.

“And it came to pass as He was on the way into Jerusalem, that He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered into a certain village, there met Him ten leprous men who stood afar off; and they lifted up their voices, saying, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And on seeing He said to them, Go your way, show yourselves to the priests. And it came to pass, as they departed they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back with a loud voice glorifying God; and he fell on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks; and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus in answer, said, Were not the ten cleansed? but where [are] the nine? Were none found to return and give glory to God save this stranger? And He said to

him, Arise, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole" (vers. 11-19).

Faith was put to the test. While still uncleansed, they were told to go and show themselves to the priests. The solitary leper in earlier days was first cleansed, and then sent; but the ten were to go as they were. Assured of His power and unfailing compassion Who never wrecked the hope of the wretched, they acted on His word; and as they withdrew they were cleansed. What could the priests do but pronounce on the cure by the Master, and perform their prescribed ritual? One infinitely greater and better than they had wrought on ruined men to God's glory.

And this truth had spoken in growing faith to one heart among them where it might least have been expected; for he was a Samaritan. How apt even believers are to settle down contented with the needed blessing, and stop short of the Blesser! But one rose above letter and self; but one of them recognised the new responsibility created by grace; but one of the ten felt the immediate and paramount duty of returning to give glory to God, and of honouring the Man, His image and Son, even as the Father is honoured.

Yes, the despised Samaritan alone turned back when he saw that he was healed. The nine might argue and blame the faith that outgrew theirs. "What! you going back to Jesus! Did He not tell us all to go and show ourselves to the priests?" It was plausible to reason, which cleaves to letter; but above letter is spirit, which cannot be satisfied with aught but God's mind; and He is not truly honoured apart from Jesus. The nine remained Jews as they were, relieved bodily by divine power, but

the heart in the old precincts of law, neither purified by faith nor enlarged by grace. Not so the Samaritan who turned to the Source and honoured with the deepest homage Him Who is the Channel too of divine goodness.

It was indeed a living sample of Judaism, the refuge now of mere lettered ritual, soon to give place to grace and truth in and by Jesus, the Christianity of the gospel, and the church, believing man being brought to God reconciled and rejoicing. The first becomes last, and the last first. How the Lord fathomed and felt it all! “Were not the ten cleansed? but where the nine? Were none found to return and give glory to God save this stranger?” Truly their loss is the riches of the Gentiles; their casting away is the world’s reconciling, as the apostle announced in Rom. 11.

Nor is this all. The Lord instantly proclaims to the grateful Samaritan that liberty which is so essential to the Christian and is now preached to all that believe the gospel. “Arise, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole (or, saved thee).” The cleansing, marvellous as it was, was but a figure of a deeper cure, even of soul-salvation. God in Christ came out to man in his sins, and man justified can now go in to God, even in the holiest. Earthly priests and temple, sacrifices and rites of law, are all gone in presence of Jesus dead, risen, and ascended.

But how is it with you, my reader? Many Jewish and more Gentile eyes that scan these pages know how true is the gospel to their present and everlasting deliverance. Are you one of those who say that to believe on Christ is one thing, but to realise and appropriate to yourself is another? God says not so; only your human

dogma, or your unjudged unbelief, cherishes these churlish thoughts of God. He is better than the strongest faith apprehends; He has declared himself to you in Jesus, full of grace and truth. Believe Him about His Son given for you and testified to you, that you too by grace may be saved through faith.

6 The Lord at Bethesda

John 5 (B.T. Vol. N3, p. 215-216.)

Throughout this Gospel, and especially these early chapters the Lord is shown eclipsing and superseding all the old objects of honour and trust. The Pool of Bethesda bore witness even then to Jehovah as healing Israel (Ex. 15). Not merely was it occasional only, but incomplete and conditional; like the law, it required strength enough to avail oneself of it. He that was quite powerless lay there in vain. Another stept in before he could be put into the water when troubled by the angel. To will was present with him, but not to do. “O wretched man that I am!” was all he could feel. He needed the only One Who could speak the effectual word, “Arise, take up thy couch, and walk”; then he did so immediately, sabbath as it was. What was an angel’s act in comparison?

Such a sight aroused Jewish enmity; for with seared conscience they exaggerated and idolised every form. They disliked the healing power of the True God on a sabbath. The man did not profit by the warning given him of worse than sickness, but learning who it was that healed him, went and told it to the Jews, who persecuted Jesus. His answer was, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” How overwhelming for their evil and pride!

how glorifying to God! how full of blessing to every man who truly owns his sin and misery!

It is the revelation of the Father and the Son, Who works as man in the midst of men. This is the truth, yea grace and truth come through Jesus Christ. Let the Jews vainly boast of the law given by Moses, which they kept not, it could not but be a ministration of death and condemnation. But the veil of unbelief was lying on their heart; and they neither judged themselves nor believed on Him Who did indeed say that God was His own Father, making Himself equal with God. And therefore those blindly religious yet wicked men sought the more to kill Him.

O my reader, flatter not yourself. You ware not so tried. You are no less guilty and lost. You may pay homage with the lip; but are you in heart and life slighting Him Who came and died for you? Are you not neglecting so great salvation? Do you not annul the gospel, as if God's proclamation were but a fair and kindly form, and not a message of life and peace to the believer? Does not God pronounce His wrath to abide on him who is not subject to the Son? If you are believing on Him, God's word is that you have life eternal in His Son.

So the Lord then declared that the Son loyally takes as man the place of entire subjection, and does nothing of Himself, save what He saw the Father doing. He emptied Himself of glory, taking the form of a bondman; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even death of a cross. From what a height, and to what a depth, that God might be perfectly and at all cost glorified even about

sin and ruin! And so He is. Wherefore also God highly exalted Him.

Here the Lord opens the great truth, starting from the sign on the sick man, and going on to His giving life eternal to those who believe, and His executing judgment on those who, not believing, do evil. Thus it is that all may honour the Son even as they honour the Father. The Son quickens whom He will, in communion with the Father who raises the dead and quickens. But He alone of Godhead became man, and suffered man's contempt and hatred even to the Cross. He therefore has all judgment given to Him, for in that full and final sense He alone judges. Bodily healing was but a sign. The real question is between life eternal and future judgment.

Hence we have the solemnly blessed message: "Verily, verily, I say to you, He that heareth my word and believeth him that sent me hath life eternal and cometh not into judgment, but hath (or, is) passed out of death into life" (ver. 24). All turns on hearing Christ's word and believing Him that sent the Saviour Son of God. If one hear and believe, he has life eternal, and does not come into judgment which is no less everlasting, but has passed out of death as it was into life as now given in Him. Life eternal is in contrast with judgment which awaits those who here below only dishonoured the Son, but must honour Him to their own perdition in that judgment.

Next is shown on one side man's real state, not infirm only but "dead " before God; and even now the voice of His Son for men that have heard to live. "Verily, verily, I say to you, An hour cometh and now is, when the dead

shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that heard shall live" (ver. 25). For the Son was come, and as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself. Being man, He receives all from the Father, jealous to honour Him alone, as man's only right place. Thus He quickens now, as at the end He will execute judgment, according to the authority given Him, because He is Son of man.

None should wonder at this. An hour cometh which will demonstrate both His giving life as Son of God, and His executing judgment as Son of man. It is an hour,,when all that are in the tombs [distinguishing these from the spiritually dead of ver. 25] shall hear his voice, and shall go forth: they that wrought the good things unto a resurrection of life; and they that committed the worthless unto a resurrection of judgment" (vers. 28, 29). There are thus two resurrections of opposed character (not a general one as the unbelief of Christendom feigns). They answer to life and good fruit now had by faith in God's Son, and to the unbelief with its unremoved death and corrupt ways. The Revelation which the Lord gave John adds the fresh light of the kingdom over the earth and all things, in which the changed saints reign with Him for a thousand years, and a little more, before the judgment of the wicked dead and their consignment to the lake of fire. It is a book of times and seasons, which the Gospel of John is not: but both thoroughly agree as to a resurrection of life, and a resurrection of judgment.

O my reader, can any words of man add to the Lord's solemn call? Hear the voice of God's Son now, that you may have life in Him and may not come into that judgment which is woe for ever.

7 The Blind at Siloam

John 9 (B.T. Vol. N3, p. 231-232.)

On no healing of the blind has the Holy Spirit dwelt so long and impressively as on this. But it is evidently in furtherance of His design in the Gospel of John: to set forth the Son's person as incarnate, but rejected in His work here, as in His word just before (John 8). How blind are all who can now read or hear God's written testimony, and fail to recognise His signature in the address to their souls, that believing in the name of Jesus they may have life eternal!

It was indeed a desperate case, "And as he passed on, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind? Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin nor his parents, but that the works of God should be manifested in him. I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: night cometh when none can work. When I am in the world, I am light of the world. Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle, and smeared the clay on his eyes, and said to him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is interpreted, Sent). He went off therefore, and washed, and came seeing. The neighbours therefore, and those that used to see him before that he was a beggar said, Is not this he that used to sit and beg? Some said, It is he, and others said, No, but he is like him. He said, I am [he]. They said therefore to him, How then were thine eyes opened? He answered and said, A man called Jesus made clay, and smeared mine eyes, and said to me, Go to Siloam and wash; and having gone off

and washed, I received sight. And they said to him, Where is he? He saith, I know not" (vers. 1-12).

The Lord put aside questions, and presents God's working in grace by Himself here, as Light of the world to give it effect. In an action which figured His incarnation in Whom was life, He besmeared the blind man's eyes with that which would have hindered sight, till he washed in the pool (Sent). The humiliation of Christ enables none to see, unless by the word and Spirit they apprehend Him sent of God the Father to do His will; by which will (as Heb. 10 tells us) we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. The word was thus mixed with faith in him who heard.

To confess Jesus Christ come in flesh is by the Spirit of God. Thus only do we, blind by nature, receive the Light of life. Christ becomes all to us, who before had nothing but sins and darkness and death. Till then uncertainty reigns, as we see here among the neighbours. The man is clear as to himself and confesses the Lord more as he learns more. The self-righteous oppose, and seize on the sabbath when the sign was wrought, as proof against the Saviour. The Jews believe not and summon the parents in vain to set it aside. But the great fact remains: Jesus gave the blind to see. Human affection may shirk the confession of the truth. Human religion may frown, revile, and persecute. But grace and truth only shine the more brightly. "One thing I know," the beggar that was answers, "that whereas I was blind, now see" (ver. 25).

Is not this characteristic of the gospel? It is the glad tidings, not only proclaimed in the name of Jesus, but

known and enjoyed by the believer. “I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake” (1 John 2:12). So it is not only that the believer has life eternal, but “these things I write to you, that ye may know that ye have life eternal, to you that believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13). Christendom in its unbelief falls back behind the veil of Judaism, and denies to the Christian the happy certainty of what grace has wrought and now gives freely. The priest and his rites would cloud all peace and joy in believing. They may be disciples of Moses; they are not disciples of Jesus. They claim a sacrifice for ever, continuously offered, instead of confessing that He sat down in perpetuity, because His one accepted sacrifice is so efficacious that God will remember our sins and iniquities no more. To unbelief it is always a-doing, never done.

Faith made the seeing man bold. To the perverse reasoning of unbelief, which refused the evidence of God’s gracious power and rejected Him Who alone makes the Father truly known, he replies, “Since the world began it was never heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man [Jesus] were not from God, he could do nothing.” Impotent and incensed, they could only hiss in answer, “Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out” (ver. 34).

“Jesus finding him said, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, And who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him? Jesus said to him, Thou hast both seen Him, and He it is that speaketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe; and he worshipped Him” (vers. 35-37). May this be your portion, dear reader. Jesus is

the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and the one means of receiving Him is faith. Believe God's testimony to Him; and He is yours. This will enable you to judge yourself truly and confess your sins honestly; without it, you will only render a fair show in flesh. All other things, important as they may be, are subordinate to receiving Jesus. But He once received makes all else an easy yoke and a light burden.

8 Lazarus Raised

John 11 (B.T. Vol. N3, p. 250-252.)

The Lord Jesus manifested His glory by His "signs"; for such they were, and not wonders only or powers. Here the signs which He did reached a climax in testifying to Him as Son of God. For as the Father raises the dead and quickens them, so the Son also quickens whom He will. This testimony He gave in raising the young daughter of Jairus (as recorded in the three synoptic Gospels), and in raising the widow's son of Nain whilst being carried out for burial. But now, quite close to Jerusalem, a still more glorious sign was seen in raising up Lazarus not only dead but buried. It is also in exact keeping with the special design of the fourth Gospel, and divinely seasonable too at that moment.

The Lord did not come to the sick man at the appeal of the sisters, however truly He loved them all, but abode two days where He was. "This sickness is not unto death (said He) but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby." He waited as ever for divine direction. After this He goes, though the disciples warn of danger, and He intimates that Lazarus was dead, as they failed to catch the meaning of His words. He knew the end from the beginning.

Martha went and met Him, but Mary sat still in the house. Yet the faith of Martha rose no higher than that He was Messiah, and that God would give Him whatsoever He should ask. When Jesus said, Thy brother shall rise again, she only speaks of the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on Me, though he have died, shall live; and every one that liveth and believeth on Me shall never die. Believest thou this? Martha's answer was quite vague and not to the purpose: "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, that cometh into the world." And having said this, she went and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is here, and calleth thee. And she, when she heard it, rises quickly and comes to Him. Yet when she arrived and fell at His feet, she says like her sister, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

The power of death lay on both, on all their hearts; and Mary wept, and the Jews that came with her. Jesus was deeply pained in His spirit, and was troubled, and wept. It was not only sympathy in love, but profoundly feeling trouble at death's power over not man only but saints. At the grave He speaks and acts in divine power over death, in communion with the Father. Martha's unbelief only draws out the expression of it. He is the resurrection and the life; and with His eyes lifted on high, He says, I thank Thee that Thou hearest Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but for the sake of the crowd that standeth around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me. And having thus said, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And the dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave

clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith to them, Loose him and let him go.

With this Lord and Saviour you, my reader, have to do now. You are called on by God to honour Him whom man rejected and crucified. You are enjoined to believe on Him. You need Him as much as Lazarus, nay even more; for Lazarus already believed on Him and was beloved by Him. Can you say that you believe on Him? Do you receive Him as the Lord and Saviour sent by God that you may have in Him life eternal? To receive Him thus on God's testimony is to believe on His name. His coming again will prove the power and blessedness of life in Him; for then it is that the sleeping saints shall be raised, and the living saints shall not sleep but be changed. It is the full result of His being the resurrection and the life, of which the raising of Lazarus was the pledge on a small scale. It accords with Christ's own words to Martha, "he that believeth on me, though he should have died, shall live; and every one, that liveth and believeth on me shall never die."

Martha did not enter into this blessed truth, though she believed on Him. She thought she knew all of moment in believing Him to be the Christ, the Son of God, that was to come into the world. And there are many saints who lose much joy and power by like vagueness. But she did believe on Him. And this let me press on you who read these lines, and yet cannot say that you believe on Him. Oh, if He is, as He says, the resurrection and the life, why do you hesitate to rest on such a revelation of Himself? It goes far beyond raising up the dead and buried man to renewed life in this world. It suffices for heaven and for eternity. It was not said only for that occasion; it is written by the Holy Spirit for you, and for

every other who reads or hears these wondrous words now.

Do not then aggravate your guilt and state of spiritual death by slighting either the grace of God that appeals to you in the words of the Lord Jesus, or the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men that hold fast the truth in unrighteousness. Such may differ greatly in outward seeming; neither class have life, because they believe not on Him. They are both alike in that they will not come unto Christ, that they may have life. But without Christ, as life and propitiation also, happiness is as impossible as holiness. Life is the first want of one dead in sins. Christ is the only giver of life; and He gives it to all that believe on Him.

9 Blind Bartimaeus

Mark 10:46-52.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 266-267.)

No sight was more characteristic of our Lord's ministry than His grace to the blind. It has the first place given to it in the answer to John the Baptist's message. A special case is presented in Matt. 9:27, another in Mark 8:22, and the more general fact in Luke 7:21 with other cures, but the most marked of all in John 9. Yet there is this striking circumstance common to the three earlier Gospels, that the final testimony which the Lord offers to the Jews in or near Jerusalem opens with the healing of the blind man near Jericho. Only Matthew, as his manner is, tells us of two (compare Matt. 8:28, 9:27). Mark and Luke were led to dwell on what was for other reasons the more remarkable of them. It is idle to conceive

separate occasions, one on entering and the other in quitting Jericho. For Matthew and Mark are express that the miracle was wrought on going out from the town. The phrase of Luke is so indeterminate as to fall in with that statement. He does not say, “as he drew nigh” or “when he came near” to Jericho; but while in the neighbourhood. This was as true when He went out as when He came in.1 “And they come to Jericho, and as he was going out from Jericho and his disciples and a considerable crowd, the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus the blind, was sitting by the wayside begging. And having heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out and say, O Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me. And many were rebuking him that he might be silent, but he cried out so much the more, Son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still and said that he should be called. And they call the blind, saying to him, Be of good courage, rise: he calleth thee. And, throwing away his garment, he sprang up and came unto Jesus. And Jesus in answer said to him, What wilt thou that I should do to thee? And the blind said, Teacher (Rabboni), that I may receive sight. And Jesus said to him, Go thy way; thy faith hath healed (saved) thee. And immediately he received sight, and followed him in the way” (vers. 46-52).

Observe how the blind Israelites at the beginning of our Lord’s ministry appeal to Him as Son of David. It was a matter of revealed promise that Messiah should open their eyes; and as they believed with their heart, they confessed with their mouth, and got the blessing. It was not so with the Canaanite, though she too believed, and with rare faith. But like many a believer, she at first applied on a wrong ground; from which the Lord led her

into the right and true, that she might all the better enjoy the grace that awaited her. Here the call on the Son of David exactly suits the ways of God, when Christ finally presented Himself to the people, about to consummate His rejection to their own utter ruin for the present. It is the starting-point for His last Messianic offer to Jerusalem, where the blind that cried in faith were made to see, and those who said they saw were made blind for their unbelief and enmity.

O my reader, call on the Lord, like the once blind Bartimaeus. Hitherto you have been blind, and have followed blind leaders into the ditch. But Jesus still waits to heal and extricate you. Fear not. Be of good courage, if now you feel your need, and believe that all authority and power are His. Does He not call you as truly as He did the son of Timaeus? Read not His words so unbelievingly. These things are written that you may believe unto life and salvation. Profit by the lesson of his earnest importunity. Many, who felt not their own need any more than his, kept rebuking him. It was not decorum — in their view who were travelling at ease to perdition. Such cries might be well on the sabbath perhaps, and no doubt on a dying bed; but they were wholly objectionable by the wayside and before a crowd.

The Lord heard as He ever does the call of distress and of faith, took His stand, and bade him be brought before Him. And how graphic the sketch, and instructive the eagerness of the blind man casting away his cloak that he might get to the Lord! Poor as he was, he must lay aside every hindrance and go to Him at once. And Jesus answered his heart, and drew out its desire: “Great Teacher, that I may receive sight.” And immediately was it given; he also followed Jesus in the way. For this His

sheep do. It is their instinct of life in Him; as it is His word to them, that they may be kept in a world of evil, snares, and danger. But the Lord Jesus guides and guards His own, yet not without their hearing His voice and following Him all the way through. And a stranger will they not follow, as the rule (the only right and safe rule), but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers.

Can you say, dear reader, that you have received sight from Jesus? If not, be assured that you are blind as well as in your sins. You are trusting baptism or religious observances or your clergyman in vain, if you suppose that any or all these can give you sight, or life, or propitiation for your sins. Only Jesus avails in answer to your faith, and even Jesus can give you all only by His death for you a guilty sinner. Look to Him, and be saved.

10 The Power and the Grace of the Name

John 18:1-9.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 280-281.)

How strikingly the divine design of the Fourth Gospel differs from the three Synoptics, as seen in their reports of Gethsemane on the night of the betrayal! Who left to his own feelings would have so dwelt on his Master’s agony as the beloved disciple? Yet he says not one word about it, though he alone of the Evangelists was chosen to be near the Lord in that affecting and mysterious scene, when He repaired again and again to them and found them sleeping. It fell to the others to record His exceeding sorrow in realising the depths into which He was just about to enter; because it bore directly on the rejection of the Messiah, on the work the Righteous

Servant had in hand, and on the Son of man, as perfectly dependent on His Father in the hour of woe as in all the activities of power in loving service.

Here shines out the glory of His person. Had we only the witness of John, rich as it is, what should we know of His anguish in anticipation of all before Him as He prayed to His Father, and of His entire submission whatever it cost? If most appropriately Luke alone mentions an angel strengthening Him and His sweat as clots of blood, here we see and hear the Son of the Father, to Whom He had commended His own in John 17.

“Jesus having said these things went out with his disciples over the winter-torrent Kidron, where was a garden into which he entered, he and his disciples. And Judas also that betrayed him knew. the place; because Jesus often resorted thither with his disciples. Judas therefore, having received the band and officials from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that were coming upon him, went forth and said to them, Whom seek ye? They answered, Jesus the Nazaraean. He said to them, I am [he]. And Judas that betrayed him stood with them. When therefore he said, I am [he], they went backward, and fell to the ground. Again therefore he asked them, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus the Nazaraean. Jesus answered, I told you that I am [he]: if therefore ye seek me, let these go away; that the word might be fulfilled which he said, Of those whom thou hast given me, I lost not one” (vers. 1-9).

What communion with the Father, what prayer, what intercession, what tender care for the feeble disciples,

what self-sacrificing interest on their behalf, what vigilant love of the good Shepherd, what pity for Israel, what outgoing of heart for the sheep not of this fold, had not been known in that garden! Yes, Judas knew it, and took his measures accordingly under Satan to gratify the chief priests and Pharisees. Thither he led the band with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Men who do not know the Lord talk of His “limitations,” and forget that He is God, the Word become flesh, but no more ceasing to be God than a man can cease to be man. Jesus knew all things that were coming on Him, the same Jesus Who had gone through all in the profoundest grief yet dependence on the Father, for He was as truly man, the perfect man. Now when horrors began to thicken, what calm pervaded His every word and act! He went forth and said to them, Whom seek ye? They answered, Jesus the Nazaraean; and on His reply, I am [He], they went backward and fell to the ground.

God indeed attested what was due to that Name; for He too was God no less than the Father and the Holy Spirit. Nor was there ever a moment more befitting. So Judas the betrayer stood with them, and he too with them fell to the ground. What a testimony to their conscience, as well as to His glory!

When the wicked Ahaziah sent a captain with his fifty to take the Tishbite prophet as he sat alone on a hill, again and again came fire down from heaven to consume the captains and their fifties. Jesus full of grace and truth came to save the lost. Not a word more did He utter. He owned Himself Jesus the Nazaraean. It was enough. In His name shall bow all beings heavenly, earthly, and infernal, and every tongue confess Him Lord to God the

Father’s glory. It was but a witness then to that glory; but how blessed and suited and eloquent, if they had not had deaf ears, seared consciences, and hearts harder than stone! He Whose name laid them prostrate could have in a moment consigned them to death for everlasting judgment. But no! He came that God might be glorified in His death for sin, to set free every sinner that believes in Him.

And so it was of His grace that, after the manifestation of power, He asked them again, Whom seek ye? As they gave the same reply, He answered, I told you that I am [He]; if therefore ye seek Me, let these go away. O what grace now manifested on behalf of His own, so unworthy of His love, yet loved unto the end, loved though He knew all would forsake Him and flee, and that one who ventured nearer in that night of desertion would there thrice deny that he knew Him! It was a fulfilment of John 17:12; but great as it was, how little compared with all that those words mean and guarantee! And indeed such is His love that it covers all things great and small.

How are you who read these lines treating Him and His love? He, the Son of God and Lord of glory, was nothing to Judas and the Jews, but for the one to sell and the other to buy; and He submitted to be the willing prisoner, and the willing sacrifice, that you might hear and live. You have heard, but cannot live without faith in Him Who is the life eternal — life now that you may live of Him now — life evermore that you may have Him your life for the body and heaven as well as now for your soul on earth. But forget not that to hear and not believe on Him leaves you worse unspeakably than if you had never heard. Oh then hear, believe, and live.

11 Malchus healed

Luke 22:50, 51; John 18:10, 11.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 295-296.)

The moral perfection of the Lord shone only the more brightly in His new and last trial. Satan, foiled in his effort to tempt Him out of His path of obedience, came now to kill Him in it. But nothing moved Him out of that way, nothing provoked Him, even when the disciples slept instead of praying, unable (even Peter and James and John) to watch one hour with Him.

When the crowd of men with swords and staves laid hold on and seized Him, Peter (too hasty to await the answer to the appeal, Lord, shall we smite with sword?) drew his, and smote the high priest's bondman, and took off his ear. This the Lord rebuked: "Return thy sword to its place; for all that take the sword shall perish by the sword. Or thinkest thou, that I cannot now call on my Father, and he will furnish me more than twelve legions of angels? How then should the scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?"

He abides the righteous Servant. He came to suffer for sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God, and fit the children of God to share His glory on high when He takes all the creation heavenly and earthly, and reigns over Israel and the nations on earth in His day. Those who believe now are called to suffer with Him, as the Lord had taught His own when correcting their thoughts and desires about His kingdom. "Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and the great exercise authority over them. But it shall not be thus among you; but whosoever will be great among you, he shall be your servant; and whosoever will

be first among you, let him be your bondman; as indeed the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:25-28).

But Peter, ever rash as yet, thought of nothing but his Master's danger; and, in fleshly zeal seeking to defend Him, he stood reproved. It was human nature, but contrary to Christ and His word. If carried out, it would have made redemption impossible, like his warm and hasty error in Matt. 16:22, for which the Lord bade him, Get away behind me, Satan, and added, Thou art an offence to me; for thy mind is not on the things of God but on the things of men. Peter failed not only to appreciate Christ's death, but to apprehend that the Christian must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Him. He did in his measure and spirit what the Lord told Pilate was not for His servants to do, because His kingdom is not of this world. It is of heaven, and of no worldly source.

In the Gospel of Luke (22:51) we first hear that Jesus said in answer, Suffer ye thus far, and with a touch He healed the cut-off ear. Even at such a crisis as this He is thus presented as the gracious Son of man, anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. If He was no longer going about doing good and healing all that were under the devil's power, because God was with Him, He was just as ready to heal one wounded by His thoughtless follower.

John lets us know particularly the names, not only of His follower but of the wounded man. And here the healing has its significance, like every other word and fact in this Gospel as illustrating His personal dignity. As the mention of His name hurled to the ground the band

which came to capture Him, and to which He thereon gave Himself up, with the words, Let these go away; so now the answer to Peter spoke His glory and His grace in a way peculiar to the last Gospel. “Put the sword into the sheath: the cup which the Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”

Blessed Saviour, as Thou in Thy love and light and lowliness art alone in Thy perfection, so art Thou in the ineffable sufferings which were in that cup for Thee to drink! And Thou didst drain it, that God might be glorified, and we who believe might be saved worthily of God. Yet do we rejoice also that as God was glorified in Thee, and in Thy death especially and infinitely, so did He glorify Thee in Himself, and this immediately in heaven, before the world-kingdom of our Lord and His Christ come, who shall reign unto the ages of the ages.

Nor need poor souls who are in their sins wait for that displayed kingdom. While Jesus is glorified on high is just the time during which the Holy Spirit is sent forth, not only to dwell in the church, but to proclaim the gospel, the glad tidings of God to guilty and perishing man. Doubt not then but believe the witness God bears to the Lord Jesus, His Only-begotten Son. Great as is your need, many as are your sins, His grace is far greater. It is as infinite as His person. Come as you are that you may find Him as He is, full of grace and truth. Does not this suit you who have nothing but sins? Receive of His fulness: it is open to all who believe. Then will you live to Him.

12 The Unbroken Net

John 21:1-14.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 313-314.)

We have seen in Luke 5 the remarkable manner in which the Lord called Simon Peter and his companions, already disciples, to be fishers of men. There was then a miracle wrought, which acted powerfully not on the mind only or the affections, but on the conscience. After a night's toil in which they caught nothing, the Master spoke, and at His word they let down the nets. This done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes; but their nets were breaking, and their partners came to help them, and filled both their boats, so that they began to sink. It was the beautiful picture of the gospel work to which they were thenceforward called, where they apart from Him could do nothing, and His power wrought. But yet He allowed the weakness of human responsibility to be felt; for the nets were breaking and the boats sinking under the weight of the very blessing given.

Here at the sea of Tiberias after His resurrection we see them at Peter's instance again fishing; and this night too they took nothing. "But when morn was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach. The disciples however knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus therefore saith to them, Children, have ye aught to eat? They answered him, No. And he said to them, Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. That disciple therefore whom Jesus loved saith to Peter, It is the Lord. Simon Peter therefore, having heard that it was the Lord, girded his overcoat about him (for he was naked), and cast himself into the sea; and the other disciples came in the small boat (for they were not far from the land, but about two hundred cubits off), dragging the net of fishes. When therefore they went out

on the land, they see a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. Jesus saith to them, Bring of the fishes ye have now taken. Simon Peter therefore went up, and drew the net to the land full of great fishes a hundred and fifty- three; and though they were so many, the net was not rent. Jesus saith to them, Come, dine. But none of the disciples dared enquire of him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus cometh and taketh the bread and giveth it to them, and the fish in like manner. This is already the third time that Jesus had been manifested to the disciples, being risen from the dead" (vers. 4-14).

This was not a miracle only but a sign, as indeed is ever the case in the fourth Gospel, and in special connection with the two fore-going manifestations of the risen Lord, which give the key to what has just been cited. The first was when the Lord made Himself known to the disciples gathered on the first day of the week, His own very resurrection day, when He breathed on them, and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. It was His risen life communicated in the power and character of His resurrection, His blood already shed, peace now given, and themselves sent on a mission of peace. It is the type of the Christian and the church.

Eight days after was the second manifestation, when Thomas, who had been absent before but was now present, was convicted of unbelief; as the Lord took up his words of doubt and bade him reach here his finger and see His hands, and put his hand into His side, and be not faithless but believing. The slow disciple could only answer, My Lord and my God! just as the converted Jews will say at the end of this age. Indeed the Lord intimated the same thing when He said to him, "Because

thou hast seen me, thou hast believed [as Israel will do by-and-by]: blessed are they who have not seen and believed"; which is the proper faith of the Christian now.

The third manifestation is equally notable. "After these things Jesus was manifested again to his disciples" in Galilee of the Gentiles. It is not said to be on the first day of the week, nor eight days after; but simply after what foreshadowed His work in bringing Israel out of their unbelief. Now He sets forth Himself for their millennial work of bringing to Him from the sea of the nations, in which converted Israel will be honoured by His grace. Here there is no breaking of the nets, no sinking of the boats. The net is drawn to land full of great fishes, as becomes the type of that vast ingathering. Whatever be the ruin of the Gentiles deceived by Satan at the end, there will be no failure among the blessed among the nations any more than in Israel. This is no small contrast with all that has been seen since Pentecost. And it is not without a bearing on that new day for the earth, that they found a fire of coals already there, and fish on it and bread. Those, who are used of grace for bringing in of the Gentiles on a great scale, learn that the Lord has wrought a work before them, and that they are invited to enter into the communion of His love in that previously hidden work; for eating here as elsewhere is its well-known figure. They partook of the fish ashore before what they had just caught on a larger scale.

Is not Jesus a wondrous and unwearied Saviour? Think of it in all these three manifestations of Himself after He rose. What was it to the disciples who forsook Him and fled? What was it to Thomas so gloomily denying the good tidings? What will it be to a Gentile remnant, and

to all the nations in the future day? And are you, my reader, to be left out of the blessing? It can only be because you harden your soul against casting yourself on Him now. If you are poor, He is rich; if you have no merit, and sins only, He is All-worthy, and died for you. Is not His death all that God values on your behalf? Believing on Him, you are justified. His work claims it, and God delights to prove that it is not in vain. Therein is his righteousness. He owes it to the cross of Christ; and it is yours if you believe. But beware of slighting the divine message. Put not His word of grace from you, nor thus judge yourselves unworthy of life eternal. God is not mocked in the end. Despise Him not now to your own ruin both now and for ever. It is “the hour when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.” Is any case too desperate?

1 Nor is there real difficulty in the account of Zacchaeus being placed after the miracle; for Luke puts things in moral order, where required as here, not chronologically. This explains the purposely general language of the third Gospel which called for the incident about Zacchaeus later.

Eleventh Series

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1 Two Masters

Matt. 6:25.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 329-330.)

When man fell, he abandoned God as Master; he gained by sin another master, even Satan, the great rebel against the true God. The race followed the fallen parents. “Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Such is the moral history of man, recorded in Genesis, there summarised, here reasoned on by the apostle. So vain, so blind, is every man, that he is apt to go no higher than himself in accounting for sin. But it is not so: neither Jew nor

Gentile originated sin. It began with the head of the race, long before those distinctions. It was an innocent man too, though Adam was not deceived, but the woman being quite deceived was involved in transgression (1 Tim. 2:14). Sin became the state of all, while each added his own sins also. Satan thus became master in fact of the race; and from the first the guilty pair hid away from God's presence, before "He drove out the man."

Henceforth all for good turned on another, the Second man, the Last Adam. Sinful man can neither atone for sins nor get rid of sin. And from the fall Jehovah Elohim clearly intimated the great truth that deliverance can come only from the woman's Seed, who, Himself bruised, should bruise the Serpent's head, that is, destroy the mysterious enemy, Jesus, the Son of God, born of the virgin, alone answers to this earliest oracle, and to every other in scripture. How many besides His incarnation converge in Him and can apply to no other, in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension! Above all He was to suffer once for sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us who believe to God. For no external rite could adequately meet the dire need. It was not purifying only, but atonement there must be by One who, being God and man in one person, suited and alone could suit God and man, the Holy One whom God made sin for us, that we might become His righteousness in Christ. Hence repentance toward God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ, must be in man.

There is thus faith-obedience, the root of all other obedience in practice. It is not mere outward separateness by circumcision or any thing akin. The sanctification of the Spirit is thereby secured in a new life imparted to the believer for Christ's obedience as

well as His blood-sprinkling. We thenceforth obey as He did, not as slaves under law like Israel with the solemn sanction of the victim's blood on them and on the book of the law, threatening death on disobedience; we obey as sons, on whom grace rests, and as we are begotten of God, so have we Christ's blood that cleanseth from every sin. As we were in baptism buried with Christ unto His death (for nothing short could suffice even as a starting-point), so we also, as He was raised from the dead, should walk in newness of life. What then? Shall we sin because, even if once Jews, we are no longer under law but under grace? Away with it. Know we not that to whom we yield ourselves bondmen for obedience, we are bondmen to him whom we obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? Through Christ and His work set free from sin, and become bondmen to God, we have our fruit unto holiness and the end life eternal.

Thus it is that sin shall not have dominion over us. Not law but grace gives power; and grace and truth came through Jesus, as John 1 expressly declares in contrast with law, which however good in itself could only slay one in whom sin was and worked. For sinful man salvation hangs on Him. Without His blood is no remission; in virtue of it He washed us from our sins, and in newness of life (His life as risen from among the dead), we are fitted to walk worthily and please God.

But Satan ever seeks to mislead. And no one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to the one and despise the other. "Ye cannot," said our Lord, "serve God and mammon." This tests those who bear His name. Never was mammon more widely sought in Christendom than now.

How is it with your own soul? Are you, a professing Christian, a slave to mammon? A divided heart is a disloyal one. No one can serve two masters. Think of the young ruler who in sorrow turned away from following Christ, because he loved his possessions. Think of the apostle who for a paltry sum sold his Master. How true it is that, hating the one, we love the other, or holding to the one, we despise the other! Mammon commands the world; and if we love the world, or the things in the world, we serve mammon. But what does a man profit if he should gain the whole world, and lose his soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Ye cannot serve two masters, God and mammon.

2 The Prudent builder, ... and the foolish.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 343-344.)

“Other foundation can no one lay than what is laid, which is Jesus Christ,” says the apostle (1 Cor. 3:11). Have you Him as your foundation, dear reader? If it be of faith, you will not doubt of His sufficiency. “He is the Rock; His work is perfect; for all His ways are righteousness.” So an Israelite could say of Jehovah; and Jesus is Jehovah. But He is more, and now more is revealed, especially since He the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us, full of grace and truth. Nor this only: “Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.”

He is the One for your soul, for your guilt, for your sins. If the Son of God became the Lamb of God, and you believe on Him, surely you need not, you cannot rightly, question that He avails perfectly for you. Yea, you are bound, if you believe Who He is, to receive without hesitation what God’s word declares He undertook and

has done. The atoning work is done; it is not future for you; nor is it a-doing either, but is done; and its efficacy is perfect for every soul that believes God about Jesus, His Son. His blood cleanseth from all sin. You who say that you believe do God wrong, if you receive not His word and rest not with confidence on the foundation that is laid. There is none other: Jesus is the one foundation for lost sinners.

God commends His love to us, in that, we being still sinners, Christ died for us. Do we ask more? We being still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. We had nothing but sins: He gives all the good we want, having suffered for all the bad that was in us. Such is the Saviour of sinners. None that is pretended even resembles Him. The Virgin mother needed Him for her soul, as did every other saint. All men need grace to save them through faith; for all are sinners. Neither angels nor the archangel can avail in any degree; they are but upheld by the word of His power. Nor will God save a sinner but through faith in His Son Who humbled Himself unto death, even the death of the cross, to glorify God and to suffer for sins, Just for unjust. Whoever denieth the Son hath not the Father either; he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also (1 John 2).

But in our text, which closes the sermon on the Mount, it is another truth: not redemption (which was not there the object) but the absolute necessity of obedience in all who call Jesus Lord. To say Lord, Lord, without doing His Father’s will, is worthless. Many shall say in the future day of account, Have we not prophesied through Thy name, and through Thy name cast out demons, and through Thy name done many works of power? But He

will answer, I never knew you: depart from Me, workers of lawlessness. It was hollow profession, whatever the works of power, which only aggravated the guilt and will add to the endless remorse. There was no life possessed in Christ, and consequently no obedience, to which every believer is sanctified (1 Peter 1:2). Without holiness none shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:11). The point is here that obedience is indispensable from each one that bears His name.

Hence the Lord concludes, “Whoever therefore heareth these my words and doeth them, I will liken him to a prudent man which built his house upon the rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and fell upon that house, and it fell not; for it had been founded upon the rock. And every one that heareth these my words, and doeth them not, shall be likened to a foolish man which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and fell upon that house, and it fell, and its fall was great” (Matt. 7:24-27).

It is not redemption only that sinful man needs, but life eternal. In Jesus only are both found, and the believer receives both. Many there are who profess His name, and boast of redemption in Him, the forgiveness of offences, but never think of present life in Him. Alas! they deceive themselves. To the defiled and unbelieving, whatever they profess, nothing is pure; but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works deny Him. They say, Lord, Lord; but they are false to His name. Had they believed, they would have had life in His name, and brought forth fruit of righteousness. But not having Christ as their life, they had no fruit unto holiness, and never grew because they

had no true knowledge of God. Life, life eternal, as a present ground for serving God in obedience, is as essential as redemption. Woe is to such as have neither. Still more bitter is the woe of such as deny either: they are enemies of the truth.

3 The ways, N. and W.

The Narrow and the Wide Ways.

Matt. 7:13, 14.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 357-358.)

The Lord sets before those who heard Him the energy requisite for entering the kingdom.

When man was unfallen, he had only to abide where Jehovah Elohim set him. A single restriction was laid on him as a test of the obedience that was due. He might freely eat of every other tree in paradise, pleasant to the sight and good for food; but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was forbidden on pain of death. The divine Creator was also the moral Governor; and man, to abide blessed, must bow to His word in grateful subjection, assured that His will was good no less than wise. That He forbade was enough. To disobey Him was sin and death. And so man learnt to his sorrow, shame, and ruin, when following the woman deceived by the serpent, he violated the plain commandment and fell.

Since then the race broke more and more into sin. Lawlessness prevailed; till at length Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The end of all flesh came before God; for it was not only that all flesh had corrupted its way here below, but that the earth was filled with violence. Nor

was it only Noah finding grace in Jehovah's eyes through faith, but a deliverance from the deluge was granted to him and his house, and a preservation of enough of the creatures in the ark to renew the post-diluvial earth. There the dispensed ways of God were to be displayed, man fully convicted after the most patient trial, and Himself revealed in His Son, but first on the ground of responsibility, till sovereign grace displace all evil, and righteousness reign to His glory; finally, when the kingdom closes, dwelling in holy power and peace and goodness when God is all in all.

Meanwhile, as the course of the world has ever been and is now more than ever man doing his own will and pleasing himself, the path of faith is ever in separation to God and His word. Christ is the One revealed by God and revealing Him in order to make this knowledge good in all who believe.. All saints since sin came into the world looked to Him, and were lightened, and their faces shall never be confounded.

Since the Word became flesh and wrought redemption, grace abounds more exceedingly. Nor is it grace only, but this reigning through righteousness unto life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord. Remission of sins, yea, peace made through the blood of His cross, is preached to every creature; that whosoever believes may know himself made nigh in virtue of Christ's blood, God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God before prepared that we should walk in them.

Still there are difficulties, dangers, and enemies which each soul that heeds the call of God must face. He who is quickened is sanctified unto the obedience of Jesus Christ (1 Peter). The mind of the flesh is enmity against

God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be: and they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Such is man's moral bent in his very nature fallen as it is. Nor is this by any means all; for the friendship of the world (and what man has not sought it?) is enmity with God; and this so surely that whosoever would be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Then the power of Satan, the liar and murderer, is the most directly destructive of all. Who is sufficient for these things? It is, and must only be, of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ.

But every natural influence here below is in Satan's hands, and as hostile to man as to God. Therefore the Lord says, "Come in through the narrow gate; because wide [is] the gate and broad the way that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that come in through it; because narrow [is] the gate and straitened the way, that leadeth to life, and few are they that find it" (Matt. 7:13, 14).

Follow the multitude, as it follows the wise according to the flesh, the mighty, and the noble, and you are lost. Public opinion may be well enough for things of this life; but it is never founded on God's word. This sets forth Christ and Him crucified, which to the perishing is foolishness, but to those that are saved the power of God, and His wisdom. So faith receives, and enjoys now, and is blessed for ever. It hears Christ's word and believes God that sent Him. It distrusts and turns away from the world which cast Him out and crucified Him. It seeks not ease or pleasure for the flesh, but follows Him who was despised by the vain, and abhorred by the self-righteous, and loathed by such as sought their carnal desires. Hence it is and must be the narrow gate and the

straitened way that leads unto life, and few there be that find it.

Those who trust self and the world naturally prefer the wide gate and the broad way. But beware, poor soul! Such is the way that leads to destruction It may look fair now, yet what solace will it be then that many come in through that wide but fatal gate? The proud and the mean, the haughty and the servile, the highest and the lowest, the dissolute and the violent, the superstitious and the sceptical, the self-satisfied and the hypocritical enter through it into the broad road whose end is perdition. O my fellow-sinners, hear Him who is Himself the way, ay the sole and sure way to the Father. Never did He refuse one that cast himself as a lost one on His grace and truth; never does He fail to guide aright each that calls on His name. He is the Saviour of all that believe. His sheep hear His voice, and as He knows them, they follow Him; and He gives them life eternal, and they shall never perish, nor shall any one seize them out of His hand (John 10:27, 28).

4 The Salt and the Light

Matt.5:13-16.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 371-372.)

In the preceding verses the Lord lays down the character of such as belong to the kingdom of the heavens. Now He states their position here below. Is it truly applicable to you? Do you in unbelief treat it as impracticable or indifferent?

If I own myself a lost sinner, and in me, that is in my flesh, no good thing dwells, neither salt nor light is mine, but sin dwells in me. It would be sheer

presumption to claim that I am born either the one or the other. Naturally I am corrupt, and as to God and His things dark as night. Important as baptism is, it in no case according to scripture produces so mighty a change; but life in Christ does, which the believer receives through the Spirit and the word of God. As its fulness and perfection were in the Son, so of His fulness did all we receive, and grace for grace. It is no presumption to believe God, nor what He declares He gives to those who receive Christ.

Let me beseech you, fellow-believer, not to slur over nor shirk the position in which the Lord sets you here below. These are His words:- “Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing save to be cast out and to be trodden down by men. Ye are the light of the world: a city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do they light a lamp, and put it under the bushel but upon the stand, and it shineth for all that are in the house. Thus let your light shine before men, that they may see your comely works, and glorify your Father that is in the heavens.” Let us earnestly seek to make this good, instead of slipping it through or shoving it on to a Jewish remnant.

As there were two broad characteristics among the foregoing “blessed,” righteousness and grace, both displayed in Christ and in Christianity, so is it with the position of the disciples. In vers. 3 to 6 are the righteous characters: in 7 to 9 the gracious: followed by the blessing of the persecuted for righteousness’ sake in 10, and by those persecuted yet worse for Christ (i.e. grace) in 11, and their joy, exultation, and reward above in 12. The position too is presented accordingly. In ver. 13 we

have the righteous side; in 14 and the rest the side of grace, but both to be verified in our practice.

Salt is the righteously preservative principle. It is sharp rather than sweet, but guards from impurity and decomposition. It gives fixity to what is good and wholesome. It proves all things, and holds fast the right. It keeps aloof from every form of wickedness. When then the disciples are called the salt of the earth, the Lord designates them as set apart to God the Father, and in patient continuance of good work seeking for glory and honour and incorruptibility at Christ's coming. They obey the truth, and are to hold fast what they have till then. If they lose the good savour, it is fatal. Saltless salt (and such a change was familiar in those lands) cannot be restored. It is not fit for anything but to be trodden down on the streets, as it often was.

How has it fared with the holy deposit in Christendom? Has the salt there retained its virtue? Did the favoured Gentile abide in goodness, any more than the Jew under law? If not, cutting off is the sentence of God (Rom. 11:21, 22). All the more should every faithful soul humble himself, repent, and look to the Lord who is as willing as He is able to make Him stand.

But are we not responsible as "the light of the world"? If it is not the property or power of salt to cure corruption, it is for light to illuminate the dark. It goes out and around. And we may notice it is to "the world" at large here in this appropriate diffusion by grace, as the salt is "of the earth," the ordered scene of privileges. As being the light, it is compared to a city set on a hill and not to be hid; and not this only, but as penetrating the home, it is as a lamp (not absurdly under the bushel as its

extinguisher, but) upon its stand, that all in the house may enjoy its brightness.

Only let us not forget the Lord's momentous caution as to this. "Thus let your light (your living profession of Him, Who is the true Light and made you light in Him) shine before men, that they may see (not your inconsistencies, but) your comely works, and glorify your Father that is in the heavens." He means the very reverse of men displaying their benevolent works before their fellows, so as to bring glory to themselves. He would have His own let their confession of Him, the one source of their light, shine, so that men may see the goodly fruits, and therefore glorify not the disciples but our Father in the heavens, the Father of lights, of whom is every good giving, and whence comes down every perfect gift from above.

5 The Beatitudes

Matt. 5:3-12.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 8-9.)

In what is called the Sermon on the Mount the Lord does not treat either of new birth or of redemption. He addresses His disciples that came unto Him, and begins with pronouncing who are the blessed in the kingdom. It is a solemn test whereby every disciple may try himself.

"Blessed the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.

Blessed they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.

Blessed the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed they that hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.

Blessed the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed the pure in heart; for they shall see God.

Blessed the peace-makers; for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.

Blessed are ye when they shall reproach and persecute you, and falsely say every wicked word against you for my sake. Rejoice and exult; for your reward is great in the heavens; for thus persecuted they the prophets that were before you."

Such are the qualities, said the Lord, which suit the kingdom. They are not those of man fallen nor even unfallen. The first man in Paradise had none of them any more than the outcast race. "Ye must be born anew," and even then have your new character formed and impressed by the Lord Jesus. None other He owns (Matt. 7:21-23), nor can others have to do with the Kingdom save for judgment. Those only do the will of His Father that is in the heavens. But the Saviour Son of God elsewhere shows, and is, the unfailing way. "As many as received Him, to them gave He authority to become children of God" (John 1:12). Who are they? "Those that believe on His name." They are born of God. They have life eternal, and can each say, "I live, no longer I, but Christ liveth in me; and that which I now live in flesh I live by faith in the Son of God that loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). O, believe Him in Whom is life producing every quality God values! There is none other in His sight. Believe, and it is yours now; and with

an evil nature in an evil world as is the fact, here it is indispensable as well as for heaven.

You, my brethren, may not have noticed that there are seven characters, all blessed in vers. 3-9, divided as after into four and three. Four righteous qualities are first, three gracious follow; and they rise respectively in each class. Christ manifested each and all in perfection. Those that follow Him, having Him as their life, must have His qualities reproduced and manifested in them.

Poor in spirit is the first named. It is just the opposite of fallen man's aspiring spirit. Outward forms of poverty will not do. Under that garb what pride may lurk, what self-seeking, what party spirit! "It shall not thus be among you, but whoever would be great among you, let him be your servant; and whoever would be first among you, let him be your slave" in this evil ace and rebel world. Such was the Son of man in life and death. He is the disciple's example; for his is not a present place of honour but the kingdom of the heavens whether to faith now or displayed by-and-by.

And who was such a mourner where His Father was unknown, and His own light and love scorned? Here too the disciple treads in His steps and looks for the comfort wherewith He was comforted and comforts.

Next, as He was meek and lowly in heart, so must he be who takes His yoke and learns from Him, assured of inheriting that earth where the hard and haughty have now their brief portion.

The last of these are such as hunger and thirst after righteousness, which marks not only persevering energy but this in inward personal desire, and they shall have

satisfying fruition in and like “Jesus Christ the Righteous.”

After this, we have the higher characters of grace, but with righteousness preceding. As Jesus was full of grace and truth, so His followers not only exceed in their righteousness that of scribes and Pharisees, but show mercy not known to these. And truly they shall find mercy, as they have found it plenteously.

Theirs too is purity in heart, and as by faith they see God now, so shall they beyond others by-and-by (Rev. 22:4).

In fine, they are the blessed peace-makers who now represent the God of peace; and His sons shall such be called as they are.

But observe that the Lord reveals a supplemental blessedness for each of the two great classes. “Blessed they that have been persecuted for righteousness’ sake” answers to the opening class in 3-6, and so fitly repeats the opening blessing, “for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.” The last of the two rises to the highest, and leaves the abstract for direct personal words of love: “Blessed are ye when they shall reproach and persecute you, and falsely say every wicked word against you for my sake.” This was suffering for grace in full. “Rejoice,” says the Lord therefore, “and exult, for your reward is great in the heavens; for thus they persecuted the prophets that were before you.”

As Christ only is all-sufficient now for evil and lost man, if he believe, so in His day shall the poor in spirit have the true and abiding riches. What then must be the lot of all who despise Him?

6 Prayer for Disciples

Matt. 6:9-13.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 20-22.)

Are you a disciple of the Lord Jesus? Are you born of the Spirit? Are you a child of God entitled to say Abba, Father? Such were they, and no others, whom the Lord taught to pray thus: Our Father that art in the heavens, Sanctified be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done as in heaven also an the earth, Give us today our sufficient bread, and forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors, and bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. If you are a disciple as they were, you too can pray thus, even if like them you could not say that you have in Christ redemption, the forgiveness of your trespasses (Eph. 1:7). Such too was necessarily their state then, for Christ had not yet suffered for sins. But it ought not to be yours now; for the atoning work is done. If then you believe on the Lord Jesus, be it known to you, that through Him is (not promised, but) proclaimed to you remission of sins, and in Him is every believer justified from all things (Acts 13:38, 39). You have not appreciated the alphabet of the gospel, if you know not that once purged you have no more conscience of sins.

While in this unformed condition, born of the Spirit but not resting on redemption known as yours (and therefore not yet having the Spirit of adoption, Gal. 4:4-6, Eph. 1:13), you do well to pray as the Lord taught His disciples. waiting for the Spirit (Luke 11:1-3). When the Paraclete was given, they entered into peace and liberty, far beyond their then state (Rom. 5:1-11, 2 Cor. 17, 18); and so may you prove when thus subject and

obedient to God (Acts 5:32). Nevertheless, though the standing of a Christian will lead you to pray in the Spirit according to the new relationships, how blessed ever is that which the Lord here taught! Do you really know what He meant? Many fail in this. Let us weigh His words.

It is in the First Gospel we hear of the Father who is in the heavens. The aim was to raise the eyes on high of Jews who were used to wait for God to display His glorious power on earth (Isa. 25:9, 31:4; Isa. 35:4. etc.), as He did in measure since the day of redemption from the old house of bondage. Now He is made known as the One who makes His Sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on just and unjust, yet with special favour to His sons.

The petitions are seven, and divide into two classes; the first three are of righteousness, as the last four are of grace. This is an order intrinsically due to God, and proper for saints. If lost sinners as such were contemplated, all must begin with sovereign grace. But of this we hear not in the so-called sermon on the Mount, but such grace shines appropriately elsewhere.

1. And how right, even our hearts feel, is the opening petition, Sanctified be thy name! It is the foremost desire of the renewed, however young in faith. Without this made good, there can be nothing good.

2. Thy (not My) Kingdom come, the Father’s Kingdom (Matt. 13:43) where the heavenly saints shine forth as the sun in risen glory, the dearest object of His love here as Father, Who will have them there with and as Christ, through Whom alone it could be.

3. Thy will be done as in heaven also on the earth. This is at the same time the Son of man's Kingdom, Who will send His angels to gather out of it all offences and all that work lawlessness (Matt. 13:41). It is the earthly things of God's Kingdom, as the other the heavenly (John 3:12), Christ being Head of the church and over all things (Eph. 1:10, 22).

Then come the petitions of grace.

4. Give us today our sufficient (or, necessary) bread. Thus are they taught to begin with confessing dependence for ordinary wants, as the apostle called us to be content with food and raiment.

5. And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. For indeed all saints are bound to judge self and confess sins, as an antecedent spirit of forgiveness is imperative. See Matt. 18:35, Luke 17:3, 4.

6. And bring us not into temptation. So the Lord impresses on the disciples; for He ever knew their weakness as none else did yet. Luke 22:46. To !endure" temptation is as blessed, as "entering into" it is full of danger.

7. But deliver us from evil in general, if not from the evil one in particular. This was not the sifting, or temptation, deprecated in the clause before, which grace may put us through for good, as we see in Peter; but the power of the enemy in drawing into sin against God. The proper desire was to be kept from the evil, or, if one fell, to be restored from it. Grace in no case fails, if a disciple alas! did. Deliver us from evil.

The doxology is an ecclesiastical accretion and therefore uninspired. Luke was led by the Holy Spirit to omit the

special title (2), the earthly Kingdom (3), and the final clause (7), as not so much called for in the case of Gentiles.

Reader, can your state admit of your adopting the prayer for a disciple of Jesus? How sad to use it lightly and untruly!

7 Grace in Practice

Matt. 5:38-48.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 37-38.)

There is nothing that comes before the eyes of men which strikes them more than the meek, lowly, thankful spirit which endures a wrong. The natural man resents, and, if he can, avenges everything of the sort. You might as well tell him to feel otherwise, as to walk in the air a mile or a foot above the ground. To the disciple such grace is a principle of his new life. It is what in its perfection he has beheld in Christ, and what suits his Father who is in the heavens and looks for the reproduction of His own character in His sons. Retaliation is here reversed and uprooted.

“Ye have heard that it was said, Eye for eye, and tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, Resist not evil; but whoever shall strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And to him that would go to law with thee and take thy coat, leave him to take thy cloak also. And whoever will impress thee one mile, go with him two. To him that asketh thee give, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not away.

“Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those that persecute you,

that ye may be sons of your Father that is in the heavens; for he maketh his Bun rise on evil and good, and sendeth rain on just and unjust. For if ye should love those that love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the taxgatherers the same? And if ye should salute your brethren only, what beyond do ye? Do not even the Gentiles the same? Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

It may be personal lawlessness, an unjust suit, or a hard law; but the disciple of Christ is taught by the Master to bow. What is a brutal insult compared with truly representing Him? Consistency with Him is far more than one's coat, and cloak to boot. Instead of begrudging the service pressed for one mile, add another to please Him who would have us walk by faith, not by Bight, still less selfishly. Luke, who was led to note not the legal side but unauthorised violence only, omits the impressment, and inverts the stripping by letting the plunderer take the inner garment as well as the outer, the Lord no doubt exhorting to both. Nor did He end here, but bade the disciple give habitually to him that asked; for what had not he himself received from the divine Giver beyond all he asked? The object of countless and rich mercies, was he to turn away from one that would ask or borrow?

But the Lord goes farther in His next utterance. Whatever was said of loving one's neighbour and hating one's enemy, His word to His disciples was and is, Love your enemies, and pray for those that persecute you. So too the Epistles insist on those that bear His name. In the Gospel of Luke rightly stand the clauses, Bless those that curse you, do good to those that hate you, and pray also for those that use you despitefully. These enlarge

the grace which disciples are exhorted to show to hostile man of the world; and from thence they were imported into the copies of Matthew by scribes who were prone to assimilate. The inspiring Spirit was pleased through Jaim to urge loving our enemies, and praying for our persecutors, which last pertained to Jews pre-eminently, because of their hot and proud religious prejudice in the flesh.

Such love and piety, to be of value, must be no mere form but a living reality, that they might be sons of their Father in the heavens; for such is their place of dignity. And what a pattern He sets! For He makes His sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on just and unjust. What rich grace in the first comparison, and what faithful goodness in the second!

Nor was the Lord content with the pointed reference to His Father and our Father, to His God and our God. He would make them ashamed, as His disciples, of not rising above the practice of Jews and Gentiles. If they loved those that loved them, did not the odious tax-gatherers the same? If they greeted their brethren only, the scorned Gentiles did also the same. This was altogether beneath the Christian according to Christ. "Ye shall be therefore perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." A lower standard of feeling and conduct was to the Saviour intolerable.

Have we such confidence by grace toward God? Assuredly we have no competency as of ourselves: but our competency is of God, according to the spirit of the new covenant, not of the old. The grace of Christ alone suffices the believer. If you reject Him, you are lost. Flee to this the only refuge, if you would be saved; flee to

Jesus now, ere the House-master shuts the door, when “Lord, open to us” will be in vain. Then will He judge strictly, instead of saying as He does now in all grace; then will He say, I know not whence ye are: depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity.

8 Treasures?

Matt. 6:19-21.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 53-54.)

Christ beyond all others knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for He Himself knew what was in man. He seeks treasures on the earth. It may not be gold or property. It may be pleasure or power or position. Some set their heart on fame in letters or learning, in science or art. Some court poetry, oratory, or philosophy. The bar and the bench, the army or the navy, civil government or politics, philanthropy or even the pulpit ordinarily, fire the ambition of others. These objects and all akin which attract the heart of man are treasures on the earth, and beneath the faith to which the Christian is called — faith in God unseen and eternal. “Love not the world,” wrote His inspired servant,” nor the things that are in the world. If any one loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vain-glory of life, is not of the Father but is of the world, And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15- 17).

Listen to the Saviour’s words on the more prevailing snare. “Lay not up for you treasures on the earth where moth and rust consume, and where thieves dig through

and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust corrupteth, and where thieves dig not through nor steal. For where thy treasure is, there will be thy heart also."

The treasures in heaven are the things that are above, where Christ is seated on the right hand of God. On these things we are to set our mind, not on things that are on the earth. For we died with Christ from its best things, the rudiments of the world which Israel had as their religion; and our life is hid with Christ in God. His cross closed all such shadows and ordinances; and therefore is the world crucified to the Christian, and he to the world. If he is truly Christ's, he is heavenly as united to Christ, though he is still on earth, and bears the image of Adam the earthy till He comes.

Be not moved by the unbelieving sneers of those who try to lower as other-worldliness your true objects. These are far above the world, or the habitable earth to come, blessed as it will be when Christ and His saints reign over it. Our proper portion is in heaven and with Christ there. Be not cheated out of that which is revealed to you by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven, on which the Epistles enlarge beyond what the disciples could bear when their Master was here, as He Himself tells us (John 16:12).

The wisest of mankind is no judge of what God wills for His children now. The New Testament is as clear as possible that He would have His own not of the world; indeed our Lord declares that they are not, even as He is not. And as it is written, Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatever things God prepared for those that love

Him: them God revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. These are treasures which the Lord calls us to lay up for us in heaven. And nothing can harm them, like earthly treasures by corruption or violence.

Do not say that such an aim is beyond the believer. It would be assuredly, if there were not the grace of God to enable. But we have Christ as Head above, from Whom all the body, ministered to and united together by the joints and bands, increases with the increase of God. His grace suffices one in the most crushing circumstances. And if we have such an Advocate on high, we have One no less divine to work in us here below that we may be strengthened in the inner man. Thus could one of old boast of weaknesses, never of sins, that the power of Christ might tabernacle upon him.

If you urge that you have doubts about your soul, how can you pass this day without settling that question before God? He sent His Son for you, that you might live through Him, and that He, the Lord Jesus, might die for you — yea, for your sins. Let it be your need, your guilt, your ruin, looking to God in the name of the crucified Saviour. Jesus never said Nay to one that, feeling his sins, appealed to Him. God the Father would have you thus honour the Son, who declares solemnly: Verily, Verily, I say to you, He that heareth My word, and believeth Him that sent Me, hath life eternal, and cometh not into judgment, but is passed out of death into life. Verily, verily, I say to you, The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that heard shall live." Be not faithless then, but believing; trust His grace that all else

you lack, as you surely do, will be given in the like love. It is His joy to bless the believer.

9 Christ come to fulfil

Matt. 5:17. 18.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 70-71.)

From the outset of His ministry our Lord was careful to affirm that He came not to dissolve but to make good divine authority in the law or the prophets. In both He was predicted as the One whom all blessing depended. He only could deliver sinful and seduced man. He was to he the Sacrifice which would justify all previous offerings to God, and render their just interpretation, and furnish their efficacy. Fulfilment of a prophecy is the same word; but the context here points to a larger scope.

The law and the prophets testified to man's unrighteousness and to God's righteousness (Rom. 3:21). But they could not do more. Christ came, not to enfeeble or undo them as His blind enemies thought, but to make good that divine testimony which left the sinner without excuse and gave what God only in His grace could supply. It was far more than even pious men conceived, a mere making up, by His obedience of the law, what men failed in. This had merely been man's righteousness accomplished by Him for the unrighteous, Here too He has done incomparably more and better. He laid the basis in His obedience unto death for God's righteousness, that God might be just and justify him that believes on Jesus. For He who knew no sin glorified God in being made sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness in Him. Hence God's grace is

enhanced, not frustrated; for if righteousness is through law, then Christ died gratuitously. But it is not so: never was anything else contemplated or revealed but that the believers rest their hope on His death.

God took care therefore that promise should long precede and exist independently of it, as the apostle argues in Gal. 3. This at Sinai Israel in their self-confidence overlooked. Instead of asking for the unconditional promise of grace they undertook to stand on their own obedience. As no sinful man can subsist on such a condition, the law written on stones, even when brought down a second time with types of mercy accompanying, could not but be a ministry of death and condemnation (2 Cor. 3:7-9). For them it is said in the reading of the old covenant the veil remains unremoved; and the veil is more than on the face, being upon their heart. They did and do not look to Christ, law's end for righteousness to every one that believes. They strove to stand on a mixture of law and grace, which only adds to the sinner's condemnation, because the added grace increases his guilt if disobedient. But we look on the glory of the Lord with unveiled face and are transformed to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit, Who testifies to Him in the glory of God as the fruit not only of His person but of His work. And so the apostle preached the gospel of God's grace and of Christ's glory, as he had been converted.

The Epistle to the Hebrews told the Christian Jews that the "new" covenant of which Jeremiah bore witness held out under Christ a better covenant. It did not, like the old at Sinai, depend on Israel as the party on whose fidelity blessing depended. All hung for the new covenant on the Lord's sovereign grace. "Because this is

the covenant that I will covenant for the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: giving my laws into their mind, I will also inscribe them on their hearts; and I will be to them for God, and they shall be to me for people. And they shall in no wise teach, each his fellow-citizen and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord; because all shall consciously know from little of them unto great Of them; because I will be merciful to their unrighteousnesses and their sins, and their lawlessnesses I will remember no more" (Heb. 8:10-12).

This was no real way to set aside the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them to God's glory and for man's salvation and blessing. Christ filled up the gap between God and the sinner for him who believes on Him. The law pointed to Him as the coming One who alone could restore the balance which the creature's evil had disturbed by weight overwhelming to all but the Saviour. He alone could by redemption win and give the blessing which God's nature loved to bestow and God's counsels assured in due time. But all this and more Christ was by His word and Spirit bringing in a new and divine life by faith into the soul, before the day arrives when He will transform our body of humiliation into conformity with His body of glory according to the working of His power even to subdue all things to Himself. It was not mere addition, as if the law and the prophets were not intrinsically complete and perfect for the end God proposed; but He is throughout assumed and predicted as essential to give the blessed result. "For verily I say to you, Till the heaven and the earth pass, one iota or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all come to pass" (vers. 18).

So even the N.T. speaks of filling up the gap otherwise left in it by the revelation of the mystery of Christ's headship on high and the church united to Him as His body. And the apostle in Col. 1:25 tells us of the stewardship of God given Him thereby to complete His word. For this was a secret hidden from ages and generations, and quite distinct from the kingdom, the new covenant, or the inheritance of Abraham's promise. It was a promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel and God's eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:6, 10).

O dear reader, look you by faith to Jesus, the sole accomplisher of what you most want and of infinitely more — what glorifies God and gives the believer a wondrous part in it all. Look not to yourself save to condemn yourself; look to Him who secures from all condemnation which you must otherwise dread. May your heart learn how truly Christ is all. This no man is willing to do, until he is brought to the decided conviction before God, that he is lost, and that in him (that is, in his flesh) good does not dwell.

10 The Father in secret

Matt. 6:1-18.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 88-89.)

Here is a Christian principle, which our Lord puts in contrast with acting so as to be seen. What so suited to exercise and strengthen faith day by day, or to guard from that hypocrisy to which man is prone?

He first lays down the general principle, it would seem, in verse 1, and then applies it to alms in 2-4; to prayer in 5-15; and lastly to fasting in 16-18. Some ancients and

moderns have been disposed to regard “righteousness” in verse 1, as equivalent to “alms,” as Rabbis and others were prone to do. But the better text and sense point to retaining the inclusive term “righteousness” in verse 1, under which fall the three duties that follow. For if applied there to “alms,” it is hard to conceive why the proper term for “alms” should be given in 2, 3, and 4. The different word in verse 1 points to the more comprehensive sense of “righteousness” or consistency in practice with our relationship. This is then shown to embrace three varied forms in which the disciple is called to do the Father’s will in the pious course of life here below. Dan. 4:27 distinguishes mercy to the poor from righteousness; and I am not aware of any confusion of the two in scripture.

Verse 1 calls the disciple to righteousness surpassing that of the scribes and Pharisees, without which none can enter into the Kingdom of the heavens. “Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward with your Father that is in the heavens.” Here is the large principle for Christian practice. Knowing Him as Christ has revealed Him to us, all acceptable service refers to Him, He is a living and true God whom we serve, and He refuses to share His glory with others. We walk by faith, not by sight. Can anything be more opposite to the ways of Christendom?

1. When therefore thou doest aims, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be glorified by men: Verily I say to you, They do get their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right doeth, that thine alms may he in secret, and thy Father

that seeth in secret will repay to thee" (2-4). If men walk in a vain show religiously quite as much as in the world, the Lord calls His own to shun publicity, and not merely this, but in His vigorous figure, that our own left hand may not know what the right does. The simple and essential aim is to do what we do to Him and His glory.

2. So it is with the prayer here enjoined. "And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they should appear to men. Verily I say to you, They do get their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father that is in secret, and thy Father that seeth in secret will repay to thee. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions as those of the nations; for they think they shall be heard through their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like them; for your Father knoweth of what things ye have need before ye beg of him.... For if ye forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father also will forgive you [yours]; but if ye forgive not men their offences, neither will your Father forgive your offences" (5-15).

Here the same show before men in prayer is reprehended; nor this only, but the heathen folly of vain repetitions, and of much speaking. Lastly the Lord warns that an unforgiving spirit cannot hope to have its own offences forgiven.

3. "And when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, downcast in countenance; for they disfigure their faces that they may appear fasting to men. Verily I say to you, They do get their reward. But thou, when fasting, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou mayest not appear

fasting to men, but to thy Father that is in secret; and thy Father that seeth in secret shall repay thee" (16-18).

In fasting there is even more sedulous care to guard from any display of that self-humiliation before God which forms so great a part of it. The Lord would form in His own a spirit of living faith in having to do with their Father. Fasting is for His eyes, just like their prayer and their alms. Faith in Him that is in secret is thus in each way exercised. What a contrast with all that hitherto characterised a Jew!

11 The Lamp of the Body

"The lamp of the body is the eye." Matt. 6:22, 23.

(B.T. Vol. N3, p. 102-103.)

That Christ. is the Light, and the True Light, is a truth dear to every Christian. He coming into the world manifests every man. Rich or poor, simple or sage, false or faithful, not one escapes His all-searching light. Nor is there the least circumstance in the course of every day, any more than in what pertains to God, and truth, and morals, not for this life only but for eternity, that He does not set in the light of God. Only through Him do we see fully what God is, Satan, man, the sinner, the saint, heaven, hell, everything.

The disciples, as the Lord told them in Matt. 5:14, are the light of the world, as they are also the salt of the earth (13). They could be neither apart from Christ. It is He who thus assimilates them to Himself; the latter in His character of righteousness, the former in the quality of His grace, as already explained in Series 11-4. In receiving Him by faith they receive a new nature, being

born of God; hence there is both righteousness and love in their ways.

But here there is a further though connected truth of great value.

“The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body will be light; but if thine eye be wicked, thy whole body will be dark. If therefore the light that is in thee is darkness, how great the darkness!”

It is a question not of the light, which is perfect but of “the eye.” Spiritual condition has an immense deal to do with the disciples seeing aright. Our recipiency and discernment, our actual judgment and our practice, depend on the state of our affections. The Lord presents the ready and effectual test. “If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body will be light; but if thine eye be wicked, thy whole body will be dark.”

Christ truly the object before one gives singleness of eye; and where He is simply and exclusively the “one thing” before the soul, the whole body is light. Difficulties vanish. The will of God becomes quite clear. I am surprised and ashamed to have had doubts here and uncertainty there. I recognise to my humiliation that I had been asleep in my ways and had to rise up from among the dead, and then only have Christ shining upon me.

Prayer alone does not ensure singleness of eye, nor yet suffices searching the word accompanied by prayer. There may be a fleshly film that dims the eye. We are too apt to think ourselves of importance for God when it is all of grace that He uses us in this way or that. We fail to appreciate our Lord’s waiting on His Father, without

taking a single step till He gets the word. Yet it is to His obedience that we are sanctified by the Spirit.

We are not like Jews with every point great or small religiously and in ordinary life, in peace or in war, personal, domestic, or social, all ruled by the statutes and ordinances, prohibitions and injunctions of law. Christ brought in the fuller and deeper obedience of a Son, and makes it by grace the believer's by the gift of life eternal and eternal redemption, with the Holy Spirit indwelling as power and personally also in us. But though thus blessed, there are still the three great enemies, the flesh, the world, and the devil, in the face of which we are responsible to please God as His children. We need therefore to pray, as the apostle did for the Colossians, to be filled with the right knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, to walk worthily of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by the right knowledge of God (Col. 1:9, 10).

For this we need the eye single and the whole body light. How is this to be? The Lord tells us in John 15:7: "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done to you." Habitual dependence on Him with confidence in His love is to abide in Him: without this all else is vain. But where we abide by grace, His words are needed to direct: for who is sufficient otherwise? and His Spirit is given to guide us thus. Only thus are we sure that we have His mind; for thus the eye is single and the whole body light. Then when we ask, we have our petition. Oh, that so it may be I and that we may be content with nothing less!

What is the issue, where other objects are allowed? The alternative is, “If thine eye be wicked, thy whole body will be dark.” How solemn the sentence, and how true! “If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great the darkness!” Oh, look to God that it be not so with you, a disciple of the Lord!

See too the impossibility of the Light yours, of the eye single, save by genuine repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus. Doubt yourself, not God; and receive Him who in His grace came to receive you by faith, if you have not already done so.

12 Be not anxious.

Matt. 6:25-32.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 121-122.)

As the Lord charges His own to lay up for them. selves treasures, not on earth, but in heaven, so does He forbid anxiety about their life here below, as His servant did about anything. He lifts our eyes above the seen present to the things unseen and eternal, whence He came and whither He was going, as He is coming to take us shortly. Here He deals with the believer’s heart, and the snare of seeking to serve God and mammon which He pronounces morally impossible.

“For this reason I say to you, Be not anxious for your life what ye should eat and what ye should drink, nor yet for your body what ye should put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body more than the raiment? Look at the birds of the heavens, that they sow not, nor reap, nor gather into barns, and your heavenly Father nourisheth them. Are ye not more excellent than they? And which of you by anxiety can add to his stature one

cubit? And why are ye anxious about raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow: they toil not, nor yet spin; yet I say to you, that not even Solomon in all his glory put on like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, being today and tomorrow cast into the oven, how much more you, O ye of little faith? Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or what shall we put on? For all these things the Gentiles seek after; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (6:25-32).

Anxiety as to the things which the present life needs is natural. All these things the nations of the earth seek after. In God they have no faith, as the Jews professed loudly, but in works denied. But the disciples had the heavenly Father's name now set before them as the One who is perfect in grace, making His sun shine on evil and good, and sending rain on just and unjust. How true this is! Yet who had affirmed it as a living principle but the Lord on earth, who also set it forth as a model for His own practically, that they might be sons indeed: an astonishing doctrine, especially for those, as they were, trained up in the legal ideas of the Jews. So their righteousness was to be, whether alms, prayer, and fasting, not before men but to their Father that sees in secret.

The name of their Father made anxiety about earthly and bodily wants a painful incongruity, and in particular about what kind the supply should be. From Himself the birds read them one lesson, and the lilies another. He nourishes each fleeting creature, He gives the passing flower its beauty. How much more did He care for His children? It was a touching appeal and carrying with it

to every believer the conviction of irresistible truth. They were, they are, called to believe in His sustaining goodness. He never fails in His love: they ought not to fail in resting and counting on it day by day. If tried as to it, let them not doubt that it is for their good. It is impossible for God to lie. Are they to doubt His love Whom the Lord reveals as their Father? He who embraces the least objects of His care will act worthily of His love to the nearest.

Nor does the Lord spare them the humbling proof how little the anxiety of man avails. “Which of you by anxiety can add to his stature one cubit?” It was a very small thing if some would count it a very great addition. Yet even for this how powerless is man! Why then be anxious about a garment? The herbage of the field rebukes the vanity of a child of God; for as the Lord called their attention to the lilies, he pointed the moral by the plain fact that God clothed even these transient creatures, lower in the scale than the birds, with a beauty far beyond Solomon’s array in all his glory.

Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or what shall we put on? Here the Lord urges two considerations which we do well to heed. One is to guard us against sharing the unbelief of those who do not even know God, How compromising to share the thoughts and feelings of the Gentiles! “For all these things the nations seek after.” The other is to assure the doubting heart. “For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things,” “Not one sparrow falls to the ground without Him: but of you even the hairs of the head are all numbered” (Matt. 10:29, 30).

Now are you, who read these words, a child of God by grace? Believe not such as say that all mankind are so. They deny the fall; they ignore sin; they oppose the solemn testimony of scripture, that, however favoured by privileges, we are by nature children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:3). Believe not others who say that baptism quickens those dead in trespasses and sins. Christ quickens by faith of His word and the working of the Spirit. He is the Life, as He is the Way and the Truth. You have His words, not merely to instruct His own, but to show how the dead may live, yea have eternal life; for this it is He gives to those who believe. “Verily, verily, I say to you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life “ (John 6:47). Why wonder? Is He not the Son, the I am? “He that believeth on the Son hath life eternal (or, everlasting): and he that is unsubject to the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). O sinner, beware lest this be your portion.

Twelfth Series

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1 The Kingdom of God

Matt. 6:33, 34.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 135-136.)

The kingdom of the heavens is an expression derived apparently from Dan. 4:26. Its inauguration also is foreshown in Dan. 7:13, 14; in 22 not only the Heir of all but the heavenly joint-heirs, and in 27 the “people” under the whole heaven to whom the chief dominion is given. Such will be the manifested kingdom when the Son of man comes with power and glory; and there will be earthly things and heavenly (John 3:12). But He came first as the great moral. test in humiliation; and His rejection and cross brought out higher than earth

through redemption therein accomplished. This too, refused by the unbelieving people, left the door open for the mystery of that kingdom and its mysteries while the rejected King is on high, and the gospel of indiscriminate grace, till the church is complete. Then all Israel shall be saved on their repentance, and the blessing of all the nations as such shall fully come.

Plainly, “the kingdom of the heavens” is a dispensational phrase peculiar to the first Gospel, as in contrast with the incredulity of the Jews who looked only for an earthly one. Mark and Luke use “the kingdom of God” for it, and in a general sense; John exclusively for what is real. But Matthew, for that very reason, when he does say “the kingdom of God,” does not mean the dispensational view, either in future manifestation or in present mystery, but the power of God ruling in Christ when here, or now in the Spirit’s action morally in those that are His. Hence the same term which is so comprehensive elsewhere has here this force all the more marked because of Matthew’s general employment of the dispensational phrase Here occurs the first instance; the others are, Matt. 12:28, Matt. 19:24, Matt. 21:31, 43, of which this is not the place to speak more particularly.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Be not careful (or, anxious) for the morrow for the morrow will be careful about itself: sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.”

Throughout the discourses on the Mount the Lord is not preaching the glad tidings to the lost but instructing His disciples who already believed. Earthly care is a great

bane and unworthy of faith. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” Where could they find that kingdom and righteousness most truly, plainly, and fully set out before their souls? Surely nowhere as in Himself. It was even more wondrously by God’s Spirit in His moral power than by His casting out demons. “Lo, I am come to do thy will, O God,” was far beyond all the miracles together that ever had been wrought. Who but He was the “man that lived by every word of God” unswervingly?

Nor is it too much to ask of such as were born of God. Indeed the principle was always true. Jehovah’s people were to be holy because He is holy. And this applies all the more strongly now that we have the relationship of sons, with redemption through Christ’s blood, and the gift of the Spirit. For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking; nor yet abstinence from flesh or wine; but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Making God’s kingdom and righteousness our first concern, we are entitled to expect that all the things needful and good will be added to us. For our God and Father never overlooks our wants. If faithful in the greatest and deepest things, He loves that we should confide in Him as to our least things. Do we believe the Lord, that “all these things [about which unbelief worries] shall be added unto us?” Let us not forget the condition: “seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” What can be more due to God, or more comely for us as His sons? The Lord’s yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

It is unbelief, accompanied by loving the world or the things in the world, which produces anxiety, darkness,

and doubt, as in the Gentiles who knew not God. If we know Him, and the blessedness of His kingdom, and the perfection of His righteousness, why be careful for the morrow? For the morrow, says the Lord, shall be careful for itself. Has He failed us today, or in the past? What evil has He ever done us, what good thing withheld from us? Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Even if the hardest trials come, do we not know that all things work together for good to those that love God, to those called according to purpose?

Do you, my reader, say that you love Him not, but dread Him because of your sins? Then why do you not flee for refuge to Him that stretches out to you His strong and gracious arms? Come unto Me, He cries, all ye that labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. He is full of grace and truth. Is not this the only Saviour for a sinner? What does “grace” mean but unmerited favour? You are justly condemned if you refuse to come at God’s word.

2 Judge not

“Judge not that ye be not judged.” Matt. 7:1-6.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 149-150.)

There ought to be no question of the Lord’s meaning here. No fault was more prevalent then or now. Censoriousness is not only the habitual bane of religious professors, but the snare to which true disciples are too prone. Gracious men who set their face in general against detraction are often bitter against what they themselves dislike, and thus slip into judging motives wrongly like others. He who is Judge of quick and dead discerns every heart, and enjoins what is comely and

just on His followers. For this sin tends to hypocrisy; and what saint would regard such a thing lightly?

“Judge not that ye be not judged; for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye measure, it shall be measured to you. And why lookest thou on the mote that [is] in the eye of thy brother, but observest not the beam in thine eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote from thine eye; and, behold, the beam [is] in thine eye? Hypocrite, pull out first the beam out of thine eye, and then wilt thou see clearly to pull out the mote out of the eye of thy brother.”

The indulgence in a hasty, severe, and suspicious spirit provokes reprisals, and such as wantonly impute evil to others in ignorance or unkindness do not fail to bring on themselves unsparing imputation. For here the Lord turns from the lack of confiding in our Father’s care and love, and warns of our danger from many an unkind impression and expression. To surmise wrong motives is itself a wrong. It is natural for such as live in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another; and such once were we ourselves. But since the kindness and love to man of our Saviour God appeared (no premium for our deserts), but according to His own mercy He saved us through washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which He poured on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, are we not bound by the family character, the new life relationship as children of God, sons of such a Father? Since redemption and the gift of the Spirit, more can be added now to what the Lord uttered then.

But He reminds us of what we easily forget. If others are a trial to us, are not we a trial to them? Are we not, unless walking according to the light, as dull to see our own faults as we are sharp to notice, and even imagine, wrongs in our brethren? How pungently the Lord puts the case that we may loathe ourselves! “And why lookest thou on the mote in the eye of thy brother, but observest not the beam in thine eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote from thine eye, and, behold, the beam is in thine eye?” The Shepherd and Bishop of our souls thus holily strips us of the mask which failure in self-judgment puts on. For if before God we discern not our own grievous shortcomings and sins, we do not know our brethren with anything like the same certainty and clearness. Love therefore and the fear of God call us each to deem others better than ourselves, judging ourselves for what we do know instead of others for what we know not and ought not to think. “Hypocrite,” says the Lord with severe reproof, “pull out first the beam out of thine eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”

Yet it is well to beware of the too common misuse of our Lord’s warning. How often pious persons thereby deprecate any censure of their own position and any care against false doctrine, or evil associations, or responsibility for such discipline as scripture requires! But this is to fail in godliness; which assuredly covers not only personal conduct, but also public walk as members of Christ. The Corinthians were careless in this way and others, which grace has turned to the profit, not only of them, but of “all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours.”

The apostle allows no excuse for carelessness congregationally any more than individually. There is no call to exercise discipline on the evildoers of the world; but Christians have the obligation of dealing with offenders in God's assembly. Paul, though absent, could not but judge that the wicked person should be excluded. It was due to Christ and His sacrifice. God must be vindicated Whose is the assembly. The saints were bound to clear themselves in the matter, taking up the offender's sin as their own; yet even here his ultimate good was sought, "that the spirit might he saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." "Do not ye judge those that are within? But those without God judgeth. Put away the wicked [man] from among yourselves" (1 Cor. 5:3-13). Here we are commanded to judge.

The selfsame principle expressly applies to sins far less gross. Our thoughts and reasonings are to be discarded on the one hand; and on the other God's authority to be recognised and conclusive. Scripture too is plain that, important as is right judgment of moral evil, the truth is yet more momentous; and this both because to slight and oppose it offends against the Giver, and it ruins those who thus err, whilst they have a fair appearance, instead of shocking men like immorality or unrighteousness.

Express injunction is also laid down, when the evil is of a more general and public character, as in 2 Tim. 2. "Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth those that are his; and, Let everyone that nameth the Lord's name depart from unrighteousness. Now in a great house are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some for honour and some for dishonour. If

one therefore purge himself out from these, he shall be a vessel for honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work." There is thus no licence to join in what God disapproves and demands us to judge. Conscience, a purged conscience, is exercised, and the heart all the more free to love fervently according to God, But how is it with you, dear reader? If you are of the world and only bear the outward badge of Christianity, take the place of truth for your soul in God's sight. Jesus is the all-sufficient Saviour of sinners, and He, the Lord of all, is rich and near to all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call on the Lord's name shall be saved. Righteousness and salvation are the portion assured by God to each that believes and confesses Him. If you received Christ, say not that you cannot tell who are His. How then can you love God's children, as Christ charged you to do? Even the unconverted know in a general way who are His, and who are not; how much more does every sober believer? He owns that, till born anew and brought to God by Christ's work, he was as evil as anyone; and, without pretending to judge the heart, he accepts those who confess the Lord and follow Him, as he himself does. Such is the judgment of true charity, not the indifference of unbelief which is of Satan.

The verse that follows itself shows whom we ought to judge. For we are to prove all things, holding fast the right. "Dogs" and "Swine" we are bound to discern and disown. "Give not the holy thing to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before the swine lest they trample them with their feet, and turn and rend you." Nabal's family is not extinct, sons of Belial with whom a disciple cannot speak with impunity. Shamelessness and filth plainly tell what

they are, and the folly of treating them as sheep of God's pasture. No doubt the grace of God can save such: but in all this discourse is not a word about redemption or saving sinners. All throughout consists of the characters which suit God, and must really be for His Kingdom. This is its design: and it is worthy of Christ, as the gospel is where this was the question.

3 Confidence

Confidence in our Father's giving.

Matt. 7:7-12.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 164-165.)

Our Lord here encourages His disciples to count on the goodness of their Father for every want consistent with His will.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask of him for a loaf, will give him a stone; and if he ask for a fish, will give him a serpent? If therefore ye, being wicked, know to give good gifts to your children, how much rather shall your Father that is in the heavens give good things to those that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye desire that men should do to you, thus do ye also to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:7-12).

It is not a sinner needing life and forgiveness of his sins, but saints directed to appeal to God and assured of their Father's answer of love, whatever their wants be. The Lord had already taught it them to pray in Matt. 6 as

with alms and fasting, parts of saintly righteousness and due to His name and glory. Here He enforces it as the way in which all they need from above is to be given them. Hence perseverance and earnestness are incumbent. Asking will ensure receiving, yea to every one that asks; seeking will not be fruitless but shall find; and to the still more importunate the door will be opened, which is but shut to exercise faith.

For there may be a matter of importance for the applicant to learn before the request can be granted, as with the Syro-phenician woman, so earnest in supplicating the Lord to have pity on her, whose daughter was grievously possessed by a demon. Yet at first the Lord answered her not a word. She pleaded like a lost sheep of Israel's house; whereas she was a Greek, and had no right of promise with the Messiah; indeed she was a Canaanite, and thus under the curse. But when she drops His title as Son of David, and gathered from His answer to the disciples wherein her mistake lay, she did Him homage, saying, Lord, help me. On this He speaks out, It is not good to take the bread of the children, and cast it to the whelps. This did help her soul, for it led her to the secret of sovereign grace on which she at once threw herself, saying, Yea, Lord; for even the whelps eat of the crumbs which fall from the table of their masters. Then Jesus answering said to her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it done to thee as thou wilt. The door opened to her knock. She was deepened and cleared in her faith, as her daughter was healed from that hour.

The Lord also encourages His disciples through the affection which is implanted in a parent's heart. If their Father makes His sun rise on evil and good, and sends

rain on just and unjust, how does He feel toward His sons? His love surely goes out to them in every request that is for their good, and withholds only what their foolishness asked that must do them harm. Hence He says, Or what man of you, whom his son shall ask for a loaf, will he give him a stone? and if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? Who would not repudiate such mockery of a son's hunger? Thence He draws the conclusive words for their hearts, If ye then, being wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father that is in the heavens give good things to those that ask Him?

The last verse goes into that which becomes the disciple with men, and lays down the simple but evidently sound principle, to do to others as we would have others do to us; and this too on no ground of human rights or natural benevolence, but of consistency with God's revealed will. "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, thus also do ye to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

Now let me ask you, dear reader, if you have not by faith the Son of God as your Saviour, are you not conscious that these words are altogether beyond you? What is your state then now, and what must the end be? I call on you in the Lord's name that you perish not in your sins. The same Lord, who thus cheers His disciples and bids them ask freely, warns you that he who disbelieves (who is unsubject to) the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides upon him. Go to God as you are, a poor sinner, in the Saviour's name, and own your ruin and His grace, that you way be saved, and know it to your exceeding and everlasting joy; and then serve Him as your Lord, awaiting Him from heaven, for He is coming.

4 The Narrow Gate

Matt. 7:13, 14.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 180-181.)

The Lord here gives a warning of great practical value. Public opinion weighs much with the natural mind. It maybe and often is right in material things: there men judge fairly well, and are awake to their interests. For the spirit of man that is in him knows the things of man. But it is not so in the things of God, where the carnal mind does not fail to display its inveterate enmity against Him to man's certain ruin if it sway. Therefore is it elsewhere written, There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God. All turned aside, together they become unprofitable, there is none doing good, no, not one (Rom. 3:10-12).

Hence the Lord says here, "Enter ye through the narrow gate; because wide [is] the gate, and broad the way that leadeth off unto destruction, and many are they that enter through it. Because narrow [is] the gate, and straitened the way that leadeth off unto life, and few are they that find it" (Matt. 7:13, 14).

Reader, how is it with you? Have you entered through the narrow gate of conversion to God? Have you repented toward God and believed on our Lord Jesus Christ? Baptism is the divine and admirable sign of salvation; yet it never gave life, but rather represented remission of sins and death to sin for such as had life: if they had not life in Christ, its true meaning, as far as they were concerned, was their guilty and wretched inconsistency, to their utter condemnation far worse than if they had not been baptised to that excellent

Name. Deceive not your own soul; he not deceived by others. The great apostle warned that in the last days grievous times should come, and evil men and impostors wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But this trust in an ordinance is one of the oldest of errors, and revived of late with fresh audacity and large success, though the same apostle expressly denounced its vanity and danger in early days (1 Cor. 10:1-11). For "our fathers," said he, "were all baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink... Howbeit with most of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.... Now all these things happened to them as types, and were written for our admonition on whom the ends of the ages are come."

O unbeliever, will it assuage the horrors of everlasting fire that you followed the multitude in despising the word of the Lord and neglecting His great salvation? You cannot deny that what He says here is very plain; your conscience must own that it is true. It is of no avail to talk about the fate of Tibet sealed up against the light of the gospel, or to enquire what is to become of the heathen millions in darkest Africa, or in haughtier India and China, or anywhere else. You at any rate have the Bible, and may outwardly profess the Lord's name. You have often heard and perhaps read these words of Him who will surely judge living and dead; and the time hastens for it. When you stand and are manifested before Him, will you not be speechless, like him who might be christened but had no wedding garment? The numberless crowds of the lost will verify His words, but yield not a drop of water to cool your tongue in the

torments of that day without an end, or even when you die impenitent now before it come. Masses and classes alike perish in their unbelief of Him and His word.

In fact it will only add unspeakably to your bitter self-reproach that the Lord gave you so distinct a signal of danger for time and eternity. You refused the narrow gate, because it admitted neither self-will, nor fleshly lust. You loved the wide gate and the broad way, because you set your heart on what you called liberty, seeking and doing what you liked in defiance of God's will. You stifled the conviction of your moral folly and incredulous madness by the abundance of your company high and low. The narrow gate was repulsive to you, because it compelled you to stoop to God, which your pride and your passions alike resented. You had in entering through it to meet God singly, and to face Him alone about your sins. Had you been in earnest, you would have seen that He is our Saviour God, who desires that all men should be saved and come to acknowledgement of truth. And this is solely in Christ Who is the one Mediator of God and men, and gave Himself a ransom for all.

Therefore are you without excuse. And you are lost and must be condemned for ever, above all your sins for this crowning sin that you reject Christ Who died for you, losing the ransom so precious to God and efficacious for man. O bethink yourself: believe the words of Him Who cannot lie, and in love uttered this warning that you might hear and live. For both gates are clearly set before you, and both ways, one unto life and the other unto perdition. Many are they that enter through the wide gate and tread the broad way. O beware; for I too was once your fellow-sinner, as infatuated as any other.

But the Shepherd's voice reached my ear, my soul. May it pierce yours, that you may turn off from the broad way, as from a serpent, yea the old Serpent the Devil, and enter the narrow gate of Christ, the straitened way that leads off unto life. Few are they that find it. May you know this happiness now and evermore in the Saviour.

5 Fruits

Matt. 7:15-20.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 196-198.)

The disciple is here cautioned. It is not only against trusting himself, that he may be dependent on his Father, and earnest in prayer that looks for an answer of grace. He has to pass through a scene haunted by the subtle emissaries of the unseen enemy; and the greater their pretension, the more are they to be shunned. The Lord would not have His own deceived and led astray.

"But beware of false prophets, which come unto you in sheep's clothing but within are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall them recognise. Do they gather from thorns a grape bunch or from thistles figs? So every good tree produceth good fruits, but the worthless tree produceth bad fruits. A good tree cannot produce bad fruits, nor a worthless tree produce good fruits. Every tree that produceth not good fruit is cub down and cast into the fire. Therefore at least by their fruits ye shall recognise them well Every reader of the O.T. may learn the destructive part by the false prophets who followed like a dark shadow the holy men whom the Holy Spirit inspired, and took up popular cries to oppose the warnings of God as evil became more rampant There is

no less danger now, as Peter particularly insists under the gospel; not to say that there is so much the more when good men pretend not to inspiration and are no longer invested with miraculous vouchers, but press only the word in the Spirit. And so it will be again for the godly remnant in the last days when, the heavenly ones being caught up, it becomes a question of that land and people. But the Lord's warning is of living value now also, as we hear in the worst and deceptive form (1 John 2:18-23; 1 John 4:1-6; 2 John 7-11). What believer does not know of the boldest antagonism to the truth? What Christian has not tasted bitter grief in seeing saints of God deluded by the sheerest clap-trap? Yea, even conniving, for alleged peace, unity, or testimony, at the denial of Christ's Person?

They who love Christ do well to beware of false prophets, who are such as come unto them in the garb of sheep, but within are ravening wolves. They may cultivate sanctimoniousness and pretend to devotion, but are under the dominion of a mightier foe than themselves, and filled with the keenest zeal to deprive the Christian of a true Christ, of life eternal possessed, of present standing as God's righteousness in Christ, of association with Him in and for heavenly glory. Are not such truly ravening wolves? What remains, if the disciple lose all the treasure distinctive of Christianity?

"By their fruits ye shall recognise them." Do they exalt Him who humbled Himself? Do they confess His incomprehensible being, God and man in one Person? Do they proclaim His grace and truth? Do they follow Christ in absolute subjection to scripture? Do they own it, as the invaluable standard, and the sure communication, of God's mind by His Spirit? Is the

believer established? Is the sinner won and delivered? Or are minds filled with ideas which but inflate the spirit, inspire self-complacency, and end in death? For these are practical effects which test what men teach, and which are legible enough to simple souls little versed in scriptural truth, and still less in human subtleties. And thus the Lord safeguards the sheep in various ways.

There is another class of false prophets who more openly contradict the Lord, count scripture obsolete, or deny that it was ever more than Hebrew sages moralising or romancing according to their genius. Hence they dare to say that the wide gate is all right, and the broad way safe; that the few are only sour, proud, and narrow, and that the many cannot but be welcome to the universal Father, Jehovah, Jove, or Lord, too good to be severe to His erring children. Here again for all who receive scripture as the expression of divine revelation and authority there is no lack of evidence for any one to recognise these false prophets from their fruits. For their love of the world, or indulgence of the flesh, is as plain as their apology for sin, slight of the Saviour, and ignorance of the true God.

Good fruits are produced by neither the religious misbeliever or the profane unbeliever. How could it be? Do people gather a bunch of grapes from thorns or figs from thistles? Those who utter false oracles are trees which the Father never planted. It is the worthless tree producing bad fruits: whereas every good tree produces good fruits. Christ is the true vine; and they only who abide in Him are branches that bear good fruit.

O then, sinner, renounce yourself, and heed none who point to another than Christ. Were He not set forth openly, and did He not welcome you in perfect grace, your lot would be dismal indeed. But He Himself declares, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto myself” (John 12:32). On earth He, the Messiah, was not sent save to the lost sheep of Israel, though he and she who by grace discerned a higher glory were blessed according to their faith. But lifted up on the cross He is seen as the Son of man come to seek and save the lost, whoever and whatever they might be. He is the attractive centre to draw all, however dark or distant, who own Him as Saviour and themselves as guilty and rained sinners. For on the cross He through death annulled him that has the might of death; on the cross He bore the judgment of sin and effected propitiation; on the cross His blood was shed that brings the defiled one perfectly cleansed nigh to God. O sinner, no longer hold out against a work thus provided and commended to you just as you are. Christ is the true God, and eternal life; and it is written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name.

Made a true and living branch of the Vine, you will bear the good fruits of that only good tree. Be humbled, but not in despair, if through allowance of flesh you bear unworthily. For you have still the flesh in you, but no excuse to let it out. For if you are Christ’s, you died to sin, not to sins merely, but to that source of lust and will, the flesh; and such is the virtue of His death to law too, that even if a Jew you ware made dead to that old husband and free to belong to Another, Who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit to God. The Holy

Spirit directs your eye and heart to Christ; and He, as He produces nothing but good fruit, never fails him that looks to Himself. He is the way, the only way of life and holiness; and if you live by faith, it is now yours to say, “not I, but Christ that liveth in me.” Then and then only, can you produce good fruits; as surely as “every tree that produceth not good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire.”

Be not deceived then. Look to Christ believingly; and all will be well with your soul now, and evermore. Therefore at least by their fruits ye shall know those that uphold the ways of the Lord, and those that pervert.

6 Bare Profession

Matt. 7:21-23.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 213-214.)

The Lord here delivers a most salutary warning, to which the new things of the kingdom gave occasion. For while the truth which came through Him is as precious as it is characteristic, it of necessity left the door open for mental activity and spurious profession in ways which could not under the law be addressed to Israel. “Now we know that, whatsoever things the law saith, it speaketh to those in (or, under) the law.” The truth, Christ, on His coming into the world which knew Him not, casts His light upon every man, and places all that have it under deep and direct responsibility. But it is also capable of being abused widely and variously by a false pretension more or less willing, yet ever inexcusable.

This the Lord meets in these verses with emphatic clearness and solemnity.

“Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he that doeth the will of my Father that is in the heavens. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many works of power? And then will I avow to them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work lawlessness” (Matt. 7:21-23).

The sense of entering into the kingdom of the heavens here is fixed to its glorious estate, not only by “in that day” in the following verse, but by the Lord’s application of it in Matt. 8:11, where its citizens sit in it with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It is the more important to note; because His rejection (which soon began to appear) brought in its “mysteries” as in Matt. 13, during which He sits on high upon the Father’s throne, and the kingdom applies to the anomalous state, as in the field or world wherein He sowed wheat and the devil darnel to ruin as a whole. This is the present mixture of Christendom while the Lord is absent above, during which any one can say “Lord” in vain, and wheat and darnel grow together till the harvest time, and the glory come by judgment.

The essential thing is doing the will of His Father which Christ was revealing. As He said in John 5:24, where life eternal was in question, “Verily, verily, I say to you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath life eternal.” These are the persons who, having done the good things as possessed of life now, rise for the resurrection of life (ver. 28). Equally peremptory is the Lord’s word here. No profession without corresponding course of life can avail; nothing less or other than doing His heavenly Father’s will. And who so

competent to reveal as the Son, who left (as He tells us in John 16:12, 13) many things, beyond hearing then, for the Holy Spirit to announce when He came?

It is clear that, as in the entire discourse, not a word is said about the new birth, still less redemption. The Lord is not here preaching to sinners how they were to be saved; He is teaching His disciples how to walk before the Father that is in the heavens. How does He view that vague and multitudinous profession, which. is a burlesque of Christianity, though now so popular, on the one hand through histrionic ceremonies and gaudy shows and religious fables, and on the other through appeals to the intellect and to the imagination by oratory or. reasoning. There may be seeming devoutness and profuse earnestness; but without living faith in Christ, neither is God known nor is self judged. The Lord insists on true obedience.

O my fellow-sinner, how can you obey a far fuller standard than the law, as long “you are dead in your offences and sins? Are you not by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2)? For we are, saved (nobody else), as the apostle adds, by grace through faith. A rite is wholly unavailing. And faith is God’s gift; it is not of works, as rash men pretend: else man could and would boast. Faithful is, the word, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Oh then repent and believe the gospel.

How overwhelming is the Lord’s warning! “Many shall say to Me in that day (and it is at hand), Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out demons, and by Thy name do many works of power? And I will say (not even you once knew Me, but) “I never

knew you." Compare Heb. 6:4-8. No gift of power is a sign of life eternal, not even the edifying gift of prophesying. A man might be an apostle of Christ, but not a child of God. "Ye must be born anew," begotten by the word of truth; which Judas never was. Outwardly near, he was really far off, not only a stranger in heart but an enemy. And so we read here of crowds not like Judas, deceived as well as deceivers, "Then will I avow to them, I never knew you."

So indeed it is and must be, where men enjoy the greatest outward privileges, and remain without faith working through love. But it is faith, not founded on evidence, nor on tradition, nor dependent on a dying priest or a dead ordinance or a self-asserting church, but given of God's grace that you may become God's son and Christ's bondman, though just as surely a member of His body. Thus only can you walk in obedience of the Father's word and will, till Christ comes or you depart to be with Him, waiting with Him as well as for Him till then.

And those who do not so believe, whatever their claims now, whatever their pretension to order, office, power or authority, must assuredly hear in that day the just and irrevocable sentence, "Depart from Me, ye that work lawlessness." May grace work and win now, giving an ear to hear the voice of Jesus to the saving of the soul, and delivering from the delusion that christening quickens souls, or exempts them from the condition of being lost and the need of being born anew.

7 Christ and the Law

Matt. 5:18-20.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 229-230.)

We have already seen how certainly and clearly laid down is Christ's position in ver. 17. He maintained the authority of the Old Testament. "Think ye not that I came to destroy the law and the prophets; I came not to destroy but to fulfil." He came to make good God's mind therein. This He confirms in ver. 18. "For verily I say to you, Till the heaven and the earth pass, one iota or one point shall in no wise pass from the law till all things come to pass. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of the heavens; but whosoever shall do and teach [them], he shall be called great in the kingdom of the heavens. For I say to you that, except your righteousness surpass [that] of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of the heavens" (18-20).

That the Lord obeyed the law is beyond doubt. This is not the meaning of fulfilling. He gave the full scope of the law and the prophets; and He did yet more, for He revealed God in Himself both by words and ways, and disclosed those secrets of the kingdom which were absolutely hidden of old. For His rejection and departure to heaven would and did give it a quite new form; and beyond this the great mystery as to Christ and as to the church had to be made known, involving things still higher and deeper. But nothing in the new could weaken the authority of God in the old. "Till the heaven and the earth pass, one iota or one point shall in no wise pass from the law till all things come to pass."

Christ should be glorified in heaven, and the Holy Spirit sent down to baptise the believing Jews and Greeks into

one body, the body of Christ, the temple destroyed, the city trodden down by Gentiles, and the Jews scattered over the earth for their Bin against Messiah. But even these woes on the chosen race fulfilled the law and the prophets, and in a special way Christ's word; yet more remains, and darkness still, before the law and the prophets are fulfilled in the salvation of Israel coming to and out of Zion. Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God shall bless to the full His long unblest people, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him. Oh haste the day! Assuredly Christ came not to make void but to fulfil.

But the Lord is here addressing His disciples who were still under the law. He is not yet even predicting His death on the cross and the redemption through His blood to which grace turned it in the justifying righteousness of God by faith to be revealed in the gospel. Indeed, as we have often noticed and might through the entire Sermon on the Mount, not one word says He here of this work of sovereign love. He first sets out the characteristics that are proper to the kingdom in verses 3-12; then position in 13, 14; and now the relation, like His own in their measure, to the revelation God had given to His ancient people, however unbelieving and unworthy as a whole. He does not foretell what their rejection of Himself must entail on the Jewish nation, or what God would then do for them or others who believe.

Hence in ver. 19 He still speaks to them as the godly remnant that heard His voice and clung to Him, born of God, but under law, and on this side of the cross and its blessed results to faith. Obedience first and last is insisted on. Here He begins with the law; but even in

this chapter He goes on to what He is saying to them, which the ancients never heard. He brings in rich additions in Matt. 6 as declaring the Father's name from the close of Matt. 5, guards them from inward and outward snares in Matt. 7, and ends the discourse there with hearing and doing His words as the rock of wisdom and safety.

As undoing the word justly sunk one to be "least" in the kingdom, faithfulness to it raised to a great place therein. Evidently therefore the righteousness of such as entered must exceed and excel that of the Pharisee (ver. 20) who honoured tradition, the word of man, to the necessary disparagement of God's word.

It was the perfection of giving His disciples their food in due season. Many prophets and kings, some even inspired, desired to see the things which the disciples saw, and saw them. not; and to hear the things which they were hearing, and heard them not. And greater things were at hand, even that most wondrous of all wonders, God's work in the cross and the resurrection and the heavenly glory of His Son. But if heaven and earth shall pass, as they are, and not the least tittle of the law and the prophets, how far above these to God's glory and man's blessing rise the words of the Lord Jesus!

And these are words of His which deeply concern my reader, who is not a disciple of His, but a slave of sin and Satan. If you are indeed His disciple, let me rejoice with you in the grace God has shown you. If you are not, but only a guilty and wretched sinner, I beseech you to hear His words meant for you to heed before God that you may live for ever. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and

are, heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Doubt Him not: He is able, He is willing. "I came to call, not righteous men, but sinners:" why despair, or turn away? Even His enemies cried, "This man receiveth sinners." What does He Himself say, even when His hearers sought to kill Him, and when He sought those who had not a pulse of life toward God? "Verily, verily I say to you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath life eternal, and cometh not into judgment [out of which no unbeliever can emerge, nor yet believer if he entered], but passed out of death into life."

For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him may not perish, but have life eternal. What love in God Who hates the sins and pities the sinner! What infinite love, when you think, first of His Son, then of yourself! But O my fellow-sinner, what a doom must be yours according to His word if you disbelieve the Son, are unsubject to Him, and neglect so great salvation!

8 Anger

Matt. 5:21, 22.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 244-246.)

The Scribes and Pharisees were especially ritualist and external. This was letter, not spirit. Our Lord not only condemns a righteousness of mere outward acts, but insists on inward reality as indispensable for the kingdom of the heavens. He does not explain at this time how the requisite practical righteousness is possible and actually made good in sinful men. He had already let Nicodemus know of the necessity for a Jew no less than a Greek to be born anew, as well as to have redemption

by His cross. Here to His disciples He expounds the absolute need of realising the varied spiritual qualities brought before them in order to enter the kingdom. As the Pharisees fatally narrowed the scope of scripture, the Lord gave its fulness as none but He could. The first of these references is to the law of murder. But the Lord goes immeasurably farther for the kingdom.

“Ye have heard that it was said to those of old, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be subject to the judgment. But I say to you, that everyone that is [rightly] angry with his brother shall be subject to the judgment; whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be subject to the council; and whosoever shall say, Fool, shall be subject to the hell of fire” (Matt. 5:21, 22). The law and the prophets He had vindicated. All must come to pass. Yet the law made nothing perfect. He speaks Who is above the law and gave fulness to all on His own authority.

Thus is the commandment made exceeding broad and deep. The axe is laid to the root of the evil tree. All violent feelings are judged as in God’s sight, and every evil word of malice and contempt shown to be of sinful and dangerous consequence. As He said later in the same Gospel (Matt. 12:37), “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” Here He warns, not so much of every light word, but of wrath, hatred, and contempt. The Judge of all the earth, Himself despised by man and abhorred by the nation, as was soon proved, could not fail to discern aright.

The danger He denounced is the burning sense of self, of the old man set on fire of hell. Circumstances might hinder its expression; but it stays in the heart it ruled,

and makes itself at length felt in its malignity. He that formed the heart knows it, as He detects a feeling so contrary to His own nature, not only unbecoming in man, but wholly inconsistent with the peacemakers, the pure in heart, the merciful, as well as the poor in Spirit, the mourning, the meek, and those hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the blessed ones that suit the kingdom of the heavens. How too could it agree with being persecuted for righteousness' sake? how with being reproached, and having all manner of evil said and done against one falsely for Christ's sake, yet, rejoicing and being exceeding glad to be thus defamed and ill-used for His name?

But we know that very recently (Mark 3:1-6) the Holy and the True looked round with anger in the synagogue on those who watched with murderous hate, if He would heal a poor sufferer on the Sabbath. Instead of shrinking from the issue, He bade the man rise up into the midst. They (the high and the broad) were silent; but the fire of their anger burned to destroy Him, after He also bade the man stretch out his palsied hand, restored on the instant His holy anger was distressed at the hardening of their hearts who, in the vain confidence of tradition (ever spurious), were thus maddened against the active and blessed goodness of God as a reality among men here below.

Again, John the baptist said to the Sadducees coming to his baptism, Viper brood, who forewarned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce therefore fruit worthy of repentance; and think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham for father. These were scathing words; but if anger dictated a word, it was unselfish and holy. It was indignation at men who sought a religious form to

cover their unbelief and wickedness. And He, whose sandal-thong John counted himself unworthy to untie, pronounced woe after woe on these Scribes and Pharisees, albeit standing highest in Jewish estimation. Blind guides He called them, fools too and hypocrites and serpents; how should they escape the judgment of hell? Was not the blessed Lord fully justified in His words, overwhelming as they were to the highest degree? It was not enmity to tell an evil-doer the truth, that he might repent. Flesh hates fidelity.

If it be objected that so the Lord was entitled righteously to denounce, but no one else may, what are we to learn from one of like passions with ourselves? He on just occasion could say in the Spirit, to an erring saint at Corinth with questions about the resurrection, Fool! as he said before, Wake up righteously, and sin not; for some are ignorant of God: I speak to your shame. So in the next chapter he declares that if anyone love not the Lord, let him be Anathema Maran-atha (accursed at the Lord's coming), 1 Cor. 15, 16. The same apostle tells the saints (Eph. 4:26), Be angry and sin not. If one truly follow the Lord and the apostle, anger then is a duty, not a sin; yet one surely has to watch and pray withal.

The source, motive, and aim decide. If of God and for Him by the Spirit, anger has His sanction; if for self, it is evil that exposes to judgment: and so the Lord denounces on its various degrees expressed in a form familiar to Jews.

O my fellow-sinner, whose words have been habitually sinful, violent and ungodly, how can you, as you are, enter the kingdom? And if you cannot, what must be your end without end? The Judge tells you plainly. But

He is now the Saviour, the only perfect Saviour. Flee, flee for refuge, for pardon, and a new nature, to Him Who alone can give all you need. The resource of God's grace is Christ. And if we believe on Him, His love constrains us to live, not to self, but to Him Who for our sakes died and rose again. Then only do we cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

9 Reconciliation

Brotherly Reconciliation.

Matt. 5:23-26.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 261-262.)

The Lord was not content, with authority peculiarly and emphatically His own, to lay down the hateful evil of anger in heart and word, even if not in violent deed. He proceeds to carry out the revealed mind of God for the kingdom by requiring reconciliation if any had stumbled one's brother. Throughout, disciples are in view, not mankind in general. Sin in disciples is exceeding sinful: good is peremptory (surely not evil) for the kingdom of the heavens.

"If therefore thou be offering thy gift at the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Make friends (or, be of good-will) with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the official, and thou be cast into prison. Verily 1 say to thee, Thou shalt in no

wise come out thence till thou have paid the last farthing" (Matt. 5:23-26).

It is no less evident that Jewish disciples as yet under the law are those addressed. This is as plain in vers. 20, 21 as in those we are now considering. In fact it is the rule in this Gospel as a whole and in the others; and it must be so, till in the death of Christ the middle wall of partition was broken down, and thus the way was opened to reconcile both Jew and Gentile that believed in one body to God, the enmity being slain. The discourse of our Lord anticipates no such unity, nor even the call of the Gentiles, in any one clause. But it is a profound mistake that this indisputable fact takes away the profit of a single word from the Christian, though we stand now in a position of grace which could not be then. There is the richest instruction morally for every one who honours Him who spake as never man spake; a spiritual estimate of unequalled depth for those who know redemption and have the indwelling Spirit to enter in far more fully than those who heard His words of divine truth at the time He uttered them.

Thus the Lord enjoins the disciple who was bringing his gift to the altar, if he remembered that his brother had anything against him, to stop short of his devoted purpose as to God Himself, and be reconciled to his brother, before returning to offer his gift. What tenderness of conscience was looked for, brotherly affection, lowliness of mind, readiness to own wrong, and desire to win an offended brother! It was the very reverse of anger, contempt, or hatred, which He had just treated, as His servant in measure re-echoed at a much later day (1 John 3:11-15). And that reverse was the Jews' case. For absorbed in bringing their offering to the

altar, they were blind to their wrong against Him who deigned to be their brother, with far more than brother's love, born for adversity as they knew not. But they refused to be reconciled, and persisted in their offering, however offensive to God. It was presumptuous sin, and high-handed self-will under cloak of religion.

What follows points to a still more solemn consideration. Who that weighs scripture can doubt that the Lord in vers. 25, 26 refers to the position in which the Jew then stood with God? This was a far deeper consideration than any other brother aggrieved: their Lord became their brother. The awful truth is that He who loved Israel and would die for them, Jehovah-Messiah, was made their adversary by their perverse disobedience and blind unbelief; and His presence, which had been their salvation and best blessing if received, must bring on the inevitable crisis by their utter rejection and hatred of Him. The Lord at this point avails Himself of the occasion in His infinite grace to urge their agreeing, or making friends, with their adversary quickly, whilst in the way with him. How His heart yearned over them, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings! But they would not. Their deadliest aversion was to their loving Messiah.

Hence the case was just about to come before the Judge, and the Judge would deliver to the official the convicted one, and he must be cast into prison till the last farthing be paid. It is no question here of eternal judgment, but of divine government morally on the earth; but all is plainly true of His people found guilty and consigned to suffer long. In that prison still lies the guilty debtor, till his heart turns to the One he despised. Then the word shall go forth, Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith

your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry to her, that her time of sorrow (or, suffering) is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of Jehovah's hand double for all her sins (Isa. 40:1, 2). Who is a God like unto Thee, that forgiveth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? (Micah 7:18.) Is not this the true unforced bearing of our Lord's words? One may apply it, to Christian use or unchristian warning. But it is an evil to twist scripture or to complain of those who bow to its full force. Such ignorance has led men into the fable of purgatory.

But let me appeal to you, my reader, who may excuse yourself because you do not profess to be a disciple. How will this avail when you stand before the great white throne? By your own plea to escape responsibility you incur certain and everlasting perdition. You know that your works are evil, and that dying as you live, you are utterly unfit to be in heaven with the Holy One of God. He whom you refuse as Saviour now will then be your Judge. You turn away from the Lord, you neglect so great salvation; your name is not in the book of life; your works are selfish, vain, proud, wilful; addicted to lustful passion, rebellious against God, you serve Satan, and therefore must your portion be with the enemy of God and of His Son, as you have been here and are now.

O be warned in time. For the end of all things is at hand, even if you live; and your life at best is but a vapour. You know not what a day may bring forth. God was in Christ reconciling, not only embittered, or self-righteous Jews, but a world to Himself, not imputing their offences to them. But all was vain for either: they hated both the Son and the Father. A great king, a mighty conqueror,

would have been to their taste. How would that have blotted out their sins, or given them a nature to serve God on earth and enjoy Him in heaven? In divine wisdom and grace their hatred was allowed to culminate in His cross; and thereby sin was judged, themselves who believe cleansed from their iniquities, and made God's righteousness in Christ. O harden not yourself for hell-fire. God as it were beseeching by us, we pray for Christ, on His behalf who died for you: he reconciled to God. The work is done, according to His will, to save you for over. Repent and believe the gospel. What could be done to compare with that which God has done?

10 Impurity

Matt. 5:27-30.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 276-277.)

Throughout it is not mere acts the Lord demands, but state; the spiritual condition suitable for the kingdom of the heavens. As in the verses immediately preceding the Lord insists on a spirit of lowly grace, going immeasurably beyond Thou shalt not kill, so now on a purity as far beyond the non-commission of adultery.

It is plain also that here, as everywhere in the so-called Sermon on the Mount, it is not the grace which saves the lost sinner who repents and believes the gospel. The state of soul that befits entrance into the kingdom of the heavens exclusively occupies the Lord. He is teaching the disciples what suited the Father's name which He made known to them. All that He laid down therefore manifestly presupposes that one is born of God, as the essential requisite for His kingdom, not acts merely if

they could be good, but renewal of heart. Christ Himself was the blessed pattern of perfection.

“Ye heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit, adultery; but I say unto you that every one that looketh at a woman to lust after her committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye stumbleth (or, ensnareth) thee, pluck out and cast it from thee; for it profiteth thee that one of thy members perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand stumbleth thee, cut off and cast it from thee; for it profiteth thee, that one of thy members perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell.”

Violence and corruption are the sad characteristics of man’s fallen estate. We see them marked in the antediluvian world, at least as the general signs of a ruined state, whatever the specific evil which aroused divine indignation and unsparing judgment. Throughout man’s history as traced in the Bible, and particularly in the favoured circle of Israel under the law, they are ever before us. Christ came, and grace and truth through Him, and redemption through His blood, everlasting redemption, to say nothing now of heavenly counsels made good in His person and place, and communications to the Christian and to the church. But man is essentially unchanged, and even avails himself of grace to become the worse. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil.” “But when thy judgments are in the earth,” says the prophet, “the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness,” Showing favour to the wicked, who believe not, emboldens them to persevere. And as the Jew was no exception who dealt wrongfully in the land of uprightness and would not

behold the majesty of Jehovah, so will the Gentile reject the gospel to his perdition, and be cut off irretrievably. The time also hastens.

But as of old, so now are the faithful men, of whom the world is not worthy, who lived and suffered as seeing Him who is invisible. And the Lord did not lower the standard but raised it, clearing it of letter and of all accretions or diminutions. He has the godly remnant in view, still Jewish as He spoke, who not only entered the kingdom, but had higher relations intimated as His rejection set in, till His session at God's right hand and mission of the Spirit gave all necessary to reveal and make good in the saints what had been ever hidden heretofore.

As violence then was judged and excluded in any shape for the disciples, so was impurity. The avoidance of the extreme act might satisfy a Pharisee or Scribe; but the Lord could not dispense with anything short of truth in the inward parts. To look at a woman lustfully was to commit adultery with her already in his heart; and it is not the outside only that God regards but the heart above all. It is only a new nature that delights in holiness; and he who has it by grace answers to the will of God his Father; and abhors himself if he slip even into a wrong look, as unworthy of his calling and hateful to Him who loves him.

But the Lord follows up His stringent condemnation by the call to deal promptly and unreservedly with anything that acted as an incentive. Therefore He specifies that which is part of ourselves, and when. rightly used of the greatest value. Not even the right eye, or the right foot, can be allowed in presence of His displeasure which the

saint fears, because he is a believer and God's child; as the Lord said elsewhere, "Be not afraid of those that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will tell you whom ye shall fear. Fear him who, after he hath killed the body, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say to you, Fear him." It is not the highest motive, but it is an imperative and most solemn and urgent appeal.

Therefore says He now, "And if thy right eye stumbleth thee, pluck out and cast it from thee; for it profiteth thee that one of thy members perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand stumbleth thee, cut, off and cast it from thee; for it profiteth thee, that one of thy members perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell." The right eye and the right hand present forcibly the mortifying of our members that are on the earth, to hinder sin against God. At, all cost must the believer deny self; as we find elsewhere he must hate father, mother, wife, children, brethren, sisters, yea and his own life also, or he cannot be Christ's disciple.

O my fellow-sinner, you know that this is wholly beyond you. You do not, will not, make any such sacrifices. Nothing but Christ, the new life, can so feel and act; and you have only your depraved life of sin and self. Are you then to despair? Yes, despair of yourself. You are truly lost, as the Lord says. But He came to seek and to save the lost. Tell God of your guilt and ruin, but plead the name of Jesus whom He has sent. He is a present and everlasting Saviour. Doubt not, but believe what God declares of His Son. Life in Him answers to the appeal of Jesus, when you rest on His redemption; and the Holy Spirit will strengthen you accordingly.

11 Purity in Divorce

Matt. 5:31, 32.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 294-296.)

In connection with the light of heaven on the lusts of the heart, the Lord adds His word on the permission of divorce in Deut. 24. It is here the woman protected against hard-hearted man. Positive sin in violation of the marriage tie alone calls for divorce. Men abused the licence beyond measure, as if the permission were a precept; and any vexation sufficed. But Jehovah hates putting away, as the last prophet testified to the Jews in their evil day.

In Matt. 19 the question distinctly proposed to Him by the Pharisees, Is it lawful to put away one's wife for every cause? And He answered and said, Have ye not read that He that made from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be united to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh? So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God joined together, let not man put asunder. They say to Him, Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorce and to put away? He saith to them, Moses for your hardness of heart allowed you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it hath not been thus. But I say to you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, not for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery, and he that marrieth one put away committeth adultery. His disciples say to Him, If the case of man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. And He said to them, All cannot receive this word, but those to whom it hath been given.

Thus was the mind of God made clear. The indulgence of lust is incompatible with entering the kingdom of the heavens. The law forbade the act of adultery; the Lord condemns even the looking licentiously as adultery committed already in the heart. He insisted therefore on the most unsparing decision with all that gave occasion. Was it not better to pluck out the right eye or cut off the right hand, rather than the whole body be cast into hell? Here (as in all the chapters of the first Gospel before Matthew 13 where He begins as the Sower), it is not seeking sinners in sovereign grace, but saints, as He enjoins on the twelve in chap. 10. “Into whatsoever city or village ye enter, inquire who in it is worthy” (ver. 11). So the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5) describes what spiritual characters suit the kingdom, as the end (Matt. 7) declares that none shall enter but he that does the will of His Father that is in the heavens. Not even prophesying or miraculous powers, were it casting out demons through the Lord’s name, could be a passport to the workers of lawlessness. Practical obedience of His words alone should stand. The rock here is spiritual reality. His word was incomparably more withering to self-righteousness than the law of Moses.

There is power of God given exceptionally to be above marriage, and live only to Christ here below. But, to far the most, marriage is God’s order for man on earth. And the monkish rule with high pretension leads into horrible evasion, hypocrisy, and corruption even contrary to nature and abominable. God’s mind is clear from the first; adultery alone justifies divorce.

Hence the necessity would be felt urgently and absolutely of receiving a new nature and an everlasting

redemption in the Saviour. No interpretation of our Lord's words here or elsewhere is more radically false than that He puts believers under the law as their rule of life. He is really condemning unbelievers and hypocrites far more stringently than the law did, and those sayings of the elders which took advantage of a legal permission for carnal indulgence and unfairness to a wife who through any cause became less attractive to her selfish husband. Such souls were inadmissible to the kingdom. Only the godly remnant are here contemplated, who abhor corruption as they do violence. The presence of Christ, not of the law given by Moses, was bile suited moment for defining the character and conduct proper to the new thing He would set up. He was the standard of what pleased God, and must mark those who are His. "The law made nothing perfect" was a hard lesson for Jews; it seems quite as hard for those who inherit the traditions of fallen Christendom, and not less for Protestants than Papists, To be content with being nobody in the world, and despised by its religion, is impossible to human nature; to be mourners as Christ was, feeling for God's will and majesty where lawlessness pervades; to be meek now, waiting for the glorious inheritance in God's time, instead of clamorous for our rights; to hunger and thirst after (not ease or wealth, or power or honour, but) righteousness, cannot be without partaking of a divine nature. Harder still was the actively gracious spirit of mercifulness, purity in heart, and peace-making according to God, with the persecutions which such righteousness entails, and especially such maintenance of Christ's name as effaces ours.

Our Lord accordingly singles out of the Decalogue the two great prohibitions of murder on the one hand and of adultery on the other. Assuredly He came not to make void the law or the prophets, but to give their fulness. He not only went farther than either, but declared that a righteousness surpassing that of the Scribes and Pharisees was indispensable for entering the kingdom of the heavens. He most pointedly sets His word with divine authority, so as to contrast what He laid down far beyond the claims of the law. In the case before us, as looking lustfully convicts of adultery before God, so whosoever put away his wife, save for cause of fornication, made her commit adultery, as well as him who married her. Thus He established a moral basis, not for a nation of mixed character, but fit for God's family and kingdom, which judged the heart's evil and allowed no concession to hard-heartedness. And what can be plainer than on this later occasion (Matt. 19) His going up to the beginning, long before the law, to God's instituted order and word in Gen. 2? There again His own word is full and final authority, for the Messiah was the Jehovah God of Israel. Whatever had been allowed by Moses, He is Mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. It is God speaking in Him who is Son: But I say to you."

Now, I appeal to your conscience, my reader. Can you face the light of God, which our Lord is, on these evils of man's fallen nature? Are you not utterly convicted by every saying of His, who is the Judge of living and dead? And if such be the truth, O spread it out, and yourself as verily guilty before God. Presume no more to stand on your own foundation. You are lost: own it truly and humbly and in earnest. The Lord Jesus is not Judge only;

He is the real and the only and the present Saviour of the lost. But you must be in the truth of your guilt in God's sight, if He is to act toward you in the truth of His salvation. That is repentance toward God; this is faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is for faith the blood of Jesus that cleanses from all, from every, sin. There is also life in Him, the Son, for every believer in Him. The one is as indispensable as the other. That life is the spring of the new nature which produces every good fruit and detests every evil work, word, and feeling; and now that one rests on His work of redemption, the Holy Ghost is given as divine power to strengthen the new man and mortify the old. It is true, that dependence on Christ, abiding in Him, is needed all the way through, and His words to abide in one, and prayer suitably and with confidence in divine love. But this is just practical Christianity so far; and we are sanctified by the Spirit, not to independence which is sin, but to obedience, the same blessed filial obedience as Christ's, our blessed Lord.

12 Swear not at all

Matt. 5:33-37.

(B.T. Vol. N4, p. 308-309.)

Here again the teaching of our Lord far transcends what was said of old. His presence brought in the light of God, and it was addressed to a new and divine nature in those who believe. It dealt with the root of every question, not merely with the fruit or overt acts.

"Again ye heard that it was said to the ancients, Thou shalt not swear falsely, but shalt render to the Lord thine oaths. But I say to you, Swear not at all; neither by (in)

the heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his feet's footstool; nor by (toward) Jerusalem, for it is the great King's city. Nor shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your word be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; but what exceedeth these is of evil (or, the evil one)."

Thus the Lord goes far beyond perjury or breaking a vow. He prohibits swearing altogether in the intercourse of daily life. Our word therein is to be, Yea, yea, or Nay, nay. That which is more than these has no sanction from God, and is therefore of evil, or the evil one, the enemy of God and man. All such asseveration as the Lord illustrates from the facts of Jewish habit. arose from the constant experience of men in deceiving or evading. They therefore resorted to such means of insuring the truth. But these efforts defeated themselves; for we know from a reliable Jewish contemporary of the N.T. inspired writers that oaths by earth, heaven, sun, stars, and the entire universe, were not counted binding. Only those obliged the conscience which were by God's name direct and express; nay others might be transgressed. As the Lord supposed in those He addresses poverty of spirit and purity of heart, He proscribed absolutely all such swearing as offensive to God and incompatible with the place of His sons.

Nor is it only Jews then, but professing Christians now, that show themselves as indifferent to the Lord's authority as if He had never thus solemnly uttered His mind. Among Protestants there is some little care to avoid profanity by adopting light and foolish exclamations, or by repeating heathen terms derived from their Greek or Latin reading, forgetting that if the idols are nothing, the demons behind them are real and

evil. Romanists are much less scrupulous. It is sad to think how perverts go farther in excuse for their blasphemous phrases than those born and bred in their vain superstitions.

Take the following proof from the late Cardinal Newman's "Lectures on certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Submitting to the Catholic Church": "Listen to their conversation; listen to the conversation of any multitude, or any private party; what strange oaths mingle with it! God's heart, and God's eyes, and God's wounds, and God's blood: you cry out, 'How profane!' Doubtless; but do you not see that the special profaneness above Protestant oaths lies, not in the words but simply in the speaker, and is the necessary result of that insight into the invisible world which you have not? You use the vague words, 'Providence,' or 'the Deity,' or 'good luck,' or 'nature'; where we, whether now or of old, realise the Creator in His living works, instruments, and personal manifestations, and speak of the 'Sacred Heart,' or 'the Mother of Mercies,' or 'our Lady of Walsingham,' or 'St. George for Merry England,' or 'loving St. Francis,' or 'dear St. Philip.' Your people would be as varied and fertile in their adjurations and invocations as a Catholic populace, if they believed as we" (Ninth Lecture, p. 232).

It is grace alone which delivers from Popery and even Protestantism, and makes it a divine joy to be a Christian, neither more nor less. Irreverence of every sort, worldly or superstitious, becomes intolerably evil in one's eyes; and it is the first of duties for the believer to hear these words of Christ and reduce them to practice. But is it not an awful instance of Satan's blinding power, that while none but the vilest of Protestants would think

of excusing his own ungodly badinage, a grave clergyman in his new born (or at least early open) apology for the shameless fooling of Papists should plead so barefacedly, not only for such ebullitions in word, but for turning the Last Judgment into a play of fireworks, and argue for it that “they are making one continuous and intense act of faith” (p. 237)

But we must carefully remember, that our Lord in no way forbids an oath before the magistrate or judge. This is not of evil; but of good, being of divine authority. For men swear by a greater, and the oath is a term to all dispute as making matters sure. To refuse it is to deny God’s authority in any who represent Him in earthly things, and hence called by His name and translated “judges,” as in Ex. 21:6, Ex. 22:8, 9, 28. See also Ps. 82:1, 6. The principle is asserted in Lev. 5:1, to which the Lord, far from setting aside on the mount, bowed when adjured by the high priest (Matt. 26:63, 64), though silent before.

In like manner James 5:12 with marked earnestness forbids swearing either by heaven or by earth. These were not judicial adjuration, which does not fall under people’s swearing. It was rather being sworn in God’s name. Nor did our Lord any more than His servant prohibit such appeals to God as in Rom. 1:9, 1 Cor. 15:31, 2 Cor. 1:23, Gal. 1:20, or the like. The scruple of Friends or Separatists has no foundation in scripture.

But how and where do you stand, my reader? Have you owned yourself a lost sinner, and the Lord Jesus the only, the willing, and the perfect Saviour? Believe in Him, and thou shalt be saved. So said Paul and Silas to the Philippian jailer, suddenly arrested, and not to him only,

but also to his house. And the same night he was baptised, and all his straightway. Why not you too? The same Lord is open to you. May you exult as he did, having believed with all his house in God, the God of all grace.