Lectures on the Gospel of Matthew

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Preface

The author trusts that the volume may prove a help to those who accept Scripture as the word of God and have confidence in the gracious guidance of the Holy Ghost, who is sent down from heaven to glorify our Lord Jesus. Critical questions have been sparingly discussed here: elsewhere they may be entered into more fully; for truth has nothing to fear, much to gain, from the most thorough sifting, if it be but competent and candid. On the present occasion, however, direct interpretation has been the aim, and the practical profit of souls."

Guernsey, Feb., 1868.

Introduction

That the Spirit of God, when inspiring Matthew, had in view the aspirations and wants of the Jews, the evidence of the Messiahship of Jesus, and the consequences of His rejection both for them and the Gentiles, is a truth which has forced itself on most Christians who have examined the Gospels with any discriminating care. So large and varied are the internal proofs of such a design that the only wonder is how an intelligent mind could dispute the facts or the inference. Yet we are told that, had a Jewish aim been steadily kept before the Evangelist, the visit of the Gentile Magi could not have been exclusively related by Matthew, any more than the circumcision of Jesus and His frequenting the passovers at Jerusalem could have been exclusively related by Luke if he had written for Gentiles. The objection has no force when it is seen that the Spirit meant by Matthew to trace the alienation of the Jews from such a Messiah

as their own Scriptures portray, not alone externally glorious, but first as a divine person though a man, intimating in His very name that He was Jehovah, coming to save His people from their sins, and not merely from their enemies (chap. 1). What a picture follows in chapter 2! Jerusalem troubled at the tidings of His birth, and distant Gentile Magi from the East coming up to do Him homage! Is this the refutation of Matthew's special design? What more beautiful illustration of it could be looked for? And if Luke gives us the most charming glimpses at the godly remnant of Israel, and the Lord Jesus presented first in their midst with the most exact heed to every requirement of the law, how does this set aside the testimony of a Gospel which teems with evidence that God gives us there Christ as traced up to "Adam, which was the son of God," not down from Abraham and David, the depositary of promise and the stock of the kingdom in Israel? Did the objectors forget that the great apostle of the Gentiles regularly carried out the principle on which he insists — "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek?" The inspired writers reflected the richness of God's ways of grace, not the technicality of a human routine.

It is evident also that the apparent discrepancies in the concurrent accounts of the synoptic Gospels must spring either from the infirmity of the human instruments or from the far-reaching wisdom of the Spirit who impressed on each a special design, and so inserted, suppressed, or variously presented, the same substantial fact or truth in pursuance of that design, never giving anything but truth, yet only thus giving the whole truth. Why does unbelief affirm that such a difference of design is an à priori theory? The habitual testimony of

each Gospel must decide this question. What can be more manifestly à priori than to impute, on such a ground as this, “demonstrable historical inaccuracies” to the inspired historians of the weightiest matters ever given to man to record? If the sole method of writing a life were that of simple sequence, there might be some appearance of reason; but some of the most famous biographies among men depart in general or in part from the mere order of occurrence. What would be thought of assailing their credit for such a reason as this? The fault lies in those who object, not in Scripture.

It is to me certain that Matthew and Luke were led to follow an exact order, one dispensational, the other moral; that they are far more profoundly instructive than if one or other, or both, had adhered to the very elementary manner of an annalist; and that it is a mere blunder therefore to characterize any resulting difference of arrangement (such as Matt. 8:28, etc., compared with Mark 5:1, etc., and Luke 8:26, etc.) as a real discrepancy. Let such defenders of the faith do their worst: the Christian has nothing to fear, but only to believe, and he shall see the glory of the Lord and the beauty of the truth. Undoubtedly a different arrangement consists with and supposes the same incident variously placed, and with deliberate design, so as to bring out the truth more fully; but how does it prove a “real” discrepancy?

It is allowed on all hands that the Lord may have repeated the same truth, as He often repeated similar miracles. But a difference of design alone accounts for all the phenomena of the Gospels, and this not to the dishonour of the writers, but to the praise of their true and divine Author. Eye-witness and apostolicity fail to

meet the case, for two out of the four Evangelists were neither. The foundation of the new building consists of prophets as well as apostles; and though God did supply eyewitnesses, He proved His supremacy by furnishing the most graphic details of our Lord's ministry by the very two who had not seen what they describe with more lifelike touches than are found in those two who describe what they saw. So false is this criterion even in the two apostles, that John alone does not give either the scene of the agony or that of the transfiguration, yet he alone of the Evangelists was among the nearest to both. He alone gives the fall of the armed band to the ground, yet Matthew beheld it equally With himself. And Matthew gives with the greatest fulness the prophetic discourse on Olivet; John not at all, though he is the only Evangelist who was present to hear it.

The Spirit's purpose is the true and only key in every instance. Thus, as to the inscription on the cross, nothing is simpler than the perfection of each report for each Gospel; while it may be that the actual writing contained John's with the addition of Matthew's opening words, the Holy Spirit appropriating each form to His aim in the respective Gospels. Plenary inspiration in no way excludes, but accentuates, special design. The true question is, Are we to attribute their differences of form to the wisdom of God or to the weakness of man? Again, difference of reading is a question of human copies, not of the inspired original. Lastly, the apostle insists not merely that the men were inspired, but that the book — yea, every scripture — is divinely inspired.

There is the strongest evidence to prove that the Greek of Matthew is the original and not a version, though possibly the Evangelist may have also written it in

Hebrew for the early Church in Judea. This might lapse, and what was permanently needed abide.

Matthew 1-4

Matthew 1

I have thought. it would be profitable to take up one of the Gospels, and to trace, as simply as the Lord enables me, the general outline of the truth revealed there. It is my desire to point out the special object and design of the Holy Ghost, so as to furnish those who value God's word with such hints as may tend to meet some of the difficulties that arise in the minds of many, and also to put in a clearer light great truths that are apt to be passed lightly over. Here I may assume that the Spirit of God has not given us these accounts of our Lord liable to the mistakes of men, but that He has, on the contrary, kept His mighty, unerring hand over those who in themselves were men of like passions with us. In a word, the Holy Ghost has inspired these accounts in order that we might have full certainty that He is their author, and thus they are stamped with His own perfection. As He has been pleased to give us various accounts, so He has had a divine reason for each of them. In short, God has sought His own glory in this, and has secured it.

Now there can be no question, to any one who reads the Gospels with the smallest discernment, that the first is most remarkably adapted to meet the need of Jews, and that it brings out the Old Testament prophecies and other scriptures which found their realization in Jesus. Consequently, there are more scripture citations as applying to our Lord's life and death in this Gospel than in all the others put together. All this was not a thing left to Matthew's discretion. That the Holy Ghost used the mind of man in carrying out His own design is clear; but

that He was pleased perfectly to guard and guide him in what he was to give out is what I mean in saying that God inspired Matthew for the purpose.

Besides presenting our Lord in such a way as best to meet the right or wrong thoughts and feelings of a Jew; besides furnishing the proofs more particularly wanted to satisfy his mind, it is evident from the character of the discourses and parables that the rejection of the Messiah by Israel, and the consequences of it to the Gentiles, are here the great prominent thoughts in the mind of the Holy Ghost. Hence there is no ascension scene in Matthew. The Jew, if he had understood the Old Testament prophecies, would have looked for a Messiah to come, suffer, die, and be raised again, “according to the Scriptures.” In Matthew we have His death and resurrection, but there He is left; and we should not know from the facts related by him only that Christ went up to heaven at all. We should know it was implied in some of the words that Christ spoke; but in point of fact Matthew leaves us with Christ Himself still upon the earth. The last chapter describes, not the ascension of Christ, nor His session at God’s right hand, but His speaking to the disciples here below. Such a presentation of Christ was peculiarly that which the Jews needed to know. It was more suitable to them than to any other people on the earth.

And who was the agent employed, and with what fitness? — one of the twelve who companied with our Lord from the beginning of His ministry till He was taken up from them. So far, of course, he was an evidently competent witness for the Jew, and far more suitable than Mark or Luke would have been, who were not, as far as we know, personal companions of the Lord.

But there was this peculiarity — that Matthew was a publican, or tax-gatherer, by profession. Although a Jew, he was in the employment of the Gentiles, which position would make him specially odious to his countrymen. They would look upon him with more suspicion even than upon a stranger. This might make it appear at first sight the more extraordinary that the Holy Ghost should employ such a one to give the account of Jesus as the Messiah. But let us remember that there is another object all through the Gospel of Matthew; that it is not only the record of Jesus as the true Messiah to Israel, but that it shows us His rejection by Israel, and the consequences of their fatal unbelief: — all the barriers which had hitherto existed between Jew and Gentile thrown down — the mercy of God flowing out toward those who were despised, and blessing the Gentile as readily and as fully as the Jew. Thus the admirable propriety of employing Matthew the publican, and its consistency with the scope of his task, are apparent.

These few remarks may help to evince that there was the utmost fitness in the employment of the first of the four Evangelists to do the work appointed for him. If it were our object to examine the rest, it could just as easily be made manifest that each had exactly the right work to do. As we proceed through this Gospel, you will be struck, I doubt not, by the wisdom which chose such a one to give the account of the rejected Messiah, despised by His guilty brethren after the flesh.

But I shall confine myself at present to showing with what wisdom Matthew introduces such an account of the Messiah. For many must have been more or less arrested by the prefatory record of names, and may

perhaps have asked, What profit is there to be had from a list like this? But let us never pass over anything in Scripture as a light or even doubtful matter. There is a depth of blessed meaning in the account Matthew gives us of the Lord's genealogy. I must therefore dwell a little on the perfectly beautiful manner in which the Spirit of God has here traced His lineage, and direct attention briefly to the way in which it harmonizes with the divine account of Jesus for the Jew, who would be constantly raising the question whether Jesus was really the Messiah.

It will be observed that the genealogy here differs totally from what we have in Luke, where it is not given at the beginning, but at the end of chapter 3. Thus, in the latter Gospel we learn a great deal about the Lord Jesus before His genealogy appears. Why was this? Luke was writing to the Gentiles, who could not be supposed to be equally, or in the same way, interested in His messianic relations. But when they had learned in some degree who Jesus was, it would be very interesting to see what was His lineage as man, and to trace Him up to Adam, the father of the whole human family. What more suitable than to link Him with the head of the race if the object were to show the grace that would go out toward all mankind, the salvation-bearing grace of God that appears unto all men? One might put that word in Titus 2 as a sort of frontispiece to Luke's Gospel. It is God's grace in the person of His Son, who had become a man, connected as to humanity with the whole family of man, though the nature in Him was ever, only, and altogether holy.

But here, in Matthew, we find ourselves on a narrower ground, circumscribed to a certain family, the royal seed

of a certain nation, God's chosen people. Abraham and David are mentioned in the very first verse. "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham," Why are these two names thus selected; and why put together here in this brief summary? Because all the hopes of Israel were bound up with what was revealed to these two persons, David was the great head of the kingdom, the one in whom the true line of Messiah's throne was founded. Saul was merely the fleshly king whom Israel sought passingly for themselves out of their own will. David was the king God chose, and he is here mentioned as the forefather of the Lord's Anointed — "the Son of David." Abraham, again, was the one in whom it was said all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Thus the opening words prepare us for the whole of the Gospel. Christ came with all the reality of the kingdom promised to David's Son. But if He were refused as the Son of David, still, as the Son of Abraham, there was blessing not merely for the Jew, but for the Gentile. He is indeed the Messiah; but if Israel will not have Him, God will during their unbelief bring the nations to taste of His mercy.

Having given us this general view, we come to particulars. We begin with Abraham, tracing Jesus not up to him, but down from him. Every Israelite would begin with Abraham, and would be interested to follow the stages of the line from him on whom they all hung.1 "Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren" (ver. 2). This comprehensive notice, "Judas and his brethren," seems to be of importance, and in more ways than one. It does not consist with the notion that our Evangelist in this part of the chapter simply copies the records kept by the

Jews. We may be sure that men never register in this fashion. Yet it is evidently in the strictest harmony with this Gospel, for it gives prominence to the royal tribe of whom was the Messiah (Gen. 49:10), while it reminds the most favoured that others, too long out of sight, were not forgotten of God now that He is giving the genealogy of His Messiah.

“And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar” (ver. 3). What is the reason for bringing in a woman, for naming Tamar here? There were women of great note in the lineage of the Messiah — persons whom the Jews naturally looked up to as holy and honourable. What Jewish heart would not naturally glow with strong feelings of respect in hearing of Sarah and Rebekah, and the other holy and well-known women recorded in Old Testament history? But there is no mention of them here. On the other hand, Tamar is mentioned. Why is it so? Grace lay underneath this, most rebuking to the flesh, but most precious in its way. There are four women, and only four, who appear in the line, and upon every one of them there was a blot. It is not that all the sources of reproach or shame were of the same kind. But to a proud Jew, with all these women there was connected what was humbling — something that he would have kept in the dark. Oh, wondrous way of God! What can He not do? How striking that the Holy Ghost should not here attract attention to those who would have brought honour in the eyes of Israel — nay, that He should single out these that a carnal Israelite would have held in contempt! The Messiah was to spring from a line in which there had been dismal sin. And where all that is in man would try to hide this and keep it back, the Spirit of God brings it plainly out, so that it shall

stand not only in the eternal records of the Old Testament history, but here rehearsed. These, on whom there were such foul blots in the judgment of men, are the only women brought specifically before us. What is man? and what is God? What is man that such things should ever have taken place? And what is God that, instead of covering it, He should have drawn the story out of obscurity and set it in full revealed light, emblazoned, if I may so say, on the genealogy of His own Son! Not at all as if the sin were not exceeding sinful; nor as if God thought lightly of the privileges of His people — still less of the glory of His Son, or what is due to Him. But God, feeling the sin of His own people to be the worst of all sin, yet having introduced in this very Messiah the only One who could save His people from their sins, does not hesitate to bring their sin into the presence of the grace that could and would put it all away. Did the Jew think this was a scandal or dishonour done to the Messiah? From that same seed their Messiah must spring, and from no other line. It was narrowed to the house of David, and to the line of Solomon, and they were in the direct line of Judah's son Phares. No Jew could get out of the difficulty. What are we not taught by this! If the Messiah deigns to link Himself with such a family — if God is pleased so to order things that out of that stock, as concerning the flesh, His own Son, the Holy One of Israel, was to be born — surely there could be none too bad to be received of Him. He came to "save His people from their sins," not to find a people that had no sins. He came with all power to save: He showed grace by the very family whereof He was pleased to be a — or rather the — Branch. God is never confounded; neither, through grace, is he that believes, because he rests upon what

God is to him. We never can be anything for God till we know that God is everything for us and to us. But when we know such a God and Father as Jesus reveals Him to us, on one side full of goodness, and on the other no darkness in Him at all, what may we not expect from Him? Who might not now be born of God? Who is there that such a God would reject? Such a hint in Matt. 1 opens the way for the wonders of grace which appear afterward. In one sense no man has such a position of ancient privileges as the Jew; yet, even as to the Messiah, this is the account that the Holy Ghost gives of His lineage. No flesh shall glory in the presence of the Lord.

But that is not all. “Phares begat Ezrom and Salmon begat Booz of Rachab” (vers. 3-5). And who and what was she? A Gentile, and once a harlot! But Rahab is taken out of all her belongings — separated from everything that was her portion by nature. And here she is, in this gospel of Jesus written for the Jew — for the very people who despised and hated Him because He would look upon a Gentile. Rahab was named for heaven already, and no Jew could deny it. She was visited of God; she was delivered outwardly and inwardly’ by His mighty grace, brought into and made a part of Israel on earth — yea, by sovereign grace part of the royal line out of which the Messiah must come, and out of which, in point of fact, Jesus, who is God over all, blessed forever, was born. Oh, what marvels of grace dawn upon us while we dwell even on the mere list of names that unbelief would disparage as a dry, if not incorrect, appendage to the word of God! But faith says, I cannot do without the wisdom of God. Certainly His wisdom

shines in all that He has written here. He that glories must glory in the Lord.

Might it be thought that Rahab was called in at some distant epoch? But no: “Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David the king.” Ruth, loving as she was, yet to a Jew was from a source peculiarly odious. She was a Moabitess, and thus forbidden by the law to enter the congregation of the Lord to the tenth generation. Even the Edomite or the Egyptian was held in less abhorrence, and their children might enter in the third generation (Dent. 23:3-8). Thus was given a still deeper testimony that grace would go out and bless the very worst of the Gentiles. Whether the Jews like it or not, God has Rahab, the once immoral Gentile, and Ruth, the meek daughter of Moab, brought, not only into the nation, but into the direct line from which the Messiah was to arise.

“And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her [that had been the wife] of Urias” (ver. 6). With only a few generations intervening, we have these three women, who would, for one reason or another, moral or ceremonial, have been utterly despised and excluded by the same spirit which rejected Jesus and the grace of God. It was, then, no new thought — the divine mercy that was reaching out to gather in the outcast of the Gentiles, that would look upon the vile to deliver and make them holy. It was God’s way of old. They could not read the account He gives of their own Messiah’s stock without seeing that it was so. And that this was the divinely prescribed channel no Jew could deny. They must all own that the Messiah was to come in no other line than that of Solomon. Oh the grace to us

who know what we have been as poor sinners of the Gentiles, what wretchedness was ours, and this because of guilt and sin! “Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

Hence the first words which introduce the Messiah give the same blessed truth, if there was an ear to hear, or an eye to see, what God had in store and was now pointing to in them. In the case last mentioned there was something more humbling than in any other. For though, of old, Tamar’s story had been wretched, yet there were other features, false and lustful and violent, which met in her case that had belonged to Uriah. And this was so much the more dismal because the chief guilt was on that man’s part whom God had delighted to honour, even “David the king.” Who knows not that it has drawn out the deepest and most touching personal confession of sin ever inspired by the Spirit of God? (Ps. 51) Yet here again we find that he who had to do with this tale of horrors, and who uttered this psalm of sorrowful confession, was the direct forefather of the Messiah. So that, if the Jew looked to those from whom the Messiah had sprung, such must He be according to His earthly ancestors. But God records the blessed display of His ways, both for the winning of the hardest, proudest, and most sinful, and for the unfailing comfort and refreshment of those who love Him.

I need not dwell particularly upon the names that follow. We might see sin upon sin, stain upon stain, interwoven into their various histories. It was one continuous tissue of that which would cause a Jew to blush — what a man never would of himself have dared to bring out about a king that he honoured. God, in His infinite goodness,

would not permit these things to slumber. Not a word is said of women who came after the Scripture record terminated; but what Jew could gainsay the lively oracles committed to them? To leave out what a Jew gloried in, and to bring in what he would have concealed through shame, and all in tender mercy to Israel, to sinners, was indeed divine. We may see from this that the mention of these four women is particularly instructive. Man could not have originated it: our place is to learn and adore. Every woman that is named is one that nature would have studiously excluded from the record; but grace made them most prominent in it. Thus the truth taught thereby ought never to be forgotten, and the Jew who wanted to know the claims of Jesus to be the Messiah might learn here what would prepare his heart and conscience for such a Messiah as Jesus is. He is a Messiah come in quest of sinners, who would despise no needy one — not even a poor publican or a harlot. The Messiah so thoroughly reflected what God is in His holy love, so true to all the purposes of God, so perfect an expression of the grace that is in God, that there never was a thought, or feeling, or word of grace in His word, but what the Messiah was come now to make it good in His dealings with poor souls, and first of all with a Jew.

This, then, is the genealogy of Christ as given us here. There are certain omissions in the list, and persons of some learning have been alike weak and daring), enough to impute a mistake to St. Matthew which no intelligent Sunday scholar would have made. For a child could copy what was clearly written out before him; and certainly Matthew could easily have taken the Old Testament and have reproduced the list of names and

generations given us in the Chronicles and elsewhere. But there was a divine reason for omitting the particular names of Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah from verse 8 — three generations. Why is it, we may be permitted to ask, that the apostle Matthew drops, of course by inspiration, some of the links of the chain? The Spirit of God was pleased to arrange the ancestry of our Lord into three divisions of fourteen generations each. Now, as there were actually more than fourteen generations between David and the Captivity, it was a matter of necessity that some should be discarded in order to equalize the series, and fourteen only are therefore recorded. Indeed, if you examine the Old Testament Scriptures, you will find that it is not at all uncommon in genealogies to drop some of the links of the chain. More than twice as many as in our verse are omitted in one place (Ezra 7:3). Now it was Ezra himself who wrote that book, and of course he knew his own descent far more familiarly than we do. And if any of us, by comparison with other parts, can find out the missing links, much more could he. And yet, in giving his own genealogy (chap. 7), the Spirit of God is pleased by him to omit no less than seven generations. This is the more remarkable as no one could exercise his rights as a priest unless he could trace his line up to Aaron without any question as to the succession. I have no doubt that there were special reasons for the omission elsewhere no less than in our Gospel; but the motives for it are a very different question. One of them I have named. There were more than twice seven generations in at least the second division; and this may have been one reason why the writer should omit several of them. But why these in particular? Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, king of Israel, and wife of Jehoram, had thus entered by

marriage the royal house of David; and a sorrowful hour it was indeed for Judah. For Athaliah, enraged at the premature end of her son, king Ahaziah, was guilty of a too successful attempt to destroy the seed-royal. But it could not be complete; for that family was selected out of all the families of God's people, never to be entirely extinguished till Shiloh came. There was but a single youthful scion, whom Jehoshabeath saved by concealment in the house of the Lord. The light was covered with a bushel for a time; but it was not put out. The then son of David appeared. It was a time when Judah had fallen into manifold and ever-deepening evil. But as surely as that young Joash was brought out of his darkness, — as truly as the priest was there to anoint the king, and the union of the two things accomplished the great purpose of God,so it will be when the years of man's rebellion against God are full. He will come forth who has been long hidden and forgotten, and all the enemies shall be trampled down; and then will Judah flourish indeed under the King, the true Son of David. For all this was the type of the reappearing of the true Messiah by and by. But my design is not so much to dwell upon that now as to inquire and suggest briefly why it is that we have these few kings omitted. The answer seems to be, that they sprang from Athaliah. Hence they were completely passed over. We find God thus marking His resentment at the introduction of that wicked and idolatrous stock from the house of Ahab. Athaliah's descendants are not mentioned even to the third generation. This appears to be the moral reason why we find three persons left out at this particular point. Then, in verse 11 we read, "And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren at the time of the removal to Babylon." It is evident that the method is summary,

Jehoahaz, whom the people made king, and who reigned for but three months, not being specified, and Jehoiakim being often called by the same name as his son Jechonias.

But I will not dwell upon the minuter features of the genealogy. The word of God is infinite; and, no matter what we may have learned, it only puts us in a position to find out our ignorance. When persons are altogether in the dark, they think they know all that is to be known. But as we make real progress, we acquire a deeper sense of how little we know, and at the same time more patience with others who may know a little lessand, very possibly, somewhat more. Spiritual intelligence, instead of puffing up the loving heart, produces an increased feeling of our own littleness. Where it is not so, we have reason to fear that the mind outruns the conscience, and that both are far from being subject to the Holy Ghost.

The generations are divided into three different sections. The first is from Abraham to David, the dawn of glory for the Jews. When David “the king” was there, it was noontime in Israel — sadly chequered, it is true, and clouded through sin; but still it was noon of man’s day in Israel. The second division is from thence till the carrying away to Babylon. The third is from that captivity until Christ. This last was clearly the evening history of Israel’s past. But that evening is not the close. It ends with the brightest light of all — type of the day when at evening-time there shall be light. just as the prophet Haggai speaks of the house of God, as it then was, being as nothing in comparison of its first glory, and says, “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts,” so a greater than Solomon was here. Although there had been the

decline of the splendour of Israel, and Israel was now broken and subject to the Gentiles, the recorded decline ends in the birth of the true Messiah. Throughout the lingering captivity no persecution could destroy that chosen family; because Jesus, the Messiah of God, was to be born of it. The moment that Jesus concludes His career here below, the chain may seem forever broken as regards the earth, but it is only to be riveted to the throne of God in heaven. Jesus is there, alive again for evermore. And Jesus shall come again, and the Jews shall see and weep, even those written in the book; and Jehovah their King, even Jesus, shall reap in joy what He sowed in tears and His own blood.

But let us look for a little at the remaining view given us of our Lord Jesus in this chapter. Joseph is made very prominent. The genealogy itself is that of Joseph, not of Mary. On the other hand, Mary is the principal figure of the two in Luke, and there it is, I believe, her genealogy. Why is this? It was of necessity, for a Jew, that Jesus should be the heir of Joseph. The reason is that Joseph was the direct lineal descendant of the royal branch of David's house. There were two lines that came down unbroken to those days — the house of Solomon and the house of Nathan. Mary was the representative of Nathan's family, as Joseph was of Solomon's. If Mary had been mentioned without her connection with her husband, there would not have been a legal right to the throne of David. It was necessary that the Messiah should be born, not merely of a virgin, nor of a virgin daughter of David, but of one legally united to Joseph, i.e., in the eye of the law, really his wife. This is carefully recorded here for the special instruction of Israel; for an intelligent Jew would at once have asked that question,

and everything must be fenced round with holy jealousy. Let people calumniate as they might, Mary must be espoused to Joseph; else the Lord Jesus would not have a proper title to the throne of David, and therefore the stress here is not laid upon Mary but upon Joseph, because the law would have always maintained the claim of Joseph. On the other hand, had Joseph been the real father, there could have been no Saviour at all. As it is, the wonder of divine wisdom shines most conspicuously, making Him legally the son of Joseph, really the son of Mary, who in the truth of His nature is the Son of God. And all three met and merged in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He must be the undisputed heir of Joseph according to the law, and Joseph was espoused to Mary. The child must be born before Joseph ever lived with Mary as his wife, and this we are carefully shown here.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ2 was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream,” etc. (vers. 18-20). Here the angel appears to Joseph in a dream. In Luke the angel appears to Mary. It is thus in Matthew because Joseph was the important person in the eye of the law; and yet the Messiah must not be, in point of fact, the son of Joseph. All the wit of man could not have understood these ways beforehand; all his power could not have arranged the circumstances. If the law demanded that Jesus should be the heir of Joseph, the prophet demanded that he should

not be the son of Joseph, but of a virgin. God humbling Himself was the need of man; man exalted was the counsel of God. How was this, and far more, to be united and reconciled in one person? Jehovah Jesus is the answer. “The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (ver. 20).

God meets the scruples of the godly Israelite, and signifies that most distinguished honour which He had put upon Mary under a guise which for a season had clouded and distressed her. She was the very virgin God had predicted hundreds of years before — “ She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus.” Here again Joseph was to be the one who publicly acts, while in Luke (Luke 1:31) Mary names. The difference arises from the point of view the Holy Ghost gives us of our Lord’s person in the two Gospels. In Luke He was proving that Jesus, though divine, was very man — a partaker of humanity apart from sin. In our case it is sinful human nature; in His case it was holy. Therefore, in speaking of Him simply as man, it is said in Luke, “Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” So He was most truly and properly a man — the child of His virgin mother; and as such, too, He is called the Son of God. In that Gospel one great point was to prove His holy manhood; to show how fully and fitly He could be a Saviour of men, and take up the woes and wretchedness, and on the cross suffer for the sinfulness of others — Himself the Holy One. He was the Son of God, who had actually taken human nature into His own person, who was perfectly and really a man as much as any of us; but

a man without sin, yet holy, and not merely innocent. Adam was innocent; Jesus was holy. Holiness does not mean mere absence of evil, but inward power according to God, and so power to withstand evil. When Adam was tempted, he fell. Jesus was tried by every temptation, and Satan exhausted his wiles in vain. All this, however, is most suitable to the Gospel of Luke, where it is accordingly shown that the proper humanity of Jesus flowed from His birth (i.e., from His mother). His legal right to the throne of David flowed from Joseph, and Joseph accordingly is the prominent personage in the Gospel of Matthew.

But He had a title greater than any which Joseph could transmit even from David or Abraham; and this was to be attested in His name, His lowly name of Jesus, Jehovah, the Saviour. “Thou shalt call His name JESUS; for He shall save His people from their sins.” Jehovah’s people were His people; and He should save them, not merely from their enemies, but from their sins. What a testimony to Him and for them! Blessed for any sinful soul to hear; how especially needed for a people then inflated with boundless hopes of earthly aggrandizement in their expected Messiah!

Here, too, alone in any of the Gospels, it is that we hear of Jesus as “Emmanuel.” This is equally instructive and beautiful, because the Jew was apt to forget it. Did he look for a divine Messiah — for one who was God as well as man? Very far from it. Comparatively few of the Jews expected anything so astonishing as this. They craved and looked for a mighty king and conqueror, yet still a mere man. But here we find that the Holy Spirit, by their own prophet Isaiah, besides speaking of Him as man, takes care to show that He was much more than man,

that He was God (vers. 22, 23). Matthew alone brings out this clear testimony of the great evangelical prophet — “God with us.” So perfectly did God provide for these poor Jews, and develop the neglected seeds of their prophecies, and reflect light on the obscure parts of their law; so that if a Jew rejected the Messiah, he did it to his own eternal ruin. Besides being the son of David and Abraham, then, He was God with us. Such was the true Messiah, and such the witness produced to Israel. Could they reject Matthew’s history, if they received Isaiah’s prophecy? In vain they worshipped God, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

“Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife, and knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son; and he called His name JESUS” (vers. 24, 25). Some of the best authorities (the Sinai., Vat., etc.) omit “her first-born,” and so present simply “a son.” But there is no doubt that these words are genuine in Luke 2, whence they may have been introduced here. The shorter form appears to me sufficient for the purpose of our Evangelist.

We have been tracing what would have been of peculiar interest for a Jew; but may we also find the blessing of these truths for our own souls. Whatever exalts Jesus, whatever displays the grace of God and puts down the pride of man, is pregnant with blessing for us. By the blessing of God, pursuing these lessons still farther, we shall find how the wisdom of every word of His is justified as we wait on this most illustrious testimony to Jesus the Messiah, to His rejection by Israel, and to the blessings which thence flow out to us once poor Gentiles.

Matthew 2

I think we shall find in the chapter before us abundant confirmation of the account I have already given of the Holy Ghost's special design by Matthew. That is, we shall see proofs that there is a most careful presentation of Jesus as the true Messiah of God, and of His rejection as such by the Jews; and that God, at the same time, takes advantage of Israel's fall to work out larger and deeper purposes.

The very first incident in the chapter illustrates it. Jesus was born. We do not meet with the same interesting facts, which are given us in Luke, of the very early days of our Lord's infancy: all are passed by, save that we have Christ presented as born in Bethlehem of Judea, the worship of the Magi from the east, and the flight into Egypt. The first fact that the Holy Ghost gives us here is the affecting one that there was no heart for the Messiah in Israel. And this was proved by the most significant circumstances. "Jesus having been born, in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship (or do homage to) Him." We are not told how soon this was after His birth. No doubt a considerable time had elapsed. People are often deceived as to this in looking at the scene through the notions of their infancy. We have all seen the pictures of the Babe in the manger, and "the three kings" coming in to worship Him. But the truth is, that the Lord was not just born, as such associations would convey, when the Magi arrived. For His earliest condition in this world we must consult, not Matthew, but Luke.

Some might, it is true, gather a wrong impression from the Authorized Version of verse 1: “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king.” This does not intimate that the visit followed immediately upon our Saviour’s birth, but leaves room for a time more or less considerable afterwards. It simply means, that after He was born these easterns came: many months, or upwards of a year, might have intervened. What confirms this is that the wise men had first seen the star in the east, and most probably at the time of our Lord’s birth. After seeing the star, they had of course many a preparation to make before they could set out, and then a long way to travel; and travelling in those days was a hard and tedious matter in the eastern parts of the world. Even when they arrive in Judea, they go up first to Jerusalem to enquire there. All this supposes necessarily the lapse of no little time. Their questions are answered by the scribes. Herod, hearing of it, is troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. He gathers together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, and demands of them where Christ should be born. They tell him in Bethlehem of Judea, upon which he calls the wisemen and sends them there. All this took place be. fore the scene of their worship.

They, when they had heard the king, departed. “And lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.” We are not to imagine, according to traditional notions, that the star tracked the way before them to Jerusalem. They saw it in the east, and connected the sight with the promised Messiah; for at that time the prophecies about His speedy appearance had been spread over a considerable part of the world. Many Gentiles were

expecting Him, especially in the east. And the greatest and most opposed in the west were aware of such hopes. The last man that was known in the east as a prophet, before the Gentiles were broken in the presence of Israel, was Balaam. No doubt he was a wicked man; but God took advantage of him to utter the most remarkable predictions of Israel's coming glory. And that very prophecy had closed with a reference to the Star that should rise out of Jacob. And now, after many hundred years had passed away, the traces of this prophecy still lingered among the children of the east. It is unlikely, too, that Daniel's prophecies in Babylon, especially that of the seventy weeks, etc., could be unknown, considering his position and the extraordinary events of his day. We can understand that these prophecies would not only be such as the children of Israel would treasure up, but the knowledge of them might spread, especially in those lands. Much of his prophecies might not be clearly understood. Still, they looked for a wonderful personage to arise — a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre out of Israel.

When these strangers, then, saw the star, they set forward to His traditional capital, Jerusalem. It is clear that the star was a meteor of some kind. As it shone in the east, they put the fact of this remarkable phenomenon along with the expectations of the coming king. And this the more, because the easterns were great observers of the heavens, and were therefore more alive to any uncommon appearance. It may have recalled the prophecy of Balaam. Certain it is that they soon started for Jerusalem, where universal report among the Gentiles maintained that the great King was to reign. Having got there, God meets them; and it is

remarkable how He does so. It is by His word, and His word interpreted by those who had not the smallest interest of heart in the Messiah. They were quite right in their interpretation; they knew where Messiah was to be born. The Magi probably thought that Jerusalem was to be the spot; but they were told by the scribes that Bethlehem was the predicted birthplace. Alas, the very men who could answer so pertinently showed the not less solemn, because it is a common fact, that it is possible to have a measure of clear knowledge of Scripture and at the same time to have no love for Him of whom all testifies! As to the Magi, ignorant as they were, and though they might have been in the dark as to other things, still their desire was true, and God overruled all. Through these Gentiles, indeed, He sent a testimony to Jerusalem as to the birth of the Messiah. God knew how to accomplish this and to rebuke, through their testimony, those who ought above all to have watched for and hailed their own Messiah. If there was a queen who came from the distant parts of the earth to see king Solomon and to hear his wisdom who was the type of Christ, so was it now. The Holy Ghost wrought on and for these pilgrims from a far country to bring them in presence of the true King. The scribes could answer the questions, but there was no care for the Messiah, and it was for Him that these wise men came. This at once detects the awful state that Jerusalem was in. The effect of the tidings that God’s King was born is that, instead of seeking the promised One, instead of being filled with joy to hear of One whom they had not sought, they were all troubled, from the king downward. More particularly, as we learn here, the chief priests and scribes are those whose state demonstrates the utter heartlessness of the nation. They

had enough religious knowledge, they had the key in their hand, but they had no heart to enter in.

“Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared” (ver. 7). I call your attention to that, as confirming what I said before. It was after the diligent enquiry of the king from the wise men that he settled in his own mind at what time the Child must have been born. When they, warned of God, had withdrawn themselves instead of returning to Herod, he sent forth the cruel command to kill the children in Bethlehem and all the coasts “from two years old and under” - he naturally inferred that there had been a considerable lapse of time between the birth of Christ and the giving of his wicked order.

If we turn to the Gospel of Luke, we shall see the importance of this. We have there our Lord born, as Matthew shows, in the city of David; but we are told here the circumstances that account for this, for Bethlehem was not the place where Mary and Joseph ordinarily dwelt. It was a village to which they repaired because of the commandment of the Roman emperor, who had sent forth a decree that all the world should be taxed, or enrolled. They, being of the royal family of the Jews, go to Bethlehem, which was the city of David. Thus God brought to pass the accomplishment of the prophecy of Micah through the decree of Caesar Augustus. Nothing was farther from the Roman’s thought than the result which his decree was to subserve — the birth of the Messiah in the very place where prophecy demanded it. It appears that the census was not carried out then, but begun, and then stopped for some time. For it is said in Luke 2:2, “And this taxing

was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria," which was several years after. People, not understanding this, have concluded that there was a mistake in Luke. They knew that Cyrenius's government of Syria was subsequent to Christ's nativity, and too hastily inferred that our Evangelist laboured under the impression that the going up of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem took place in his time. But it is they who err, I believe. The decree of Caesar Augustus did not come into full operation or effect till then. It was just sufficiently carried out, when the order for enrolment was given, to induce Joseph and Mary to go up to the city of their lineage; and that was enough. God's object was accomplished. Joseph and Mary went there, and while there her days were fulfilled and she brought forth her firstborn Son, and "wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in the manger." There we have a scene totally different from what we had in Matthew, though this too was at Bethlehem. In all probability they paid more than one visit to the place. It was not far from Jerusalem, and we know that they went there every year to the feast of the passover. I see no reason to doubt that the visit of the Magi took place at another visit on the part of the parents to Bethlehem.

Mark how the circumstances recorded in Matthew differ from those in Luke.

In Matthew, Jerusalem is all troubled by the tidings of the Messiah's birth, while strangers from afar come up to do homage to the King of the Jews. They had seen His star; they knew it was the promised King, and now they are come to worship Him. They arrive at Jerusalem, and when they leave it, on their way to Bethlehem, they are again encouraged of God. The star which they had seen

before in the cast, re-appeared and went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was — plain evidence that the star had not accompanied them all the way. And we shall find it true in our own experience, that where we act in simple obedience, we find all that is necessary. God always takes particular care of those who are true to the light, even though it be ever so little; while nothing is more abhorrent to Him than great pretensions to light, without any heart for the true light, which is Christ.

We may observe that, of the reputed parents, Joseph is ever made the prominent person here, as in chapter 1. The vision, of verse 13, was to Joseph. Nevertheless, the Magi," when they were come into the house, saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him," not her. Their homage was to Him. "And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." They acknowledged Him, as poor strangers whose greatest honour was to be owned of Him. Jerusalem is outside all this. A usurper was there; an Edomite was ruling. And, as when Christ returns again to the earth there will be a false king in Jerusalem under the influence of the western powers, and in conjunction with the religious heads of Israel, so it was at His first coming. All was entirely opposed to the recognition of Jesus.

In Luke we have quite another order of things. It is not so much one acknowledged as a king, though He was a king, but He is seen there in the lowliest possible condition. The persons that own Him are Jewish shepherds, who had the news made known to them from heaven. The heavenly hosts sing — their hearts delight

in the ways of God, in the Saviour — for as such had He been announced to them: “Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be the sign unto you; ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in the manger.” This was the very opening of our blessed Lord’s life here below, evidently taking place immediately after His birth. The incident of the homage rendered by the Magi was long subsequent. There is not the slightest ground for confounding the two occasions. Each Gospel is true to its special purpose. In Matthew it is a question of His royal rights over Israel and the Gentiles; in Luke we have the perfect lowliness, from His very birth, of the Saviour-Son of Man; heaven’s interest in the birth of the earth — despised Christ the Lord, and those poor of the flock, whose hearts are awakened to receive this blessed One — the expression, the means, and the substance of divine grace. “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people,” or rather, “to all the people,” for it means the Jews. A much wider circle appears afterwards, but it does not go beyond the Jews yet. To the Jew first, was the divine order.

How beautifully these various accounts harmonize with the Gospels in which they are found? In the one, the King, born some time before, is seen in Bethlehem, but none welcome Him save strangers from the east. From Matthew, we should not be aware of the slightest recognition of the Saviour up to the time of their coming. On the contrary, when the first breath of these tidings is brought to Jerusalem, consternation was the result in all. The king, the priests, the scribes, all are in a state of ferment. There was no heart for Jesus. But God always will have a testimony. If the Jews will not

have Him, the Gentiles come; and grace it is that effects this. Unbelieving Jews tell the Magi where the King should be born. They at once act upon it, and the Lord, meeting them on the way, puts them in presence of the King, to whom they present their gifts. It is the Messiah of Israel, but rejected by Israel from His very birth. Jerusalem is with the false king, and cares not to receive Him. Those who were despised as dogs, whom the Jews themselves had to instruct in the first lessons of prophecy, have the glory of being the true recognizers of the claims of the Messiah. How humbling! It is the Messiah come, and owned by the ends of the earth; but slighted and rejected of His own nation. “He came to His own, and His own received Him not.” It was important that Israel should know it. Here, through the earliest of the Evangelists, let them learn that it does not arise from any want of evidence on God’s part. How did these Gentiles know? And where were the Jews all this time, that they had not recognized their own Messiah? It was a terrible tale, for the truth was the strangest of all things in their ears. Such is God’s way: He gives testimony, but man dislikes it because it is of God. To recognize the person of Christ was the difficulty. To see from Scripture that their King was to be born in Bethlehem of Judah, was an easy thing; it did not test the conscience, nor put the heart to the proof. But to own that the ignored and despised One, the child of Mary and the heir of Joseph, was the Messiah — this was indeed hard to the flesh. To those who had seen the sign of it in the heavens, who had looked for it in the midst of great darkness, but who had their eyes toward it, all was simple, and they hastened to do Him honour. Now that He was born, they rejoiced, and came from far

to have the joy of seeing Him and offering their gifts at His feet.

“And being warned of God in a dream, that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him” (vers. 12, 13). The unbelief that refused the word of God, is now allowed to show how thoroughly it was under the power of Satan, who proves himself, as from the beginning, to be a liar first, then a murderer. But God revealed Herod’s purpose; and Joseph, in obedience to His word, takes the young child and His mother by night and departs into Egypt, “and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.”

I have a word to say about this prophecy, and the application of it to our Lord. We shall have to take into account many prophecies cited in Matthew, but the present quotation has evidently a remarkable character attached to it. It had been said that Israel was God’s son, God’s firstborn, in Egypt. To them pertained the adoption. The prophet Hosea, seven hundred years after their departure from Egypt, again applies this word to Israel; and now it is used of Christ, as that which fully came within the intent of the inspiring Spirit. How is it that God’s taking Israel out of the land of Egypt should be so illustrated in Christ’s history? Because Christ is the object of the Holy Ghost in Scripture. It matters not what may be the place of His people: in all their troubles

or deliverances, Christ must enter into all. There is no kind of temptation (save, of course, of inward evil) that He has* not known; nor of blessing on God's behalf that He has not proved. Christ goes through the history of His people; and on that principle it is that such scriptures as these are applied to Him. Christ Himself is carried into the very place that had been the furnace of Israel. There it is that He finds His refuge from the false king of Judea. What a picture! Because of the anti-king then reigning in Jerusalem, the true King must flee, and flee, into Egypt. Christ was the true Israel. Compare Isa. 49.

We see from this that no miraculous power is put forth to preserve Emmanuel. It was accomplishing the prophecies — filling up the outline of desolation, morally and nationally, that the Holy Ghost had sketched many a long year before. God was showing how precious to Him was every footstep of His Son. It might seem a trifling circumstance in itself that the Lord was carried into Egypt and came out of it another day. But whatever was the place of Christ — and His place was wherever His people were in their sorrow — He will not permit them to feel a pang without His sharing in it. He knows what it is to be carried into Egypt, and that too in a far more painful way than Israel had experienced. For the bitterest trouble of Christ was from His own people; the most murderous blow aimed at Him was by the king then sitting on the throne in their midst. Failing in this, he sends forth and slays all the children "that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In

Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not" (vers. 16-18). How clearly we find that the Holy Ghost is here providing for the Jew the proof that they were precious in His sight, and that if Christ entered into their they must not wonder if His presence will bring upon themselves the bitterest suffering through their rejection of Him. If Christ has the smallest connection with Israel, they become the object of Satan's animosity. It is Herod, led on by Satan, who issued the order to slay their little ones; but the Messiah is taken away from the scene of his rage. In Israel they have weeping and great mourning. Such were some of the troubles that Israel bring upon themselves; and this is but a little picture of what will befall them in the latter day.

"But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young Child's life. And he arose, and took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel" (ver. 19-21). It is sweet to find "the land of Israel" occurring here. It was not merely the country, as known among men, where poor Jews lived by permission of their Gentile lords. How few look on it as "the land of Israel" now! But God's thoughts are toward His people in connection with the glory of His Son. if Jesus had His earthly tie there, if Emmanuel were now born of the virgin, why should not the land be called the land of Israel? It was the divine purpose completely to expel the foot of the Gentile that was now treading it down. If the

people would only bow and receive Him to take His place as their King, how blessed their lot! But would Israel receive Jehovah-Jesus now returning from Egypt? — There was no readiness for Him yet. One Herod passed away; another followed. Hence, when the young Child was taken back into the land of Israel, and Joseph heard "that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene" (vers. 22, 23).

The method of citation is worthy of note here. Note that it is not one particular prophet, but "the prophets". And by that we are to gather, not that any one inspired writer said these words, but it is the spirit of the prophets who do speak of Him. When we read in one prophet, "They shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek"; in another, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief "; and again, what they should give Him for meat, and in His thirst for drink, and how He should be taunted up to the last — we can understand this application of the prophets. It was the well-understood language expressive of contempt in that day: He should, in other words, be called a Nazarene. Nazareth was the most scorned of places. Not only did the men of Judea proper look down upon Nazareth, but the Galileans themselves despised it, though it was part of their own district. Later on we read of a guileless Israelite who, when he heard of Jesus being there, exclaimed, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Thus, if one spot

in Palestine, more than another, would accord with the rejection that was the portion of Christ, it was Nazareth. A striking picture, surely, of One who, while He was the true King, was yet refused by His own people! Gentiles might have done Him reverence; but His own nation was indifferent. How little fruit was there to answer to the culture that God had bestowed upon them! But here was the blessed One who pursues His path of obedience unto death, who would not show His glory by protecting Himself. His people went down into Egypt: He goes down there also. He has to be called out of Egypt: that was His portion. He would not screen Himself from the sorrows of His people: He would share them all. When He does come forth, Israel is still unprepared for Him. His parents turn to Nazareth once more, Joseph having been again divinely instructed in a dream. This is the last mention that we have of him in Matthew. Luke gives us later circumstances; but Joseph wholly disappears before our Lord entered upon His ministry.

When He is called out of Egypt, He cannot go to Jerusalem, nor to Bethlehem either. He was to be despised and rejected: the prophets had said so: their words must be accomplished. Archelaus reigned in Judea a usurper was still there. Joseph, at the warning of God, turns aside to Nazareth, and Jesus dwelt with them; that the word of the prophets might be fulfilled in our Lord’s proving to the full what it was to be the most despised of men. He knew it pre-eminently on the cross; but it was His all through. And this is the way that God speaks of the Messiah to Israel. He shows what their hardness of heart and unbelief would entail — even if it were to the Messiah Himself. What a picture of man, and especially of Israel, when such must be His portion! He

comes and calls, but no answer greets Him. The unbelief of man hinders the blessing of God. It was the sin of Israel that thus complicated the early history of the King. But future chapters will show that God would turn the very unbelief of Israel into the means of blessing for the despised Gentiles, and that if the Jews rejected the counsel of God, to their own perdition, the Gentiles would hear and receive all blessing in the blessed One.

Thus we find from the beginning of this wonderful book the germs of all that the end will display. We find one who is really the Messiah, ready to accomplish the promises and to take the throne, but the people in no way ready for Him. Israel were steeped in sin; they had no heart for Him. They were full of their own ceremonies, their own light, and the pride of their privileges. All was turned to self-exaltation. Hence Jesus is rejected from the very first. This is the story of man. The after chapters will show us the glorious consequences which God, in His grace, causes to flow even from the rejection of His own Son. Upon that happier theme we may dwell on other occasions.

Matthew 3

We are now carried forward from the return of our Lord into the Holy Land to the days when John the Baptist came insisting upon the grand, essential truth of repentance. And John’s ministry is viewed here entirely in connection with the Lord’s relation to Israel. It is interesting to compare the different ways in which the Gospels present John himself, as illustrating the manner in which the Holy Ghost uses His divine right to shape and group the materials of our Lord’s history according to the exact object in view. A casual reader might

scarcely recognize that John the Baptist in John's Gospel was the Baptist of Matthew. The manner in which they are viewed, and the discourses that are recorded, take their form from the particular book in which the Holy Ghost has given them. This, so far from being imperfection, is a part of that admirable method in which God impresses the design which He has in view, and which suits the place which each portion of Scripture has to fill. And what can be of deeper interest, or more strengthening to faith, than to find that the very passages on which unbelief puts its finger as its alleged proofs of the imperfection of Scripture (varieties of statement insuperable to the mind of man), on the contrary, when viewed as part of God's plan for commending His beloved Son, all range into their own places in this great scheme, which is to the glory of Christ. This is the true key to all Scripture; and if that key be of great value from Genesis to Revelation, there is no place, perhaps, where its value is so conspicuous as in the Gospels. In finding four different accounts of our Lord, each presenting things in a different manner, the first thought of man's heart is that each succeeding Gospel must add to or correct what had gone before. But such thoughts only prove, either that the truth was never known, or that it has been forgotten. Is it adequately borne in mind that God is the author of the Gospels? Once admit that simple truth, and it would be evidently blasphemous to suppose that He makes mistakes. Look at the meanest thing that God has made, the minutest insect that the microscope can discover upon the least blade of grass — what does not fill the particular niche for which God created it? I do not deny that sin has brought all kinds of derangements into the natural as well as into the moral world. I admit that

man’s infirmities may appear even in the word of God: first, in not keeping the sacred deposit free from all corruption; and then in interpreting that word through some feeble medium of his own; and thus, one way or another, hindering the pure revealed light of God.

I have made these few remarks because all readers may not be equally familiar with the great truth of the difference of design in the Gospels, and therefore I do not scruple to draw attention to the immense help it furnishes to the understanding of Scripture, and especially of its apparent discrepancies.

In the chapter before us John the Baptist is presented as fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. He came “preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is He that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight.” In Luke you will find that the prophecy is carried farther down. More is given us than the words we have here. “Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” The range of Luke is wider. “Every valley shall be filled,” etc. “All flesh shall see,” etc. I ask, Why is that quotation continued farther there? It is the more remarkable because usually Luke does not quote much from the Old Testament, as compared with Matthew. How comes it that Luke departs in this particular instance from his habit?. The reason is obvious. His task was to show the grace of God that brings salvation, and that has appeared to all men. The Holy Ghost leads him therefore to fasten upon those

words that display the universal range of God's goodness to man.

But there is another expression that I must dwell upon for a little — "the kingdom of heaven." We are all familiar with it as a phrase often used in Scripture; but possibly not many are equally familiar with its force. Indeed, it is understood very vaguely even by most Christians. To many it conveys the idea of the Church — sometimes the visible, and sometimes the invisible Church. By others it is supposed to mean something tantamount to the gospel, or heaven itself at the end. The expression is derived from the Old Testament, and that is the reason why it appears in Matthew only. As we have already seen, our Evangelist writes with a view to Israel, and therefore lays hold of a phrase which is suggested by the Old Testament, and taken from the prophecy of Daniel, who speaks of the days coming when the heavens should rule. Before that (Dan. 2), we hear that the God of heaven is to set up a kingdom that should never be destroyed — the kingdom of heaven. And again, in Dan. 7, we are told of the Son of Man's coming, and of a universal kingdom which is given Him. Chapter 2 does not give us the person, but the thing itself: so that there might still have been a kingdom without the revelation of the person in whose hands it was held. But chapter 7 completes the circle, and shows us that it is not merely the heavens ruling in the distance, nor a kingdom opening with judgment on earth; but, besides that, there is a glorious Man to whom the rule of heaven will be entrusted. The Son of Man will not simply destroy what opposes God, but will introduce a universal kingdom.

This kingdom John the Baptist came preaching. I do not believe that he was at all aware of the particular form it was to take first. He simply preached the kingdom of heaven as at hand, himself the public and immediate forerunner of the Shepherd of Israel, with the thoughts of a godly Jew, and a special witness that the Messiah was there — that He was about to be manifested, who would execute judgment upon the evil, and introduce good in the power of God, and bring in the glory promised to the fathers; and that all this was about to be inaugurated and established in the person of Christ here below. This, I believe, was the general thought. And we shall find subsequently that for the rejection of Jesus by the Jews John was not at all prepared. This too it was that led to the twofold form taken by the kingdom of heaven. While the old or Jewish view of a kingdom established by power and glory as a visible sovereignty over the earth is postponed, the rejection of Jesus on earth and His ascension to God's right hand lead to the introduction of the kingdom of heaven in a mysterious form; which is, in point of fact, going on now. Thus it has two sides. When Christ went up to heaven and took His place as the rejected here, but the glorified One there, the kingdom of heaven began.

This is a view of the kingdom that we do not find in the Old Testament. To it pertain the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, that were only opened out as the Lord was manifestly rejected by Israel. Thus we see in Matt. 11 John sends two of his disciples to ask whether Jesus was really the Messiah, or were they to look for another? Whether he was himself staggered, or his disciples, or whether both were, it matters little — such was the result. It sounds like an unbelieving question to

the Lord. He might well be astonished that Jesus did not deliver the Jews, and bring in the glory for which patriarchs had waited and which prophets had predicted. Strange that instead of this His messenger was in prison; Himself and His disciples despised! Our Lord at once referred to those deeds of power and grace which bespoke the presence of God acting in a new way, and introducing a power evidently in grace — bringing in totally new thoughts, above the habits or hopes of the most godly Jew. These they were to report to John. But He goes farther, and says, “And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me.” This apparently conveys a rebuke to John, and implies that he had been more or less stumbled. Yet it is beautiful to see how at once, after the departure of the messengers, our Lord vindicates the Baptist before the multitude. But after pronouncing John to be the most blessed among those born of women, He suddenly introduces a most startling truth, namely, that great as John was, the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than he. This does not refer to the kingdom coming in power and glory, because, when that day comes, Old and New Testament saints must all be raised or changed to have their part in it; as it is said of those who are being called now that they shall sit “with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.” What then does our Lord mean? Does He not refer to some form of it that John had not spoken of? And what was this? He goes on farther, and says, “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” What an extraordinary statement must this have appeared to those who listened to it then! The Lord is contrasting the kingdom of heaven, in a public, manifest form, with that kingdom as opened to faith —

only more blessed as known to faith than to sight. As the Lord afterward said to Thomas, “Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” This holds good in every dealing of God. Abraham was more blessed when, though in the land of Canaan, he possessed it not, than if it had all been actually his own. He gained a better place in the ways of God from the very fact of his not having one foot of the land in possession. So with David. His reign was morally far more glorious than that of Solomon. His heir had the place of power; but David had that which was unseen, yet nearer to God. We never find that Solomon enters into what was taught by the ark, whereas it was always the great attraction to David’s heart. Solomon was found before the great altar which the whole world could see. The ark was within the holiest, where God sat. It was the throne of His Majesty in the midst of Israel. To it the heart of David ever turned. The blessing of faith is always better than the blessing of sight here below, how great soever this may be.

There has been no time in the ways of God so blessed for a soul as the ways of God now. To be born in the Millennium is not at all to be compared with it. It is true that then all will be in subjection to Christ, and the heart might say, Would that we might be born then! But even the believers found in that day on the earth will. not know what it is to enter within the veil, or to have the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. Neither will they know in the full sense the joy of the Holy Ghost with the privilege of being cast out and scorned by the world for Christ’s sake. So that both in the matter of suffering, the enjoyment of what Christ has gone through for us, and

His present glory in heaven, our present place is far beyond millennial privileges. For those who suffer now, it will be the best of heavenly blessings then. The peculiarity of the present time is this, that while we are on earth we are consciously dwellers in heaven. We are not of the world, as Christ is not of the world. Our life does not belong to it; our blessing does not spring from it; all our portion is outside this world. And this is communicated to us while we are in the world, to raise us above the world. It is not, as with John here, going into the wilderness — a most seasonable and beautiful expression of what God thought of the city of holiness, Jerusalem, where the priests themselves ministered. John retires from it all. He is outside it in sympathy: the very act in itself declared that the wilderness is better than the city, even though it contain God's temple. But what a solemn declaration of the ruin, not only of the world, but of the favoured people who were the great link between God and men generally!

In this scene behold another thing altogether. It is not man blest, and the earth brought also into blessedness under the personal reign of Christ; but here the heavens were opened upon the Lord Jesus. Never had they opened before upon any one on earth, except as a sign of God's judgment (Ezek. 1). But here first of all the eye of Heaven, of the Father who is in heaven, is directed upon the beloved One. By and by He takes up His place in heaven as the Man who had suffered for sins and brought in the revealed righteousness of God.

The kingdom of heaven then began. From the time that Jesus goes up into heaven till He comes back again the New Testament view of the kingdom of heaven runs on; and in that sense the privilege of the feeblest soul

brought to the knowledge of Christ now, transcends anything that ever entered into the heart or mind of men, or even of saints, before the Lord died and rose again. You may dwell upon the blessed walk of Enoch and the bright faith of Abraham; but still this remains true — “Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” There is no honest escape from the conclusion that has been drawn. If persons argue, Is a little child believing in Jesus now more holy and righteous than the blessed saints of old? I answer, That is another matter altogether. He ought to be. But that is not what is said. The Lord lays down that “the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” In a word, it is not a question of what men are; but God is glorifying Christ. Upon Him God is putting honour, and therefore gives such privileges to the least one that believes in Him. Since His death and resurrection, the worshippers once purged have no more conscience of sins. Think of what such a thing would have been to an Old Testament saint! They might look forward to it, but they could not say that it was an accomplished fact. It would have been contrary to the holiness of God, and positive presumption for man, to have this till Christ came and wrought the work that blotted sins completely out.3 Now it is presumption not to take with confidence what Christ has done; for He has commanded that remission of sins should be preached in His name. When we enter into the position in which we are set by the work of Christ, it is not only that we have remission: we are made the righteousness of God in Christ: we stand in the relation of sons of God, and are entitled by Christ Himself to say that His God is our God, His Father is our

Father. We are entitled to know that we are one with Christ, and that the glory that God has conferred upon His beloved Son He shares with us. The glory conferred, I say; for of course there is His essential divine glory in which none can participate. God never gave Christ to be God. Deity was His own right from all eternity. He could not have Godhead bestowed upon Him. But Christ became man, and as man He was the Son of God; He was not merely so as God. He was the Son of God as born into this world, and as such He has been raised up from the dead; in virtue of which He brings us into the same place before God that He Himself has acquired. He has entirely delivered. us from the place into which He entered for us, enduring the wrath and judgment of God. He brings us into the place to which He is not only entitled Himself, but has acquired a title for us.

But John had no conception of such a compass of blessing. The Jews looked upon the kingdom as the state when Israel would be blessed of God as a nation; and even those that may have more fully understood, still looked for all the power of the kingdom to be brought in, entirely independent of anything on their part. “But the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” The Lord shows that there is an action of faith needed now; that the kingdom of heaven here presented demands the rupture of natural ties and the giving up of previous associations. In the sense of power and glory introduced by a personal Messiah upon the earth, John had already pressed on consciences that it was not a thing of mere ordinance or privilege by birth — that God would not be content except with moral realities. And allow me to say that it is a very solemn thing indeed to claim the privileges of grace for that

which is contrary to the nature of God. I am not speaking now of the lost one found by grace, to whom God gives a new life fresh from Himself. But the effect of a soul's receiving life in the person of Christ is that there are produced feelings, thoughts, judgments and ways acceptable to God and akin to His nature. If a person is a child of God, he is like his Father; he has a nature suitable to God, a life that dislikes sin and is surely pained by what is iniquitous in others, but more particularly in himself. Many bad men are strong against evil in others; they are weak where it might touch themselves. But a Christian always begins with self-judgment. That is the reason why, now that there was to be a moral preparation for the Messiah, John preaches, "Repent." Repentance is the soul's moral judgment of itself under the eye of God; the soul's acceptance of His judgment of its state before Him, and bowing to it. John called upon them to repent because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. "For this is He that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight." This clearly implied two things — that he was but a voice, pretending to nothing, and that the work would be done by another. The voice only was on his part; but the other, whose way he was preparing, was the Lord, Jehovah Himself. "Prepare ye the way of Jehovah."

Then we have the account of John the Baptist himself. "The same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey" — all perfectly suitable to this summons to repentance. As yet it is not grace introduced; this belongs to the kingdom of heaven, when it is fully

brought in. But John did not know it thus. He knew that the Messiah was coming, a Messiah who would introduce the power of God and deliver His people. But the deep unfolding of grace, the mighty victory which a suffering Messiah would accomplish for the soul, and the way in which God would be magnified most of all by the putting away of sin by the death of His Son, were thoughts that must wait for another season — not for utterance more or less, but for adequate intelligence. The ark of the Lord must stand still in the waters of Jordan first. Not a foot can pass that way scatheless till the ark has passed in. Most fittingly, therefore, John does not bring out the fulness of divine grace, but the moral call to repentance.

John accordingly is found outside the religion of man, as well as outside his profanity. He was not in Rome, but he was also away from Jerusalem; and this, in the predicted messenger of Jehovah, was a most solemn feature. “Then went out to him Jerusalem., and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” Here is a part of that truth which is exceedingly startling, when we reflect upon it. The Pharisees were, religiously, the most influential in Israel. The Sadducees were the loose, secular, self-indulgent class; the Pharisees, those who stood very firm for what they considered the truth. Yet when John sees them both coming to his baptism, he says, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance” — fruits of a kindred

character. He maintains that the day of ceremonialism, or of birthrights, was completely past. The Pharisee might rest upon his religion; the Sadducee upon the fact that he was a child of Abraham. The desire to escape wrath and to have part in the kingdom might be no more than nature. Humbled souls suit the kingdom. Descent from the fathers, the law, the promises even, may be turned into a right against God, who will not allow it, and can raise out of the stones children to Abraham. But there must be, if they would draw near to God, ways of a nature morally suitable to God. “Bring forth, therefore,” he says, “fruits meet for repentance.” He is not explaining here how a sinner is to be saved, or how God remits sins; but that, if persons take the stand of having to do with God, there must be. what becomes His presence. So the apostle says to the Hebrews, “Follow peace and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” He is not speaking there of what is imputed, but of holiness as a practical thing. This is written to Christians; and the Holy Ghost does not hesitate to insist upon it. So strong is the tendency to reaction in human nature that the very baptized Jews, who had been pleading for the law, might fall into the opposite extreme and think that sin is compatible with the salvation that God gives through grace. But God never allows that His nature can coexist with sanctioned iniquity.

Here then was evidently a stern rebuke for the leading Jews. But, more than that, John adds, “And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees” — that is to say, judgment is just at hand (ver. 10) — “therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance” — he does not go beyond this. The

remission of sins that he speaks of appears to have been rather a question of the government of God than of that complete putting away of sin which was the fruit of grace when the work of atonement was done. But even so, it was in view of Messiah's advent.

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (ver. 11). There he brings together the two grand features of the first and second comings of Christ. He did not know but that both would go on together. All that might lie between the two was hidden from his eyes. The Old Testament Scriptures did present the first and second advent of the Messiah, but not in such a way as to convey the thought of two distinct epochs. Even after the Lord's death and resurrection, the disciples did not understand this. So John joins these two things — the baptizing with the Holy Ghost and with fire. We know that the baptizing with the Holy Ghost is the power of God's blessing in the kingdom of heaven as it now is. The baptism of fire is that which will accompany the kingdom of heaven as it will be when Christ comes again. There is no such thing in the word of God as the baptism of fire to designate what took place at Pentecost. Baptism with fire is the application of the judgment of God in dealing with men; whereas the day of Pentecost was the outpouring of the grace of God, and the giving of the Holy Ghost to dwell in the saints of God, which referred to the power of the Holy Ghost going forth so as to bear testimony in such sort as would not bear a single evil thing in the heart of men, even while it showed out the grace of God. This is Christianity — the perfect love of God shown to a man

that has no claim upon it: all his evil condemned by the grace of God in the death of Christ! And thus it is that a man is made honest in the sight of God and men. He can afford to be guileless about himself, because he knows that God imputes nothing to him. When we read on the day of Pentecost of the tongues being divided, it was to show the going forth of the testimony of God to the Gentile as well as to the Jew. But when Matt. 3 speaks of our Lord's baptizing with fire, the allusion is not to these tongues of fire, but to the execution of righteous judgment when Christ comes again. This appears still more clearly from what follows: "Whose fan is in His hand; and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (ver. 12). It is not at all what He does in saving a soul, but the very contrary. It refers to the time when, men having refused the gospel, nothing remains but the outpouring of vengeance upon them.

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him" (ver. 13). What a cluster of wonders! Jesus coming to be baptized of John, who was avowedly preaching repentance and remission of sins. What could bring the Lord Jesus there? for He never confessed sins, and had none to confess. He challenges even His enemies to convince Him of sin. A man without sin — without the smallest particle of self in any form or degree — the lowliest and most blessed of men — the One who judged everything according to God; and yet He comes to be baptized! John at once felt it — Jesus coming to be baptized of him! To be baptized at all, but, above all, of him whose baptism was that of repentance! What is the clue to this? It is grace — the source and the channel of everything in Jesus. It was not the judgment

of God that put Him there; it was not any need in Himself that brought Him there; nothing that He had to acknowledge or confess; but it was grace. For on whom in Israel did God's eye look down with compassion? Upon those that were confessing their sins. Upon such does His eye ever rest. For the next best thing to not being a sinner at all is to confess our sins. We find that this is the first great movement produced by the Holy Ghost in a sinner's soul — the feeling of his true place in the sight of God. Here was the blessed One; and though not one thing naturally could claim His presence, yet grace led Him there. And when John was earnestly hindering Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" what blessed grace and truth does not our Lord's answer unfold! "Suffer it now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." It is all righteousness now to be fulfilled, and not merely the doing of the law. Now it was the righteousness of acknowledging the true state in which even the best part of Israel lay. For if there were any in Israel that showed a feeling for God, it was those who were baptized of John — those who repented in view of the kingdom of heaven. They desired God's promises, and they wished to be ready for the King. And the Lord's heart was there at once; the sympathies of His soul were with those that were humbling themselves in the sense of their sin before God.4 The same principle is true of us in proportion as the Spirit of Christ is ungrieved in our souls. Even if it is a question of acknowledging anything to man, who is the person you can most open your heart to? The spiritual man — he who is walking most above sin — his is the bosom to which you can open out your sin more fully than to another. "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the

spirit of meekness." It was exactly the perfection of the holiness of Christ that could enable Him so to act: another might have feared appearances. If Christ had been merely innocent, instead of holy, should we have found Him there? Never. Holiness implies divine power against sin; innocence is merely the absence of sin. Thus we find our Lord, in the full consciousness of His own perfect holiness, coming to the baptism of John, and taking His place with those in Israel who felt aright toward God.

"And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Does it not seem that this wonderful testimony of God the Father was the consequence of Christ's fulfilling all righteousness in the waters of Jordan? It was the answer of God to the place that Christ, in His grace, had taken. It was God, jealous for the glory of His Son, who would not permit that a suspicion should rest upon this loveliest and lowliest of acts. And therefore, lest the full grace of it should not be felt, how quick is God the Father to say, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased "! Do not think He has sin. But if you are there, He is with you: if the sheep are in the waters, the shepherd must enter them too. The Father at once vindicates His Son: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It is not that He was well pleased with that act merely, but it is the retrospective expression of God's delight. It refutes all that the poor mind of man might have — has — gathered out of this transaction. It is always thus in the word of

God. If there be, so to speak, a locked door, the key is always beside it. If there is a heart that counts upon God, and knows the perfection of His character, and is jealous over the honour, of His beloved Son, God is always with such. Man has endeavoured to take advantage of the Lord's grace, taking thus His place with the godly in Israel, in order to lower His person and His position even in relation to God Himself. But when we read with chastened spirits, what do we hear? "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." We shall by and by find the importance of this in connection with what follows; but I leave the subject for the present. There is nothing in the whole compass of God's word so full of blessing to the believer as the person of Christ and His ways; but it requires great jealousy over self and the special guidance of the Holy Ghost; for who is sufficient for these things?

Matthew 4

There are two things that we may notice before our Lord is tempted of the devil. The first is that He is most emphatically recognized as the Son of God by His Father; secondly, that He is anointed as man by the Holy Ghost. Now a similar thing is true of the believer — of course in an inferior way. Still the believer is owned as a son of God, and has the Spirit of God given to him before he becomes the proper object of the enemy's temptations. And this is an important distinction to bear in mind. Strictly speaking, the relation which the sinner bears to the enemy is not as subject to be tempted. He is a captive; he is led by the devil at his will. This is a very distinct thing from temptation; for it supposes a person thoroughly under the power of Satan. We are tempted

when we are out of the enemy's power, and because we are sons of God. Thus, you see, all men have to do with Satan in one way or another. The mass of mankind are his slaves; but those delivered by the power of God, those who by grace are God's children, become the objects of his assault in the way of temptation. It is not so much his power that such have to dread; for when the soul has received Jesus, Satan's power is really void; it is completely broken for the believer. And therefore it is that we are warned rather against his wiles. In certain cases there may be the suffering from his fiery darts; but even this is not his power, which is nothing to the believer while he is looking to Christ; he has only to resist, and the devil will flee from him. If Satan had really power, it is clear that he would not flee. But he has lost it as regards the soul that has received Christ. But then, while to faith the power of Satan is a thing destroyed in the cross of Jesus, his wiles are a very serious matter; and we ought not to be ignorant of his devices. Now God has been graciously pleased to give us his manner of dealing with our blessed Lord. That this is intended for our use, and the great pattern and principle of the temptations of Satan at any time, is clear from many obvious and weighty considerations.

Besides, we know from the Gospel of Luke that in the case of our Lord there was a very long-continued temptation of Satan, of which we have no details. We are only told the fact that Jesus was tempted of the devil during forty days. But the great temptations which the Holy Ghost has been pleased to record for us are those that took place at the end of the forty days. May we not gather hence that in the temptation of our Lord there were two parts: first, that not common to man, but

peculiar to our Lord? For we are subject to no such circumstances as being driven into the wilderness for forty days. But, secondly, we are exposed to such as are given to us at the close. The Lord seems to cast a veil over the first, and discloses carefully what in principle every child of God may be tempted by some time or another. We shall see that these three temptations, presented by Matthew and Luke in a different order, give us an admirable insight into the ways of Satan when he thus assails the children of God. But it is exceedingly sweet to see that before Satan is allowed to tempt at all, the blessedness of the Son's recognition by the Father is most fully brought out. And indeed it is something akin which renders any one obnoxious to the hatred of Satan. The enemy is well aware when God converts and quickens a soul hitherto dead in trespasses and sins; and at once he is prepared with his temptations. They need not, of course, come in the same order as our Lord's; but they seem to be, more or less, of a similar character with those revealed here.

It is clear that the first temptation grew out of our Lord's actual circumstances. He had been all this time in the wilderness without food, and at the end of the forty days he was a hungered. When Moses was without food on the mount for the same time, he was with God, and miraculously sustained. But the wonderful thing here is that the time was spent with the enemy. None had ever been so, or will be so again. To be all that time in the presence of Satan, dependent on God, was the greatest moral honour, though the severest trial, that man had ever passed through. Throughout the Lord is seen as Son of man, though also as Son of God.

The introductory notice shows us that temptation was going on all the time our Lord was in the wilderness. “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward a hungered. And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” Whatever may be the aim of Satan, this is one main part of his tactics — he insinuates a doubt, a doubt of our own relationship with God. “If Thou be the Son of God.” Now, search the word of God as you may, never will you find His Spirit leading a soul to doubt. Nor can anything, indeed, be more opposed to His way than sanctioning mistrust of God. And it shows the exceeding subtlety of Satan that he has actually made the children of God themselves to be his instruments, not only by permitting doubts in themselves, but helping to raise them in others, often on the mistaken plea that not to be confident with God is a sign of humility, and of a desire to be lowly! But faith says, “We are always confident.” Not that we are to shrink from self-examination: we do find this pressed in Scripture. Thus, in 1 Cor. 11 the believers are evidently exhorted to examine themselves, but not with any idea of producing doubt. On the contrary, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat”; for the question was about the Lord’s Supper. On the strength of His grace, the believer is to examine himself in the thought of going to the table of the Lord. It is not a question whether he is to go or stay away: we do not find this in Scripture. Nor do I find, on the other hand, that because I am a Christian it is no matter what state I may be in spiritually. But a man is to examine himself, and so to eat. He is sure to find that which calls for humiliation. It is important for a soul to draw near to

God, and to have His light cast upon all that is there. This will give ground for humbling oneself, not for staying away. Such is what the Spirit of God lays down as a general rule for the Lord's Supper. Of course, I am not speaking now of cases of open sin, where the vindication of the Lord's glory is required. These suppose a man's practising sin, and not examining himself. But I am speaking now of the ordinary walk of the child of God, and what we read there is careful inquiry as to what he finds within himself; but "so let him eat."

"If Thou be the Son of God." Our Lord did not look like it. There was nothing outwardly to carry the demonstration of it. If it had been so, there would have been no room left for faith at all. Satan takes advantage of the lowliness of our Lord in the place that He took as man. And indeed nothing could be more singular than His being found in the wilderness ', and, as we read in Mark., with the wild beasts. If He was really the Son of God, Maker of heaven and earth, what a place to be in, and led there by the Spirit, after the Father had spoken from heaven and acknowledged Him to be His beloved Son! But so it was. And so it is now, in a lower sense, with the children of God. For no matter how much blessed they may be of God, or how truly owned as His sons and having His Spirit dwelling within them, they also, in their measure, have their wilderness. "As My Father hath sent Me into the world, even so send I you into the world." Not into some pleasant place where there is no room for trial, but the very contrary. Because we belong to God and to heaven, because we have the Holy Ghost sealing us unto the day of redemption, we have to encounter Satan, but with the certainty that his

power is broken, and that his wiles are what we have to resist. This questioning the relationship of Christ with God shows how truly Satan was at work. But the Lord does not pronounce him to be Satan until open rebellion is manifested against God. When it is mere subtlety, He does not call him Satan. There are two ways in which the enemy is described in Scripture. He is called Satan and the devil. The latter is the term which implies his accusing character and his wiles; the former refers to his power as adversary.

We must wait, even when we suspect it is the power of evil at work, before we pronounce it absolutely. For if there is such a fact as the devil tempting, God also puts a soul to the test, and this may be very sharp. Moreover, even God Himself does not act till a thing is manifest. He shows wonderful patience, most contrary to the haste of man. He comes down to see whether the evil is so great, as in the case of Adam, yea, of Sodom and Gomorrah. But it always remains true that whatever God may be in other things, quick as He is to hear the cry of His own in sorrow, He is exceedingly slow to judge; and there is nothing that more marks the knowledge of Christ practically, and the effect of it in our own souls, than where the same thing is made true in us. Hastiness to judge is man’s way in proportion to his want of grace; and patience is not a question of knowledge, but of love that lingers over another, unwilling to pronounce till every hope is gone. The rising in the flesh, which looked so threatening, might turn out after all to be only on the surface, and not deep-seated. So here we see patience even in our Lord’s dealing with the adversary. It is only when he thoroughly makes manifest what he is — only when he demands the worship due to God alone — that

our Lord says, “Get thee behind Me, Satan.” The adversary then flees instantly. But the Lord lets him thoroughly discover himself first. This is divinely wise. Because, although the Lord knew him to be Satan all the time, what pattern would this be for us? The Lord is here the blessed man in the presence of Satan, showing us how we have to carry ourselves in the temptations that come upon us as saints of God.

And let me say another word with regard to temptation. In the sense we have it here, it is entirely from without. Our Lord never knew what it was to be tempted from within. He was “in all points tempted like as we are.” But the Holy Ghost qualifies this by adding, “yet without sin.”5 It was not merely that He did not yield to sin, but He never had the principle of it — never the least motion of any thought or wish contrary to God. He never knew sin. It is in this we so differ from Him. We have cause of deep humiliation sometimes, because, besides having to do with the devil without, we have an evil nature within — what Scripture calls “the flesh,” i.e., the self, the spring of insubordination and of enmity against God. It is the fountain of unloving, wilful, ungodly desires in us, which naturally never seeks God’s will, save only in a spirit of fear; never seeks it as that which is loved — we never do till born of God. Even afterward the same wicked principle is still there; but we have a new life implanted of God in our souls, which delights in His will.

But though the temptations of our Lord which we have here were from without, still Satan adapted them to the circumstances in which our Lord then stood. He had been for forty days without food, and the first word of the tempter is, “If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But He answered and

said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (vers. 3, 4). Our Lord refers to Deuteronomy, alluding to the manna, the daily food of Israel, which involved dependence upon God, and showed that Israel did not need the resources of the world to sustain them. They did not require some rich country to supply them out of its abundant harvest; neither did they depend upon gold and silver. Israel, before they had a land to cultivate and the means of gathering from it, were taught alone with God. In the wilderness, where He had brought them out as His first-born son, He puts them to the proof; and the way of it was, whether they were content with God and with the fare that God provided for them day by day. Alas, they were not!

Here the scene is entirely changed. It is a man in the wilderness; and Satan is there — not God. In spirit He ever dwelt with His Father; for even when on earth He was "the Son of man which is in heaven." He combined thus two things in His own person. Day by day He was the man dependent upon God for everything. And this was the first great temptation of the devil — the appeal to His earthly natural warts. It was no sin to be hungry; but it would have been a sin to distrust God because of the desert place. Did not God know that there was no bread there'? and was it not His Spirit who had lead Him there? Had God told Him to leave the wilderness, or to make the stones into bread? He would not use His own power independently of God's word. And it is the constant mark of the way of the Holy Ghost in the children of God that they do not use miraculous power for themselves or for their friends. If we look at it in the New Testament, we find Paul working miracles and

using the power of God to heal the sick around. But was it ever used for his own circle? On the contrary, Paul leaves Trophimus sick at Miletus, and displays about him all the anxiety of one who might never have had power to heal the body. When Epaphroditus was sick, we see the exercise of a faith which knew that the will of God, with acquiescence in it, was worth a thousand miracles. Miracles had not in themselves the high character of exercising the soul in dependence upon God. To obey God, to submit to Him, to have confidence in Him, is that of which the natural man is incapable. Power alone never reaches so high. Therefore, in the case of our Lord Himself, we never find that He puts His works of might on a level with obedience. Nay, He even speaks of His disciples as those who should do greater works than He Himself had done. But obedience was what characterized Christ: this never was found in a mere child of Adam.

Here, in the face of Satan, our Lord finds His strength; not in doing miracles, or in any provision that He might have made for Himself, but in the word of God. Hunger might have legitimate wants, but here He was, tried by Satan, and He will not step out of the trial till it is over; He will not shift His circumstances or lift one finger for Himself: He waits upon God. “Man shall not live by bread alone,” He answers, “but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” God’s word had led Him there, for the Holy Ghost acts by the word, and He would not leave the wilderness till God’s word led Him out. This completely set aside Satan’s temptations. But more: it brought out the real secret of living in dependence upon God day by day, for the food of the new life is the word of God. Of what immense

importance this shows the written word to be, and having it as our household bread day by day; not merely reading it as a task or formal duty, but, as it is indeed, the divinely-suitable provision for the child of God! It is good for every one to study it, because it is in every way for the good of the soul day by day to read it intelligently, heartily, as those that receive it from God Himself. And God does not give that which the heart of man cannot take in, but what is adapted to our daily wants, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”

This, then, is the answer of our Lord to the first temptation. Why should He turn the stones into bread? He hung upon God’s word: His Father had not told Him to do so. So should it ever be with us. Where we have no clear expression of the mind of God, it is always our place to wait till we have. Sometimes it may show our weakness that we do not know the mind of God, and this is distasteful to us. Restlessness would like to go somewhere, or do something, but this is not faith. Faith proves itself in waiting for God to manifest His will.

The next temptation was not a personal one, but connected with religion, as the first had been in respect of bodily wants. We shall find that the order is different in Luke. But here, in the second temptation mentioned, is what I may call the religious temptation. The Lord had said that man should “live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” The devil then takes Him up into the holy city, sets Him upon a pinnacle of the temple, and founds his temptation upon that very point in our Lord’s answer — the word of God. He says, as it were, Here is a word of God for you: “He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, and in their hands

they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." Very true. It was God's word, and evidently spoken of the Messiah. But what was Satan using it for? He says, "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down; for it is written," etc. This was making a move without God — doing something by oneself. Scripture did not say, Cast Thyself down, because God has given His angels charge concerning Thee, lest Thou shouldst dash Thy foot against a stone. The Lord would not turn aside from Scripture because Satan had misused it. He shows us, in the most instructive way, that we are not to be moved from our stronghold because it may be turned against us. Our Lord does not enter into nice distinctions, nor analyze what Satan had said, but He has given us that which ought to be, if I may so say, the standard mode of dealing for every Christian man. There are those who might have spiritual discrimination to see that Satan was perverting the scripture which he quoted; but many might not. The Lord takes a broad ground in dealing with the adversary. He stands upon what each Christian should know and feel, and this is, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord Thy God. He cites a plain positive word of God which Satan was destroying by the use he made of psalm 91. Now that is the stronghold of a believer who may have to do with one that reasons subtly from Scripture, "It is written again." He can appeal to that which is palpable and clear. It will be found that where a person systematically misapplies Scripture, he destroys some fundamental principle of the word of God. Whatever is false is contrary to some plain passage of Scripture. Now this is a great mercy. The believer holds fast to what is sure; he will not quit what he does understand for something that he does not. He may be

perplexed by what the adversary is producing, and may have only a growing suspicion that he is wrong. But he may say to himself, I never can give up that which is beyond a doubt for that which I do not know. In other words, he holds the light, and refuses the darkness.

It is thus, it seems to me, our Lord deals with Satan. He could at once have set him aside on grounds of reasoning, and have shown the perverted end to which Satan was applying Scripture; but He rather deals with him on moral grounds, which every Christian is capable of judging. Do I find a scripture used for the purpose of making me distrust God? At once I take my stand on "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." What is meant by this? I am never to doubt the Lord will be for me. If I do anything to prove Him, to see whether He will be for me, this is at once unbelief and disobedience. It is an allusion to Israel's history again, and another quotation from the book of Deuteronomy. Indeed, our Lord quotes every answer to the temptations, as has been long ago remarked, from the book of Deuteronomy. You will find in Exodus 17 that the Israelites tempted the Lord by asking, Is He among us or no? This does not mean that they provoked Him by idolatry, or refusal to do His will. It is not a question there of open sin, but of unbelief of His goodness and presence — unbelief, in a word, of God's being for us. This is exactly what our Lord pleads. Cast Myself down in order to find that the scripture is true and that the angels will bear Me up! I do not need to do such a thing; I am very certain that if I were cast down the angels would be there to sustain Me. If you have a person whom you suspect of dishonesty on your premises, you may perhaps be disposed to test him in some way or other. But who would think of testing one

that he had full confidence in? Now that is exactly the import of our Lord's answer, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." His soul resented the idea of trying God, to see whether He would sustain His Son. God might try Him; Satan might put Him to the test; but as to His tempting the Lord, as if the Lord His God required to be put to the proof whether He would be true to His word — away with such a thought! He would not hear of it for a moment.

The temptation which is second in Matthew, Luke gives as the third. Why is this? Surely we ought not to read Scripture as if such differences were not intended to suggest inquiry. We have to take care that we do not misinterpret Scripture; but Scripture is meant to be understood. I say of these different orders in which the temptations are put, both are right, both are inspired of God. If they were both intended to report the temptation exactly as it took place, it is clear they are not right; but God had a much higher object. God wrote for our instruction, and God has been pleased, in the different Gospels, to put the facts in the way that is most instructive. Matthew simply gives the temptation historically, as it took place. Therefore in Matthew we have notes of time: "Then the devil taketh Him up," etc. In Luke there is no such thought; it is simply, "And the devil," etc. This word at once prepares us for it. It is clear there were these different temptations, but Luke puts them so as not to tell us the order in which they occurred.

This is a general remark, true of the whole Gospel of Luke, that he habitually departs from the mere order of fact to give an arrangement suited to the design which he had in view. As a whole, the Gospel of Luke is

characterized by' putting the facts of our Lord's life in an order that suited the doctrine He was teaching. Thus you will find in Luke that even the genealogy of our Lord is not given in its regular place; there is a departure from the mere natural series; and there is, instead, a moral order. Take the case of the Lord's prayer: Luke puts that in a totally different place from Matthew, who gives it in the wondrous discourse commonly called the sermon on the mount; and as prayer formed a most important part of the new principles the Lord was bringing out, so it formed one of the main subjects of the Lord's discourse. Luke reserves that prayer till Luke 11, because our Lord is pointing out there the grand means of spiritual life, how it is to be kept up and sustained in the soul. And this he shows us from the history of Martha and Mary (Luke 10). Why was it that Jesus approved of the path and walk of Mary rather than of Martha? It is not that He did not love them all, nor was it that Martha had not a real personal love to the Saviour, and that her heart was not true to Him. But there was an immense difference between them. What and why was it? Luke gives us the moral difference. When Martha was all busied with what she could do for the Lord, to show her love to Him, Mary was occupied with the Lord Himself — seated at His feet, listening to His word. The one was full of what she could do for Christ; the other, full of Christ Himself; and nothing that she could do was of the smallest consequence in her eyes, compared with Christ Himself. Thus we find, in another instance, Mary breaking the alabaster box to anoint the feet of Jesus — an action little accounted of by others; yet what she had done should be recorded throughout the whole world. Our Lord brings out in Luke this great point — the word of God, the waiting

upon Jesus, being the first great means of strengthening the new and spiritual life; and therefore, immediately after this account of these sisters, we have the request of the disciples to be taught how to pray. It really took place long before; but they are put together in that special form by Luke to mark the connection of the word of God with prayer.

So, in the temptation, Luke departs from the order of fact and gives us the moral sequence. Matthew simply names the facts here as they took place. Luke puts them in the order of magnitude, and rises from the natural trial to the worldly one, and then to the religious temptation. For it is perfectly plain that the temptation by the word of God was much harder for one who valued His word above everything than that which lay in an appeal to natural wants or to worldly ambition. Therefore Luke keeps this temptation to the last. In Matthew it is not so, but we have, in the third place, the temptation by the world. “Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me” (vers. 8, 9). Here at once the devil was manifest. The very idea of presenting any object of obeisance and worship between the soul and God was at once to detect that he was either the devil himself or an instrument of the devil. The Lord therefore at once pronounces him “Satan.” “Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve” (ver. 10). If it had been an apostle, it would have been just the same. If such a one had been so completely led away as to hint such a thing, the Lord would have

said “Satan” all the same. Is not this most solemn with us in dealing with Christians even who may have become for the time instruments of Satan? The Lord did not hesitate on one occasion to say, “Satan” to Peter himself; and yet he was the chief of the twelve — the first in dignity among the apostles of the Lamb. And yet our Lord Himself, after He had put signal honour, upon Peter and given him a new name, does not hesitate to say “Satan” to Peter as to the enemy himself. All this brings out an important principle, for our own ways in having to do even with a child of God.

In answering the third and last temptation, our Lord still confines Himself to the book of Deuteronomy. Why? Because Deuteronomy is the book that regards Israel after they had completely failed under the law, and when God brings in the new principle of grace and shows not the mere righteousness of the law, but that which is of faith. The apostle Paul also quotes from Deuteronomy for the same purpose. It is the book that indicates the place of obedience when it is no longer a mere question of observance under the law. The Lord Jesus is here taking that very place. He is not witnessing what He could have done as a divine person. As such He would have taken ground where we could not follow Him. But throughout this temptation He takes the posture that becomes us and all that desire to follow Him. The only thing right and becoming for a godly man, in meeting temptations, is the ground of the obedience of faith: one thus stands in the confidence of what God is in His goodness. The Lord would on no account swerve from what was the due and comely place for a servant of God in Israel. If a person was godly, his place was to confess and to be baptized with the baptism of repentance. Our

Lord at once finds Himself with such, though in His case it was the fulfilling of righteousness, while with us it is the acknowledgment of sin. He who alone could have taken His stand upon legal righteousness, takes it as in every way vindicating God, not upon the mere righteousness of man. Satan may put temptation before Him in every form; but it is of no use. His only care is to vindicate God, and never to arrogate anything to Himself. The enemy was foiled, to God's glory, by an obedient and dependent man.

I believe that the principles brought before us in this chapter are of the greatest practical importance for the children of God. The few remarks I have made may help to direct souls to the value, practically, of these temptations of our Lord for guidance in our own path. I therefore commend the whole subject to the attention of the reader, as one that, although it may have come before us many a time, and we may have often meditated upon its practical value, may still claim our thought, as it will surely repay our prayerful study.

It may be instructive to compare the different ways in which the Holy Ghost introduces our Lord's ministry in the Gospels. And when I speak of His ministry, you will understand that I mean His public service, for there was much appertaining to the Lord — miracles performed and remarkable discourses uttered — before His ministerial course was formally entered on. What I desire now to notice is the wisdom with which He has given us a distinct view of our Lord in each of these different inspired accounts. We may reverently follow Him who has been pleased to furnish them so variously — omitting certain statements in some, and presenting them in others; altering now and then the order of

narrating events to accomplish thus His purpose more perfectly. In comparing these accounts we may see that the Holy Ghost always preserves the grand design of each Gospel, and this is the basis of all just interpretation. We shall find, steadily keeping in view what He is aiming at, that we have in this the principle on which the Gospels were written, and consequently what alone will enable us to understand them aright.

I have already shown, to commence with the Gospel of Matthew, that throughout the Holy Ghost is setting before us the Messiah with the fullest proofs of His mission from God, but, alas, a suffering and a rejected One, and this specially by His own people; and, among them, rejected most of all by such as, humanly speaking, had most reason to receive Him. Were any peculiarly remarkable for their righteousness in the estimate of the nation? If Pharisees were so, who so bitter against Him? Were any celebrated for their knowledge of Scripture? The scribes were those combined with the Pharisees against Him. The priests, jealous of their position, would naturally oppose one who brought out the reality of a divine power, administered by the Son of man upon earth, in the forgiveness of sing. Now all these things come out with striking force and clearness in the Gospel of Matthew. But although we are not arrived at these details as yet, still the main design of the Holy Ghost discovers itself in the manner in which our Lord is presented as entering upon His public ministry in the portion that is now before us.

First of all, no notice is taken in Matthew of all that passed at Jerusalem. Humanly speaking, Matthew was as likely to have known and inquired into the earlier circumstances of our Lord, and particularly His

connection with that city, as the beloved disciple John. Yet of a great deal given in John not a word appears in Matthew. In the fourth Gospel we have a deputation from Jerusalem to see John the Baptist first, and then our Lord is acknowledged as Lamb of God and as He who baptizes with the Holy Ghost. Then we have our Lord making Himself known to various persons; among them, to Simon Peter, after Andrew his brother had already been in the company of the wondrous Stranger. Then Philip is called, who finds Nathanael; and thus the work of the Lord spreads from one soul to another, either by the Lord attracting to Himself directly, or through the intervention of those already called. All this is entirely omitted here. Then, again, in John 2 is given the first miracle, or sign, in which Christ set forth His glory — the turning of water into wine; after which our Lord goes up to Jerusalem and executes judgment upon the covetousness that then reigned even in the boasted city of holiness. We have also a little incidental view of what our Lord was doing during this time at Jerusalem. He was working miraculous signs there, and many were believing on Him, though in a natural way. Jesus, it is said, “did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men”; but He does open the great doctrine of the new birth, and brings out the cross — Himself to be made sin thus, as the serpent had been lifted up by Moses in the wilderness, that whosoever believed in Him “should not perish, but have everlasting life.” All this took place before the circumstances recorded by Matthew. When this is seen, it must strike any observing reader of the word of God. It could not be that those things were unknown to Matthew: they could not fail to be named and dwelt on if, apart from inspiration, you look at him as a mere disciple. Andrew, Peter and John,

and the rest, would have conversed on their first acquaintance with the Saviour over and over again. Yet Matthew does not say one word about it; neither does Mark or Luke — only John. Now, when we examine the Gospels themselves, we find the real solution. It is not the ignorance of one Evangelist, nor the knowledge of another, that accounts either for the omissions or for the insertions. God gives such an account of Jesus as would perfectly impress the lesson He was teaching in each Gospel.

Why does all we have noticed appear appropriately in John? Clearly because it falls in with the truth that is taught there. In John we have the utter ruin of man — of the world — from the outset. The first chapter shows us the practical evidence of what Judaism was — the Lord not received by His own, however duly coming, and thus calling His own sheep by name, and leading them out. For the testimony of John Baptist had no abiding effect upon the mass; it might pass from mouth to mouth, but it fell unheeded upon the ears of those that had no faith: “Ye are not of My sheep, as I said unto you.” Now we have the sheep individually called by name, and one of them receiving a new name thoroughly in keeping with the character of John’s Gospel. In Matthew we have none of these striking incidents, because therein the Holy Ghost brings before us Jehovah-Jesus, the Messiah, working miracles, accomplishing prophecy, expounding the kingdom of heaven — but in want, despised, and the companion of such in Galilee; for He is not seen here as the Son of God, whether from everlasting or as born into the world; but He Himself takes a place in separation, to make good the great oracle that the prophet Isaiah had been inspired of God to reveal hundreds of years before.

For you will remark that our Lord's leaving Nazareth and coming to dwell in Capernaum is brought in here as the fulfilment of that which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, "The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles." It was outside the regular allotment of Israel, in that part of it which is yet to belong to Israel, which certain of the tribes had taken possession of, though, strictly speaking, it was beyond the proper limits of the promised land. The Lord goes through Galilee of the Gentiles, and in all that He was doing He fulfilled the prophecy. The Jews ought surely to have known it. The people which sat in darkness thus "saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. "

Now, if we turn to the prophet Isaiah, we shall find the importance of this quotation somewhat more. It is part of a grave prophetic strain, in which the Lord lays bare the exceeding rebelliousness of Israel, and the judgments falling upon His people, because they would not hearken to His voice. His hand was stretched out against them: "For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still" (Isa. 5:25). In the midst of these dealings of God we have the glory of the Lord revealed (chap. 6). Now we know, as John 12 declares, that this glory is in the person of Christ. Accordingly it is announced in Isa. 7 that there was to be a birth wholly above nature. It was no longer One sitting upon a high throne, removed from men, though men receiving a message of mercy from Him in the midst of judgment, but chapter 7 reveals the great fact of the incarnation. The King of glory, Jehovah of hosts, was to become a babe, born of a virgin. The next chapter

reveals another fact. Israel no more cared for the glorious Child of the virgin than for the warnings of God before. On the contrary, they despised and rejected Him. Consequently, chapter 8 supposes a godly remnant more and more isolated in the midst of a fearful state of things in Israel, who, joining with the Gentiles, will be saying, "A confederacy." Israel then takes the place of utter unbelief. The Jews will be leaders in this rebellion against God. But in the midst of it all, what is He doing? "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples. And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him. Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and wonders in Israel, from the Lord of hosts which dwelleth in Mount Zion." That is, there is a distinct declaration that God will be pleased to have a little remnant in the midst of Israel; and while Israel rejects the Messiah, a separated remnant appears, and the blessing would come at last in all the fulness of grace. Still it would be a small, despised thing in the beginning; and this is exactly the circumstance that our Lord now was bringing out in evidence. "And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits… should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Accordingly the prophecy goes on: "Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first He lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun, and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light [the Messiah]: they that dwell in the. land of the shadow of

death, upon them hath the light shined." He shows afterward in this prophecy that (while the Gentile affliction upon the nation would be heavier than ever, and the Roman oppression far exceed the Chaldean of old, yet) the Messiah would be there, despised and rejected of men, nay, of the Jews, and that at this very time, when thus set at naught by the people that ought to have known His glory, great light, would spring up in the most despised place, in Galilee of the nations, among the poorest of Israel, where Gentiles were mixed up with them — people who could not even speak their own tongue properly. There should this bright and heavenly light spring up; there the Messiah would be owned and received. Thus we can see how thoroughly this prophecy suits the Gospel we are considering. For we have here one who is Jehovah-Messiah, a divine king — not a mere man, but slighted by the nation and despised by the leaders, making Himself known in grace to those who were the most scorned in the outskirts as you go out toward the Gentiles. What kings had looked for in vain, what prophets had desired to see, it was for their eyes to look upon. The Lord begins to separate Himself a remnant in Israel in Galilee of the Gentiles. This keeps up and confirms the object of Matthew from the first.

But there is more than this. "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (ver. 17). It is clear that this begins His public preaching. The discourse to Nicodemus was entirely different. Why have we nothing like the Samaritan woman in Matthew? How does it fit in with the Gospel of John? In Matthew the subject is the accomplishment of the prophecies about the Messiah, and God showing there was on His part no failure of

testimony till the Baptist's work closes. Jesus awaits this in Matthew. In John He waits for nothing. He gives there the grandest possible testimony about the kingdom of God; the necessity of a life which man has not naturally, that God alone can give; and the necessity of the cross as the expression of God's judgment of sin in grace to sinners — to the world. So that the discourse in John 3 consists of these two parts — a life given of God that is perfectly holy; and Jesus dying in atonement for the sins of the old life, which never could enter into the presence of God. For though believers must have the new life, yet this cannot blot out sin. Death is needed as well as life, and the Saviour provides both. He is the source of life as the Son of God, and He dies as the Son of man. And this is what He strikingly brings out in the beginning of John's Gospel.

In Matthew, as I have said, we have Jesus waiting till the testimony of John the Baptist is closed, and then He enters upon His public ministry. These things are perfectly harmonious. If it had been said our Lord preached the kingdom of heaven to Nicodemus, there might have seemed to be a contradiction; but He did not. To him He showed the necessity of a new birth for any to see the kingdom of God. But in Matthew He is looking at what concerns the earth — the kingdom of heaven according to the prophecy of Daniel. He therefore waits till his earthly forerunner had finished his task. Hence Matthew leaves out all allusion to anything public about Christ before John is cast into prison. He presents to the Jews the kingdom of heaven as that which was according to their prophets.

In the Gospel of Luke let us see how our Lord's ministry is opened. Chapter 4 will suffice for my purpose. The

Lord returns in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: “And there went out a fame of Him through all the region round about. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up.” This is a previous scene; He is not in Capernaum yet. Matthew leaves it all out. This is the more striking because Luke was not one of those personally with our Lord, while Matthew was. But unless you believe that it is God who has guided the hand of every writer, and put His own seal upon it, you are incapable of understanding Scripture; you will add your own thoughts, instead of being subject to the mind of God. What we want is to confide in God, who is shedding on us His own blessed and infinite light. Why does God give us this incident at Nazareth in Luke and nowhere else? Is it the Messiah? No; such is not the object of Luke. Nor is it His ministry in the order in which it occurred: this you will find in Mark. But Luke, as well as Matthew, changes the order of events, for the purpose of bringing out the moral object of each Gospel. Luke gives us this circumstance in the synagogue; Matthew does not. If any one has read the Gospel of Luke with spiritual intelligence, what is the uniform impression conveyed to the mind? There is the blessed Man, anointed of the Holy Ghost, who goes about doing good. Indeed, this is precisely the way in which Peter sums up the life of Jesus in the Acts, when preaching Him to Cornelius — “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him.” And then he gives an account of His wonderful work in His death and resurrection, and its fruits to the believer.

Opening, then, Luke's Gospel, what is the first incident of our Lord's ministry recorded there? At Nazareth, the most despised village in Galilee, the place where our Lord was sure to be scorned — in His own country, where He had been living all the days of His private life of blessed obedience rendered to man and of dependence upon God — in this same place He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read from the prophet Isaiah where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor: He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted,... to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And He closed the book." He stopped in the very middle of a sentence. Why so? For the most precious reason. He was come here as a herald of grace, the minister of divine goodness to poor, miserable men. There was judgment mingled with mercy in the prophecy of Isaiah. The Gospel of Matthew points out judgment upon the Jews and mercy to despised Galilee. But here it is a larger thing. In Luke there is not a word about judgment; nothing appears but the fulness of grace that was in Christ. He was come with all power and willingness to bless: the Spirit of Jehovah was upon Him for the purpose. He was sent to preach the acceptable year of the Lord — and there and then He closed the book. He would not add the next words, which announced "the day of vengeance of our God." He most significantly stops before a word is said of that day. As to the actual errand on which Jesus was come from heaven, it was not to execute vengeance: this was only what man would by and by compel Him to do by refusing grace. But He came to show divine love flowing in a perfect, unceasing stream from His heart. This was what our Lord opened out here. Where does such a scene as

this suit? Exactly the place where it occurs — the Gospel of Luke only. You could not transplant it to Matthew, or even to John. There is a character about it that pertains to this Gospel and none other. Some of the circumstances of our Lord's ministry are given in all the Gospels, but this is not: because it flows in the current of Luke, there it is found, and there alone.

This will help to illustrate the characteristic and divinely-arranged differences of the Gospels. Harmonizing is the attempt to squeeze into one mould things which are not the same. Thus, if I may add a few words as to the account in Luke, we have more in corroboration. While they hung upon His lips to hear the gracious words, as the Holy Ghost characterizes them, all eyes fastened upon Him. "He began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.... And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? "Such was their blindness of heart. He was despised and rejected of men; not only of the proud men of Jerusalem, but even at Nazareth. This is Luke's object, who demonstrates the deeper thought still — that it was not only men who might be built up in the law, but that the heart of man was against Him wherever He was. Let it be at Nazareth, and let Him utter the most gracious words that ever fell from the lips of man, still scorn followed. "And He said unto them, Ye will surely say unto Me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also, here in Thy country." We learn here that the Lord had done many things elsewhere, and things that had taken place previously to this; but the Spirit of God records this first at length. The Lord accordingly brings in another thing that I must refer to. He takes instances from Jewish history to

illustrate the unbelief of the Jews and the goodness of God to the Gentiles: “I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up;... but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta,” etc. That is to say, He shows that in the unbelief of Israel God turns to the Gentiles, and that they should hear. There was this grand point in Luke’s Gospel — not only the display of the fulness of the grace that was in Jesus, but God going out to the Gentiles, and in mercy to them. The first recorded discourse of our Lord in Luke brings out the very object of the Gospel. Accordingly, when the Lord uttered these words, they “were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong. But He, passing through the midst of them, went His way, and came down to Capernaum.” And then we have the Lord dealing with a man that was possessed with a devil. This is the first miracle detailed here; and it is only in the next chapter that we find our Lord calling Simon Peter, Andrew, and the rest, to follow Him; all which is given with the greatest possible care. At once we are struck with the difference.

For when we turn back to Matthew there is not a word about Nazareth, or the casting out of a devil from a man possessed; but simply our Lord, when He began to preach, was walking by the sea of Galilee, and “saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. And He saith unto them, Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (vers. 18, 19). The account is given very succinctly. The particulars are not found; but we do get them in Luke, and, I presume, for this reason, that his is

specially the Gospel where we see the moral analysis of the human heart. There are two things specially brought out in Luke — what God's heart is toward man, and what man's heart is naturally toward God; and, besides this, what he becomes through the grace of God. Take the parable of the prodigal, for instance. Have you not there God's grace and the wickedness of man's heart fully brought out? and then his coming to himself and being lost in the goodness of God toward him? This is just the Gospel of Luke, the sum and substance of the whole book. It is one reason why you have the experience of Peter when first called to service; how the Lord met his fears, and fitted him to become a fisher of men. And Peter is there made a prominent person: such experience is worthless except in an individual. Experience must be a thing between the soul and Christ; and the moment it becomes vague, or a matter of public notoriety, all is gone; it becomes then rather a snare for the conscience. There is the danger of repeating what we have heard from others, or of keeping back what is bad as to our own souls. It must be a matter of individual conscience with the Lord. Hence Luke gives us one individual singled out, and the minute account of what he passes through with the Lord.

This is not Matthew's point. There it is the rejected Messiah, now that His forerunner is cast into prison, who. will Himself soon find that there is worse than a prison in store for him. But for all that, the Lord will accomplish the prophecies. He is, in the most despised place, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah that predicted the law bound up among His disciples at the very time that the Lord was hiding His face from Israel. Now He wants to have persons who are suited to be the representatives

of this godly remnant in Israel. Therefore He calls first two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother. It would be a mistake to suppose that this was our Lord's first acquaintance with them. They knew the Lord long before. How do we know this? John tells us. If you examine the point, you will find that all the incidents in the first four chapters of John's Gospel occurred before this scene. The circumstances recorded of our Lord in Jerusalem, in Galilee, and with the woman of Samaria even, all took place before Simon and Andrew were called away from their work. In order to call for a special line of service, there is a second work of Christ necessary.

It is one thing for Christ to reveal Himself to a soul; it is another to make that soul a fisher of men. There is a special faith needed in order to act upon the souls of others. The simple saving faith that appropriates Christ for one's own soul is not at all the same thing as understanding. the call of Christ summoning one away from all the natural objects of this life to do His work. This comes out here. The Lord, in His rejection, calls, and causes His voice to be heard by these four men, and by others also. They had already believed in Him, and had everlasting life; but even with everlasting life a man may be following a good deal of the world, and, being occupied with what contributes to his own ease here below, remain a member of the society of men. Many that are godly still continue mixed up with the world; but in order for the Lord to make them to be the companions of His own service, and to fit them for carrying out His own objects, He must call them away. But they have got a father: what is to be done? No matter; the call of Christ is paramount to every other

claim. They were casting a net into the sea; and He saith unto them, “Follow Me.” But they might have caught ever so much fish: what of that? “They straightway left their nets, and followed Him. And going on from thence, He saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them” (vers. 20, 21). No doubt it was a struggle. They were mending their nets with their father when the Lord called them; but they immediately left their nets and their father, and followed Him. And for this reason: they knew who Christ was; that He was the Messiah, the blessed object of hope that God had from the beginning promised to the fathers; and now the children had it. He called them. Could they not trust all they had in His hands, and confide in His care for their father? Surely they could. The very same faith which gave them to follow Jesus, not alone as a giver of everlasting life, but as One to whom they now belonged as servants, could enable them to confide all that they had pertaining to them in this world into His keeping. Surely, if the Lord called them, His call must be superior to their natural obligations. This was an extraordinary case. We do not find that persons in general are called to such a work as this; but it may be there are occasions where the Lord has those that He summons to serve Him in this special way. How could one be of use to the souls of others unless he have known somewhat of this trial for his own soul? The Lord is presented here as thus forming this godly remnant for Himself from the very beginning. “Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel.” This was what the Lord was now doing; but it is not all. “Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel

of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And His fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those which had the palsy, and He healed them" (vers. 23, 24).

Now, mark, there is nowhere, except in Matthew, such a series of the Lord's works and teaching compressed into a couple of verses. In Matthew they are crowded into a cluster, before we have the teaching commonly called "the sermon on the mount." Why is it that the ordinary current of the Lord's ministry is brought before us here in this comprehensive form? It is intended to show, after the Lord had called these disciples, the universal attention that was drawn to His doctrine. The Lord had been giving a full testimony everywhere through all Galilee, and his fame had spread through all Syria; persons had been attracted from all quarters; and the Holy Ghost then gives us the outline of the kingdom of heaven in its objects and character. The circumstances are so arranged by the Holy Ghost as to show the universal attention directed to it. When all are on tip-toe to hear Him, then the Lord unfolds the character of the kingdom of heaven. Matthew knew perfectly well that the sermon on the mount was really uttered long after. He heard it himself. Yet Matthew's own call is not given till chapter 9. It was subsequent to the call of the twelve disciples that our Lord took His place upon the mount; but Matthew records it long before. The object is to mark, not the time when our Lord uttered this discourse, but the change announced. There were, first, all these mighty deeds that witnessed to His being the true

Messiah; and then His doctrine was perfectly brought out. The sermon on the mount need not be considered, historically, as one continuous discourse, but may have been divided into different parts. It is nowhere said that it was all uttered in strict consecution. We have only the general fact that then He spoke thus on the mount, and there He taught the people. It may have been given in several discourses, with the circumstances giving rise to this part or that omitted in Matthew. The human mind compares these things together, and finding that in Luke different portions of it are given in a different connection, while in Matthew all are given together, instead of confiding in the certainty that God is right, jumps at once to the conclusion that there is confusion in these scriptures. There is really perfection. It is the Holy Ghost shaping all according to the object He has before Him.

Another time I hope, if the Lord will, to enter carefully into this most blessed discourse of our Lord's, to evince its grand importance in itself, and its appropriateness in Matthew, where alone we have it so fully. In Mark and John it is not given at all; in Luke only in detached fragments; in Matthew as a whole. But now I merely commend to you the subject we have been looking at, trusting that the general remarks Already made may prove an incentive to further and prayerful examination. May the hints thrown out help some to a more profitable reading of God's word, and more intelligent entrance into His mind, beside., giving a key to apparent difficulties in the Gospels.

1 Note that it would be an impossibility now for any Jew to produce his genealogy from Abraham or David, as must be to authenticate the Messianic claim This is

given us both on the legal, or Joseph's side, and the natural, or Mary's side, in Matthew and in Luke. The Messiah having come, and being rejected by the Jews, the Romans were permitted to come and destroy their temple, city, and nation; and their genealogical records might well come to an end, as they did. [Ed.

2 Many ancient versions omit "Jesus" from this verse.

3 In Gen. 7:1; Gen. 15:6, and Ps. 32:1, 2, 5, etc., we see that some saints of old, as taught of God, may have anticipated blessing beyond the dispensation in which they lived. — [Ed.

4 We may say that the Lord, in being baptized in Jordan, was identifying Himself with the true-hearted in Israel who came confessing their sins. Grace brought Him where sin had brought them, and us all. The Good Shepherd "entereth in by the door" and takes His place with the sheep He had come to save by the sacrifice of Himself. His baptism pointed to this. — [Ed.

5 The exact translation of the Greek expression is, "Who was in all things like-tempted, sin apart." — [Ed.

Matthew 5-8

Matthew 5

It has been already explained, though briefly, that one reason of the Spirit of God in putting the sermon on the mount out of its historical place in Matthew, if we may so speak, and giving it to us before many of the events which took place subsequently, was this: that the whole Gospel was written upon the principle of convincing Jews; first, to show who Jesus was — their Messiah (a man, but Jehovah), the LORD God of Israel; then to give full proofs of what He really was as their Messiah, according to prophecy, by miracle, moral principles and ways, both in His own person and in His doctrine.6 In order to give the greater weight to His doctrine, the Spirit of God, in my opinion, has been pleased, first, to give as a general sketch the deeds of miraculous power which roused universal attention. The report went abroad everywhere, so that there was no possible ground of excuse for unbelief to argue that there was not sufficient publicity; that God had not sounded the trumpet loud enough for the tribes of Israel to hear. Far from that: throughout all Syria His fame had gone forth, and great multitudes followed Him from Galilee, and Decapolis, and Jerusalem, and Judea, and from beyond Jordan. All this is brought forward here and grouped together at the end of chapter 4.

And just as there is this grouping of the miracles of Christ, which might have been severed from one another by a long space of time, so, I apprehend, the sermon on the mount was not necessarily a continuous discourse, unbroken by time or circumstances, but that the Holy

Ghost has seen fit to arrange it so as to give the whole moral unity of the doctrine of Christ as to the kingdom of heaven, and specially so as to counteract the earthly views of the people of Israel.

Luke, on the contrary, was inspired of the Holy Ghost to give the questions that originated certain portions of the discourse, and the circumstances that accompanied it; and, again, to keep certain parts of that discourse back, connecting them with facts that occurred from time to time in our Lord's ministry, the actual incidents being thus interwoven in moral correspondence with any particular doctrine of our Lord. In some places of Luke the Spirit of God takes the liberty, according to His sovereign wisdom, of keeping back certain portions, and bringing in a part here and there according to the object He has in view. The great feature of Luke's Gospel, which runs through it from beginning to end, being its moral aim, we can perfectly understand how suitable it was that, if there were circumstances in Christ's life which were a sort of practical comment on His discourse, there you should have the discourse and the facts put together.

Now, as to the discourse itself, the Lord here clearly speaks as the Messiah, the Prophet-King of the Jews. But besides, all through you will find that the discourse supposes the rejection of the King. It is not brought clearly out yet, but this is what underlies it all. The King has the sense of the true state of the people, who had no heart for Him. Hence there is a certain tinge of sorrow that runs through it. That must ever characterize real godliness in the world as it is: a strange thing for Israel, and specially strange in the lips of the King, of One possessed of such power that, had it been a question of

using His resources, He could have changed all in a moment. The miracles which accompanied His steps proved that there was nothing beyond His reach, if it were only a question of Himself. But you will find in all the ways of God that while He always makes good His counsels — so that if He predicts a kingdom and takes it in hand to set it up He will certainly accomplish it — nevertheless, He first presents the thought to man, to Israel, because they were His chosen race. Man has thus the responsibility of receiving or rejecting that which is the mind of God, before grace and power give it effect. But man always fails, no matter what God's purpose may be. His purpose is good, it is holy, and true; it exalts God but abases the sinner: this is enough for man. He feels that he is made nothing of, and he rejects whatever does not gratify his vanity. Man invariably sets himself against the thoughts of God: consequently there is pain and sorrow — rejection of God Himself. And the wonderful thing that the history of this world exhibits is God submitting to be rejected and insulted; allowing poor weak man, a worm, to repel His benign advances and refuse His goodness; to turn everything that God gives and promises into the display of his own pride and glory against the majesty and will of God. All this is the truth about man, so the tinge of it runs through this blessed discourse of our Lord. And as He is now bringing out (which is the great purport of the early part of this chapter) the character of the people who would suit the kingdom of heaven, He proclaims that their character was to be formed by His own. If there was men's dislike and contempt for what was of God, He shows that those who really belong to Him must have a spirit and ways characterized by, and in sympathy with His own. I only say "sympathy" here, because the truth

of a divine life given to the believer is not spoken of in this discourse. Redemption never is touched upon, as it is not the subject of the sermon on the mount. If a person, therefore, wanted to know how to be saved, he ought not to look here with the thought of finding an answer. It could not be found in it, because the Lord is bringing out the kingdom of heaven and the sort of people that are suitable to that kingdom. It is clear that He is speaking of His own disciples, and therefore is not showing bow one alienated from God could be delivered from such a position. He is speaking about saints, not about sinners. He could lay down what is according to His heart; not at all the way for a soul consciously at a distance from God to be brought near. The sermon on the mount treats not of salvation, but of the character and conduct of those that belong to Christ — the true yet rejected King. But when we examine these beatitudes closely, we shall find an astonishing depth in them, and a beautiful order too.

The first blessedness, then, attaches to a fundamental trait which is inseparable from every soul brought to God, and that knows God. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Nothing more contrary to man! What people call “a man of spirit,” is exactly the opposite of being poor in spirit. A man of spirit is one who — such as Cain was — is determined not to be beaten; a soul who would fight it out with God Himself. He who is “poor in spirit” is the very opposite of this. It is a person who is broken, who feels that the dust is his right place. And every soul that knows God must, more or less, be there. He may get out of this place; for although it is a solemn thing, yet it is easy enough to rise again, to forget our right place before God; it is even a danger for those who have been

brought into the liberty of Christ. When there is sincerity of heart a man is apt to be low, specially if not quite sure that all is clear between his soul and God. But when full relief is brought to his spirit, when he knows the fulness and certainty of redemption in Christ Jesus, if then he look away from Jesus and take his place among men, there you will have the old spirit revived, the spirit of man in its worst form — so terrible is the effect of a departure from God in order to mingle with men. The poor in spirit, first in order, the Lord lays down as a sort of foundation, as being inseparable from a soul that is brought to God: — he may not even know what full liberty is, but there is this stamp, never absent where the Holy Ghost works in the soul — that is, poverty of spirit. It may be encroached on by other things, or it may fade away through the influence of false doctrine, or worldly thoughts and practice, but still there it was, and there, in the midst of all the rubbish, it is; and God knows how to bring a man down again, if he has forgotten his true place. “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (ver. 3). If He is speaking about the kingdom, He forthwith says these are the people to whom it belongs. By the “kingdom of heaven” He does not mean heaven: it never means heaven, but always takes in the earth as under the rule of heaven. You will find that many persons are in the habit of confounding these things. “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” they think means “theirs is heaven.” Whereas the Lord is not referring to heaven, but to the rule of the heavens over an earthly scene. It refers to the scene of the ruling Messiah; those who are poor in spirit belong to that system of which He is the Head. He does not,peak of the Church here. There might have been the kingdom of heaven and no Church at all.

It is not till the sixteenth chapter of this Gospel that the subject of the Church is broached, and then it is a thing promised and expressly distinguished from the kingdom of heaven. There is not in all Scripture a single passage where the kingdom of heaven is confounded with the Church, or vice versa. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This is the primary foundation, the broad characteristic feature of all that belong to Jesus.

“Blessed are they that mourn” is the second feature. There is more activity of life, more depth of feeling, more entrance into the condition of things around them. To be “poor in spirit” would be true if there were not a single other soul in the world; he thus feels because of what he is in himself; it is a question between him and God that makes him to be poor in spirit. But “blessed are they that mourn” is not merely what we find in our own condition, but the holy sorrow that a saint tastes in finding himself in such a world as this, and, oh, how little able to maintain the glory of God! So there is this holy sorrow in the second part. The first is the child of God experiencing the earliest feelings of holiness in his soul; the second is the sense of what is due to God — a feeling it may be of great weakness, and yet of what becomes the honour of God, and how little it is upheld by himself or others. “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (ver. 4). There is not a single sigh that goes up to God but He treasures and will answer it; “Ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves.” Here, then, we have the sorrowing of the godly soul.

But in the third case we come to that which is much deeper and more chastened. It is a condition of soul

produced by a fuller acquaintance with God, and is especially the way in which God elsewhere describes the blessed One Himself. He was “meek and lowly in heart;” and this was what the Lord said after He had been groaning in spirit, for He knew what it was to have a deeper sorrow than we have spoken of, over the condition of men and the rejection of God that He witnessed here below. He could only say “Woe” to those cities in which He had done so many mighty works; and then Capernaum comes in for the deepest condemnation, because the mightiest works of all were done there in vain. And what could Jesus do but groan in spirit as He thought of such utter spurning of God, and indifference to His own love? But at the same hour we find He rejoices in spirit, and says, “I thank Thee, O Father.” Such is the blessed proof of matchless meekness in Jesus. The same hour which sees the depth of His sorrow over man sees also His perfect bowing to God, though at the cost of everything to Himself. Conscious of this, He says, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me: for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” Now, then, I think I may be bold to say that this meekness, which was found in its absolute perfectness in Jesus, is also what the gradually deepening knowledge of the ways of God, even in the sense of the abounding wickedness of this world and of the failure of what bears the name of Christ, produces in the saint of God. For, in the midst. of all that he sees around him, there is the discerning of the hidden purpose of God that is going on in spite of everything; so that the heart, instead of being fretted by the evil which it witnesses and which it cannot set aside, instead of the least feeling

of envy at the prosperity of the wicked, finds its resource in God — “the Lord of heaven and earth” — an expression most blessed because it marks the absolute control in which everything is held by God. Jesus is the meek one, and those that belong to Jesus are trained to this meekness also. “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (ver. 5). The earth — why not heaven? The earth is the scene of all this evil, causing such sorrow and mourning. But now, having better learnt God’s ways, they can commit all to Him. Meekness is not merely to have a sense of nothingness in ourselves, or to be filled with sorrow for the opposition to God here below; but it is rather the calmness which leaves things with God, and bends to God, and thankfully owns the will of God, even where naturally it may be most trying to ourselves.

The fourth blessedness is much more active. “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (ver. 6). Perfect soul-satisfaction they shall have. Whatever was the form of the spiritual feeling of the heart, there is always the perfect answer to it on God’s part. If there was sorrow, they shall be comforted; if there was meekness, they shall inherit the earth, the very place of their trial here. Now, there is this activity of spiritual feeling, the going out after what was according to God, and what maintained the will of God, especially as made known to a Jew in the Old Testament. Therefore it is called hungering and thirsting after righteousness. We learn deeper principles in the New Testament still, which had to be brought out when the disciples were able to bear them.

This closes what we may call the first section of the beatitudes. You will find that they are divided, as the

series of Scripture often are, into four and three. We have had four classes of persons pronounced “blessed.” All the traits ought to be found in one individual, but some will be more prominent in one than another. For instance, we may see great activity in one, astonishing meekness in another. The principle of all is in every soul that is born of God. In verse 7 we enter upon a rather different class: and it will be found that the last three have got a common character, as the first four have.

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (ver. 7). As righteousness is the key note of the first four, so grace is that which lies at the root of the latter three; and, therefore, the very first of them demonstrates not merely that they are righteous and that they feel what is due to God, but they appreciate the love of God, and maintain it in the midst of surrounding evil. Yea, there is something more blessed still: and what is that? “Blessed are the merciful.” There is nothing on which God more takes His stand (as the active principle of His being in a world of sin) than His mercy. The only possibility of salvation to a single soul is that there is mercy in God; that He is rich in mercy; that there is no bound to His mercy; that there is nothing in man, if he only bows to His Son, which can hinder His constant flowing spring of mercy. “Blessed,” then, “are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” It is not only a question of the forgiveness of their sins, but of mercy in everything. It is a blessed thing to hail the smallest sign of mercy in the saints, to take the little, and look for much more. “Blessed are the merciful.” They will find, not that there is not difficulty and trial, but that though they shall know the cost of it, they shall know the sweetness of it; they shall taste afresh what the mercy of

God is towards their own souls, in the exercise of mercy towards others. This is the characteristic feature of the new class of blessing; just as poverty of spirit was the introduction to the first blessings, so mercy is to these.

The next is the consequence of this, as in the former class. If a man does not think much of himself, men will take advantage of him. If a man is bold and boastful and self-exalting, even saints may suffer it (2 Cor. 11). If he does well to himself, men will praise him (Ps. 49). But the contrary of all this is what God works in the saint. No matter what he may be, he is broken down before God: he learns the vanity of what man is; he is content to be nothing. And the effect is that he suffers. Poverty of spirit will be followed by mourning. Then there is the meekness as there is deepening acquaintance with God, and withal the hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

But now it is mercy; and the effect of mercy is not a compromising of the holiness of God, but a larger and deeper standard of it. The fuller your hold of grace is, the higher will be your maintenance of holiness. If you only regard grace, as a wretched selfish being, to find an excuse for sin, no doubt it will be perverted. And so He speaks at once of the simple normal effect of tasting of this spring of mercy. They are “pure in heart.” This is the next class, and it is, I believe, the consequence of the first — of being merciful. “Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.” It is exactly what is proper to God; for He alone is pure absolutely. Thus also He was perfectly reflected in His beloved Son. For not a single thought or feeling ever sullied divine perfectness in the heart of Jesus. In this case He is just telling out what He Himself was. How could He but put His own

characteristics before those who belonged to Him? For indeed He is their life. It is Christ in us that produces what is according to God by the Holy Ghost — that blessed One whose very coming into the world was the witness of perfect grace and mercy on God's part; for we know God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son for it. And He was there, a man — the faithful witness of the mercy and of the purity of God. He, when He came with His heart full of mercy towards the vilest, was yet the very fulness and pattern of the purity of God in, its perfection. "He that sent me," He could say, "is with me;... for I do always those things that please Him." The only way of doing anything to please God is by the cherished consciousness of being in the presence of God; and there is no possibility of this, except as I am drawn there in the liberty of grace and as knowing the love of God to me, as brought to Him in Christ. But this is not revealed here; for the Lord is rather unfolding the moral qualities of those that belong to Him.

The third and closing form of these beatitudes is, "Blessed are the peace-makers; for they shall be called the children of God" (ver. 9). Here we have the active side again, of which we saw an analogy in the closing one of the first four. These go out making peace, if there is any possibility of the peace of God being brought into the scene; and if it cannot be, they are content to wait on God, and look up to Him, that He may make this peace in His own time. And as this peace-making can belong only to God Himself, so these saints that are enriched with these blessed qualities of the grace of God as well as His righteousness, with His active mercy, and its effects are equally found now characterized as peace-

makers. “They shall be called the children of God.” Oh, this is a sweet title — sons of God! Is it not because it was the reflection of His own nature — of what God Himself is? The stamp of God is upon them. There is no one thing that more indicates God manifested in His children than peace-making. This was what God was doing, what His heart is set upon. Here are found men upon the earth who shall be called “the sons of God” — a new title from God Himself.

Then follow two blessings of exceeding interest. They add much to the beauty of the scene and complete the picture in a most striking way. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (ver. 10). This is evidently to begin over again. The first blessedness was, “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;” and the next three were all marked by righteousness. It is the first thing that God produces in a new-born soul. He who is awakened takes up God’s cause against himself. He is, in measure at least, broken down, poor in spirit; and God looks for him to grow in poverty of spirit to the last. But here it is not so much what they are, as what their lot is from others. The last two beatitudes speak of their portion in the world from the hands of other people. The first four are characterized by intrinsic righteousness — the last three by intrinsic grace. These two, then, answer, one to the first four, and the other to the last three. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This does not go beyond the blessed state of things that the power of God will bring in upon the earth in connection with the Messiah. Being rejected, the kingdom of heaven is His with a stronger and deeper

title, as it were — certainly with the means of blessing by grace for the lost. A suffering and despised Messiah is still dearer to the heart of God than if received all at once. And if He does not lose the kingdom because He was persecuted, neither do they. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Persecuted, not merely by the Gentiles or the Jews, but for righteousness’ sake. Do not be looking at the people that persecute you, but at the reason why you are persecuted. If it is because you desire to be found in obedience to the will of God, blessed are you. You fear to sin? you suffer for it? Blessed are they which suffer for righteousness’ sake: they will have their portion with the Messiah Himself.

But now we have, finally, another blessedness. And mark the change. “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you for My sake.” This change to ye is exceedingly precious. It is not merely put in an abstract form — “Blessed are they;” but it is a personal thing. He looks at the disciples there, knows what they were to go through for His sake, and gives them the highest and nearest place in His love. “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you... for My sake.” It is not now for righteousness’ sake, but “for My sake.” There is something still more precious than righteousness, and that is Christ. And when you have Christ, you can have nothing higher. Blessed indeed to be persecuted for His sake! The difference is just this: when a man suffers for righteousness’ sake, it supposes that some evil has been put before him which he refuses. He would have perhaps to subscribe something against his conscience, and he cannot, nor would dare,

to do it. He is offered a tempting bait, but it involves that which he knows is contrary to God. All is in vain: the tempter's object is seen. Righteousness prevails, and he suffers. He not only loses what is offered, but he is evil spoken of too. Blessed are they who suffer thus for righteousness' sake! But for Christ's sake is quite a different thing. There the enemy essays great execution. He tempts the soul with such questions as these: Is there any reason why you should stand up for Jesus and the gospel? There is no need for being so zealous for the truth. Why go out of your way so far for this person or that thing? Now in these cases it is not a question of a sin, open or covert. For, in the case of suffering for Christ's sake, it is the activity of grace that goes out to others. It answers to the last three of the seven beatitudes. A soul that is filled with a sense of mercy cannot refrain his lips. He who knows what God is, could not be silent merely because of what men think or do. Blessed are ye who thus suffer for Christ's name! The power of grace prevails there. Too often, alas, motives of prudence come in: people are afraid of giving offence to others, of losing influence for self, of spoiling the prospect of the children, etc. But the energy of grace, looking at all this, still says Christ is worth infinitely more; Christ commands my soul — I must follow Him. In suffering for righteousness' sake, a soul eschews evil earnestly and peremptorily, committing itself at all cost to what is right; but in the other it discerns the path of Christ — that which the gospel, the worship, or the will, of the Lord calls to, and at once throws itself with its whole heart on the Lord's side. Then comes in the comfort of that sweet word, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you.... for My sake." The Lord could not refrain the expression of His soul's

delight in His saints: “Blessed are ye.... Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.” Observe it is not now in the kingdom of heaven, but” in heaven.” He identifies these with a higher place altogether. It is not only the power of God over the earth, and His giving them a portion here, but it is taking them out of the earthly scene to be with Himself above. “For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” What an honour to follow in earthly rejection and scorn those who preceded us in special communion with God — the heralds of Him for whom we suffer now! We may clearly then consider that these two final blessednesses, the persecutions for righteousness’ sake and for Christ’s sake, answer respectively to the first four blessings and to the last three.

In Luke, where we have these blessings brought before us, we have none for righteousness’ sake — only for His name’s sake. Hence in all the cases it is,” Blessed are ye.” To some it may seem a delicate shade, but the difference is characteristic of the two Gospels. Matthew takes in the larger view, and specially that view of the principles of the kingdom of heaven which was suited to the understanding of a Jew, to bring him out of his mere Judaism, or to show him higher principles. Luke, whatever the principles are, gives them all under the form of grace, and treats them as our Lord’s direct addresses to the disciples before Him — “Blessed are ye.” Even if he takes up the subject of the poor, he drops the abstract form of Matthew, and makes it all personal. Everything is connected with the Lord Himself, and not merely with righteousness. This is exceedingly beautiful. And if we pursue further the next few verses, which give, not so much the characteristics of the people as

their general attitude in the world — the place in which they are set in the earth by God — we have it in a very few words, and strongly confirming the distinction which has been drawn between righteousness' and Christ's name's sake. Also, if you examine the 1st epistle of Peter, you will find this remarkably corroborated there also.

"Ye are the salt of the earth." Salt is the only thing that cannot be salted, because it is the preservative principle itself; but if this is gone, it cannot be replaced. "If the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" The salt of the earth is the relation of the disciples here to that which already had the testimony of God, and therefore the expression "earth," or "the land," which was specially true of the Jewish land then. If you speak about the earth now, it is Christendom — the place that enjoys, either really or professedly, the light of God's truth. This is what may be called the earth. And this is the place which will finally be the scene of the greatest apostasy; for such evil is only possible where light has been enjoyed and departed from. In Revelation, where the closing results of the age are given, the earth appears in a most solemn manner; and then we have the peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues — what we should call heathen lands. But the earth means the once-favoured scene of professing Christianity, where the energies of the mind of men have been at work, the scene where the testimony of God had once shed its light; then, alas, abandoned to utter apostasy.

"Ye are the salt of the earth" — they were the real preservative principle there: all the rest, the Lord intimates, were good for nothing. But, let us note, He gives a solemn warning that there is a danger that the

salt should lose its savour. He is not now speaking of the question whether a saint can fall away or not. People go with their own questions to Scripture, and pervert the word of God to suit their previous thoughts. The Lord is not raising the question whether life is. ever lost; but He is speaking of certain persons who are in a given position; and among them there may be persons who take it heedlessly, or even falsely, and then comes the fading away of all that they had once possessed. He announces their judgment — a most contemptuous one — to be passed upon that which took so high a place without reality.

“Ye are the light of the world.” This is another thing. Bearing in mind the distinction drawn in the series of the beatitudes and of the persecutions, we have the key to these two verses. The salt of the earth represents the righteous principle. This evidently involves the clinging to the eternal rights of God and the maintenance before the world of what is due to His character; but it is gone when that which bears the name of God falls below what even men think proper, and they scoff against what is called religion. All respect vanishes, and men think that the condition of Christians is a fair subject for ridicule. But now, in verse 14, we have not only the principle of righteousness, but of grace — the outflowing and strength of grace. And here we find a new title given to the disciples, as descriptive of their public testimony —,’the light of the world.” The light is clearly that which diffuses itself. The salt is what ought to be inward, but the light is that which scatters itself abroad. “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.” There was to be a diffusion of its testimony around. Man does not light a candle to put it under a corn measure, but on a

candlestick, “and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.” After this manner let your light shine before men, “that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” Mark it well.

We have looked at these two striking sketches of the testimony of believers here below as the salt of the earth, the preservative energy in the midst of profession; and as the light of the world going out in the activities of love toward the poor world; and the danger of the salt losing its savour. and of the light being put under a bushel. Now we find the great object of God in this twofold testimony. It is not merely a question of the blessing of souls, for there is not a word about evangelizing or saving sinners, but of the walk of saints. There is a grave question that God raises about His saints, and this is about their own ways apart from other people. Calls to the unconverted we find abundantly elsewhere, and none can exaggerate their importance for the world; but the sermon on the mount is God’s call to the converted. It is their character, their position, their testimony distinctively; and if others are thought of throughout, it is not so much a question of winning them, as of the saints reflecting what comes from above. This light is what comes from Christ. It is not, Let your good works shine before men. When people talk about this verse thinking of their own works, they are generally not good works at all; but even if they were, works are not light. Light is that which comes from God, without admixture of man. Good works are the fruit of its action upon the soul; but it is the light which is to shine before men. It is the confession of Christ that is the point before God. It is not merely certain things to be done. The light shining is the great object here,

though doing good ought to flow from it. If I make doing good everything, it is a lower thought than that which is before the mind of God. An infidel can feel that a shivering man needs a coat or a blanket. The natural man may be fully alive to the wants of others; but if I merely take these works and make them the prominent aim, I really do nothing more than an unbeliever might. The moment you make good works the object, and their shining before men, you find yourself on common ground with Jews and heathen. God's people are apt thus to destroy their testimony. What so bad, in the way of a thing done professedly for God, as a work that leaves out Christ, and that shows a man who loves Christ to be on comfortable terms with those that hate Him? This is what the Lord warns the saints against. They are not to be thinking about their works, but that the light of God should shine. Works will follow, and much better works than where a person is always occupied with them. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven " (ver. 16). Let your confession of what God is in His nature and of what Christ is in His own person and ways — let your acknowledgment of Him be the thing that is felt by and brought before men; and then, when they see your good works, they will glorify your Father which is in heaven. Instead of saying, What a good man such a one is, they will glorify God on his behalf — connecting what you do with your confession of Christ.

The Lord grant that this, as it is the word and the will of Christ, may be that to which we surrender ourselves, and which we desire above all things for our own souls and for those who are dear to us; and if we see the

forgetfulness of it in any saints of God, may we remember them in prayer, and seek to help them by the testimony of His truth, which, if it does not carry the heart with it, may at least reach the conscience and bear fruit later.

We have seen our Lord's statement of the character, and also of the position, proper to the heirs of the kingdom of heaven. We have found Him pronouncing those "blessed" whom man would not have counted so. But our Lord was the perfect pattern of all this. And what could have sounded more unreasonable, specially to a Jew, than to hear one deliberately and emphatically call those blessed and happy who were despised, scorned, hated, persecuted, yea, thought ill of, and treated as malefactors? No doubt it was expressly for righteousness' sake and Christ's sake. But to the Jew the coming of the Messiah was looked forward to as the crown of his joy — that most auspicious event on which all was to turn for Israel, both as to the accomplishment of God's promises made to the fathers and the fulfilment of the magnificent predictions which involve the overthrow of their enemies, the humiliation of the Gentiles, and the glory of Israel. Therefore, to suppose that the receiving of Him who was the Messiah would now entail inevitable shame and suffering in the world was indeed an enormous shock to their most cherished expectations. But our Lord insists upon it, declaring such only to be blessed — blessed with a new kind of blessedness, far beyond what a Jew could conceive. And this is part of the privileges into which we too are brought by faith of Christ. The instruction of our Lord in the sermon on the mount only comes out in stronger forms now that He has taken His place in heaven. The

enmity of man has also come out to its full measure. The world has joined with the Jews in enmity to the children of God. And so the last book of the New Testament shows that those who take the name of Jews, without any reality, remain to the end the most hostile to all true testimony of Christ on the earth.

In the portion that follows we enter upon a most important subject. If there was this new kind of blessedness, so foreign to the thoughts of Israel after the flesh, what was the relation of the law to Christ's doctrine and the new state of things about to be introduced? Did not the law come from God through Moses? If Christ brought in that which was so unexpected, even by the disciples, what would be the bearing of this truth upon that which they had previously received through God's inspired servants, and for which they had His own authority? Weaken the authority of the law, and it is clear that you destroy the foundation on which the gospel rests; for the law was of God as certainly as the gospel. Hence came in a most weighty question, especially for an Israelite: what was the bearing of the doctrine of Christ, respecting the kingdom of heaven, upon the precepts of the law? The Lord opens this subject (vers. 17-48) with these words: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets." They might have thought so from the fact of His having introduced something not mentioned in either; but "Think not," He says, "that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." I take this word "fulfil" in its largest sense. In His own person the Lord fulfilled the law and the prophets, in His own ways, in righteous subjection and obedience. His life here below exhibited

its beauty for the first time without flaw. His death was the most solemn sanction which the law ever could receive, because the curse that it pronounced upon the guilty, the Saviour took upon Himself. There was nothing the Saviour would not undergo, rather than God should have dishonour. But our Lord's words warrant, I think, a further application. There is an expansion of the law, or δικαίωμα (righteous requirement), giving to its moral element the largest scope, so that all which was honouring to God in it should be brought out in its fullest power and extent. The light of heaven was now let fall upon the law, and the law interpreted, not by weak, failing men, but by One who had no reason to evade one jot of its requirements; whose heart, full of love, thought only of the honour and the will of God; whose zeal for His Father's house consumed Him, and who restored that which He took not away. Who but He could expound the law thus — not as the scribes, but in the heavenly light? For the commandment of God is exceeding broad, whether we look at its making an end of all perfection in man, or the sum of it in Christ.

Far from annulling the law, the Lord, on the contrary, illustrated it more brightly than ever, and gave it a spiritual application that man was entirely unprepared for before He came. And this is what the Lord proceeds to do in the wonderful discourse that follows. After having said, "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled," He adds, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto

you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (vers. 18-20). Our Lord is going to expand the great moral principles of the law into commandments that flow from Himself, and not merely from Moses, and shows that this would be the great thing whereby persons would be tested. It would no longer be a question of the ten words spoken on Sinai merely; but, while recognizing their full value, He was about to open out the mind of God in a way so much deeper than had ever been thought of before that this would henceforth be the great test.

Hence He says, when referring to the practical use of these commandments of His, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" — an expression that has not the smallest reference to justification, but to the practical appreciation of and walking in the right relations of the believer toward God and toward men. The righteousness spoken of here is entirely of a practical kind. This may strike many persons sharply, perhaps. They may be somewhat perplexed to understand how practical righteousness is made to be the means of entering into the kingdom of heaven. But, let me repeat, the sermon on the mount never shows us how a sinner is to be saved. If there were the smallest allusion to practical righteousness where a sinner's justification is concerned, there would be ground to be startled; but there can be none whatever for the saint who understands and is subject to God's will. God insists upon godliness in His people.,Without holiness no man shall seethe Lord." There can be no question that the

Lord shows in John 15 that the unfruitful branches must be cut off, and that, just as the withered branches of the natural vine are cast into the fire to be burned, so fruitless professors of the name of Christ can look for no better portion.

Bearing fruit is the test of life. These things are stated in the strongest terms all through Scripture. In John 5:28, 29 it is said, “The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation,” or “judgment.” There is no disguising the solemn truth that God will and must have that which is good and holy and righteous in His own people. They are not God’s people at all who are not characterized as the doers of that which is acceptable in His sight. If this were put before a sinner as a means of reconciliation with God, or of having sins blotted out before Him, it would be the denial of Christ and of His redemption. But only hold fast that all the means of being brought nigh to God are found in Christ — that the sole way by which a sinner is connected with the blessing of Christ is by faith, without the works of the law — only maintain this, and there is not the least inconsistency nor difficulty in understanding that the same God who gives a soul to believe in Christ, works in that soul by the Holy Ghost to produce what is practically according to Himself. For what purpose does God give him the life of Christ and the Holy Ghost, if only the remission of the sins were needed? But God is not satisfied with this. He imparts the life of Christ to a soul, and gives that soul the Holy Spirit to dwell in him; and as the Spirit is not the spring of weakness or of fear “but of power, and of love, and of

a sound mind," God looks for suited ways and for the exercise of spiritual wisdom and judgment in passing through the present trying scene.

While they looked up with ignorant eyes to the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, our Lord declares that this sort of righteousness will not do. The righteousness that goes up to the temple every day, that prides itself upon long prayers, large,alms, and broad phylacteries, will not stand in the sight of God. There must be something far deeper and more according to the holy, loving nature of God. Because with all that appearance of outward religion, there might be always, as there generally was in fact, no sense of sin, nor of the grace of God. This proves the all-importance of being right, first, in our thoughts about God; and we can only be so by receiving the testimony of God about His Son. In the case of the Pharisees we have sinful man denying his sin, and utterly obscuring and denying God's true character as the God of grace. These teachings of our Lord were rejected by the outward religionists, and their righteousness was such as you might expect from people who were ignorant of themselves and of God. It gained reputation for them, but there it all ended; they looked for their reward now, and they had it.. But our Lord says to the disciples, Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the 'kingdom of heaven."

Allow me to ask the question here, How is it that God accomplishes this in regard to a soul that believes now? There is a great secret that does not come out in this sermon. First of all, there is a load of unrighteousness on the sinner. How is that to be dealt with, and the sinner to be made fit for and introduced into the

kingdom of heaven? Through faith, he is born again; he acquires a new nature, a life which as much flows from the grace of God as the bearing of his sins by Christ upon the cross. There is the foundation of practical righteousness. The true beginning of all moral goodness in a sinner — as it has been said and as it deserves to be often repeated — is the sense and confession of his lack of it, nay, of his badness. Never is anything right with God in a man till he gives himself up as all wrong. When he is brought down to this, he is thrown upon God, and God reveals Christ as His gift to the poor sinner. He is morally broken down, feeling and owning that he is lost, unless God appears for him; he receives Christ, and what then? “He that believeth hath everlasting life.” What is the nature of that life? In its character perfectly righteous and holy. The man is then at once fitted for God’s kingdom. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” But when he is born again, he does enter there. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” The scribes and Pharisees were only working on and by the flesh; they did not believe that they were dead in the sight of God; neither do men now. But what the believer begins with is, that he is a dead man, that he requires a new life, and that the new life which he receives in Christ is suitable to the kingdom of heaven. It is upon this new nature that God acts, and works by the Spirit this practical righteousness; so that it remains in every sense true, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven.”

But the Lord does not here explain how this would be. He only declares. that what was suitable to God’s nature

was not to be found in human Jewish righteousness, and that it must be for the kingdom.

Now He takes up the law in its various parts, at least what has to do with men. Here He does not enter into what touches God directly, but first of all takes up that which flows from human violence, and after this the great flagrant example of human corruption; for violence and corruption are the two outstanding forms of human iniquity. Before the flood even, such was the condition of men: “The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.” Here, in verse 21, we have the light of the kingdom cast on the command, “Thou shalt not kill: and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.” The law took cognizance of this extreme form of violence; but our Lord gives length, breadth, height, and depth to it: “But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire” (ver. 22). That is, our Lord treats as now coming under the same category with murder, in the sight of God, every kind of violence, and feeling, and expression; anything of contempt and hatred, whatever expresses the ill-feeling of the heart; any putting down of another, the will to annihilate others as far as character or influence is concerned: all this is no better than murder in God’s searching eye. He is expanding the law; He is showing now One who looks at and judges the feeling of the heart. Therefore it is not at all a question merely of the consequences of violence to a man, for there might be no very bad effect produced by these words of anger, but they proved the state of the

heart; and this is what the Lord is dealing with here. “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (vers. 23, 24). He is not yet manifesting the Christian in his entire separation from the Jewish system. These words clearly show a connection with Israel — though the principle applies to a Christian; for the altar has no reference to the Lord’s table.

“Agree 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 officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily, I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing” (vers. 25, 26). I believe that Israel were guilty of that very folly — Israel as a people — that they did not agree with the adversary quickly. There was the Messiah, and they, being adversaries of Him, treated Him as their adversary and compelled God to be against them by their unbelief. The position of Israel morally, in the sight of God, was very much the one shown us here. There was a murderous feeling in their heart against Jesus. Herod was the expression of it at His birth, and it went through all the ministry of Christ, as the cross proved how utterly there was that unrelenting hatred in the heart of the Jews against their own Messiah. They did not agree with their adversary quickly, and the judge could only deliver them to the officer to be cast into prison; and there they remain until this day. The Jewish nation, from their rejection of the Messiah, have been shut out from all the promises of God; as a nation they have been committed

to prison, and there they must remain till the uttermost farthing is paid. In Isaiah we have the Lord speaking comfortably to Jerusalem: “Cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” Thus, while we come into His favour now, while we through the grace of God receive the fulness of blessing through Christ Jesus now, yet there can be no doubt that rich blessing is in store for Jerusalem. For God in His mercy will one day say to her, Your iniquity I now pardon: I will make you no longer the witness of My vengeance on the earth. And why is Israel not permitted to this day to amalgamate with the nations? There they remain, kept apart from all other people by God. But God has in store for them His signal mercy. “Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem… for she hath received at the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” This figure we find elsewhere beautifully set forth in the case of the man guilty of blood, who fled to the city of refuge provided by God. And the book of Numbers teaches that there the man abode, out of the land of his possession, till the death, not of the manslayer, but of the high priest that is anointed with oil. The priesthood of our Lord is referred to there. When the Lord has completed His heavenly people and gathered them in where they do not need the activity of His intercession; when we are in the full results of all that Christ has wrought for us, the High Priest shall then take His place on His own throne. Then will be the termination of His present heavenly priesthood, and blood-guilty Israel will return to the land of their possession. I have no doubt that this is the just application of that beautiful type. I cannot understand what proper interpretation there could be of the death of the high priest anointed with oil, if you appropriate it

to a Christian now; but apply it to the Jew, and nothing is plainer. Christ will terminate that character of priesthood that He is engaged in for us now, and will enter on a new form of blessing for Israel.

But there is another thing besides violence: there is the corrupt element in the heart of man — the heart lusting for that which it has not. This is taken up in the next word of our Lord: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee… And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (vers. 27-30). That is, whatever in our walk, or in our ways, or in our service, whatever it might be that exposes a soul to the danger of yielding to these unholy feelings, should never be spared, but departed from at any cost. There must be the excision of everything that is hurtful to the soul; the members of the body, such as the eye desiring and the hand which would take, being used as showing the various ways in which the heart might be entangled. The cutting off of these members sets forth a heart thoroughly exercised in self-judgment; not prompted to excuse itself by saying that it had not actually committed the sin, but whatever exposed to it must be given up.

The Lord then denounces the easy dissolution of the tie of marriage: “It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his

wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (vers. 31, 32). Thus our Lord shows that though there might be serious difficulties, still this human relationship receives the strong sanction of God's ordinance. Though an earthly relationship, the light of heaven is thrown upon it, the sanctity of marriage held up, and the possibility of allowing anything to interfere with its holiness entirely put down by Christ, save only where there was that which interrupted it in the sight of God, in which case the act of separation would be only a declaration of its being already actually broken.

The next case (vers. 33-37) brings us into a different order of things: it is the use of the name of the Lord. Here the reference is not a judicial oath, i.e., an oath administered by a magistrate. In some countries this might savour. of heathenism or popery, and no Christian ought to take such an oath. But if the declaration be simply God's authority, introduced by the magistrate to declare the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, I do not see that the Lord in any wise absolves the Christian's obligation to this. But the matter here relates to communication between man and man. "Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black." They were simply the asseverations of common life among the Jews. If our Lord had meant to forbid the Christian from taking judicial oaths, would He not have instanced the oath that was usual in the courts of those days? But the oaths that He brings before us were what

the Jews were in the habit of using when their word was questioned by their fellow-men, not what was employed before the magistrate. So far from thinking that a Christian is doing right in refusing a judicial oath, I believe he is doing wrong not to take it when the magistrate requires his testimony, when there is nothing to offend conscience in the form of the oath. If the magistrate does not acknowledge God in the oath, still the Christian is bound to acknowledge God in the magistrate, who is, to the Christian, a servant of God in the outward things of this world. Even the Assyrian was the rod of God, all the while that he thought only of carrying out his own purposes against Israel. Much more the magistrate, let him be who or what he may, represents the truth of God's external authority in the world, and the Christian ought to respect this, more by far than the men of the world; and therefore the oath, which simply demands the truth on ground of that authority, is a holy thing and not to be refused. The Christian, doubtless, has no business with prosecuting another himself. On the contrary, he owes it to Christ and His grace to let the world, if it will, abuse him — he may protest by word against it, and then leave it with the Lord. When our Lord Himself was dealt with unrighteously, He convicts the person of it, and there it ends, as man would think, for ever. There is no such thing as seeking to get present reparation of His wrongs. So should it be with Christians. There may be the moral conviction of those that do the wrong, but the taking it patiently is acceptable with God.

There is no way in which the Christian so shows how much he is above the world, as when he seeks not the world's vindication in anything. If we belong to the

world, we ought all to be volunteers. If the world is our home, a man is called upon to do battle for it. But for the Christian this world is not the scene of his interests, and why fight for what does not belong to him? If a Christian fight in and with the world (save his own spiritual warfare), he is out of his place. It is the duty of men, as such, to repel wrong; and if the Lord uses the world in order to put down revolution and make peace, the Christian may well look up and give thanks. It is a great mercy. But the truth which the believer has to get firmly settled in his own soul, is that "they are not of the world." To what measure are they not of the world? "They are not of the world even as I am not of the world." In John 17, where our Lord repeats this wondrous word, He speaks in view of going to heaven, as if He were no longer on earth at all. Thus, in the spirit of one away from the world, He says, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." A little before He had said, "Now I am no more in the world." His going up to heaven is what gives its character to the Christian and to the Church. A Christian is not merely a believer, but a believer called to the enjoyment of Christ while He is in heaven. And, as Christ our Head is out of the world, so the Christian is in spirit lifted above the world, and is to show the strength of his faith as above his mere natural feeling. Nothing makes a man look so foolish as having no side in this world. Christians do not like to be nonentities; they are apt, one way or another, to wish their influence to be felt. But the Lord delivers from this.

It is below our calling, then, to indulge in affirmations beyond the simple statements of truth. "Let your communication be, Yea, yea; nay, nay, for whatsoever is

more than these cometh of evil" (ver. 37). It is worthy of note, as a practical proof of the distinction here drawn, how our Lord acted when He was before the high priest. He was silent till the high priest put the oath to Him; then at once he answers. Who can doubt that He shows us the right pattern there?

Our Lord comes next to the case of any practical injury that may be done us. It is not that it is wrong for a man to punish according to the injury that has been inflicted upon another. "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" is perfectly righteous; but our Lord intimates that we ought to be much more than righteous, we ought to be gracious; and He presses this as the climax of this part of the discourse. First, He had strengthened the righteousness of the law, extended its depths, and put aside its license; now He goes further. He shows that there is a principle in His own ways and life which teaches the Christian that he is not to seek retaliation. "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." It is clear the Lord has no reference here to what governments have to do. The New Testament is written for the Christian, for that which has a separate existence and a peculiar calling in the midst of earthly systems and peoples. It belongs to those who are heavenly while they are walking upon earth. We become such by the reception of Christ, and to such the Lord says, "Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Personal injury is meant here. The evil done may be ever so undeserved, but it has to be overcome with good. Show that you are willing to take even more for Christ's sake. I 'And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take

away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." There the law' is evoked: that is, a man lays a claim, perhaps falsely, to one part of your clothing, and if he will "sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." Here it seems not exactly a man appealing to the law, but the public officers themselves. "And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." The great principle our Lord marks in this — whether it is human violence, or the law ever so hardly or wrongly applied, — that while, according to the law, you might go one step, according to the gospel you would go two. Grace does twice as much as the law, whatever may be the point in hand. It was never intended in anywise to supplant obligations or to lower responsibilities, but, on the contrary, to give power and force to everything that is righteous in the sight of God. The law might say, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth;" here there is not only the endurance of that which is positively wrong, but grace that gives more than is asked. "The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." And this is one way of practically showing how far we value grace. It is not a question of the mere letter of our Lord's words. If you were to limit it merely to a blow on the face it would be a very poor thing; but the word of Christ is that which conveys to me the spirit that pleases God, and gives me the reality of grace. And grace is not the vindication of self nor the punishment of a wrong, but the endurance of evil and the triumph of good over it. Christ is speaking of what a Christian has to put up with from the world through which he passes. He is to receive tribulation as the discipline which God sees to be good for his soul; the great spectacle before men and angels — that there are men on this earth who are allowed and

rejoice to suffer for Christ, because they have learned to give up their own will, to sacrifice their own rights, and to suffer wrongfully, looking onward to the day when the Lord will own whatever has been their sorrow for His sake, and when all evil shall be judged most solemnly at His appearing and kingdom.

Our Lord says, in verse 42, “Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.” It is an example of a great general principle that the Lord is insisting upon; as He had laid bare the character of violence, so here of another thing — the solicitation that addresses itself to the kindness of heart of a Christian. “Give to him that asketh thee.” Most certainly this is, a comely and a gracious thing; but it is perfectly plain the Lord is not pressing upon His people that the thing be done heedlessly, nor as a mere gratification of their feelings, but with a conscience towards God. Supposing a person came to ask you for something, and you have reason to think that he would spend it improperly, you must limit it. Why not? He might say to you, Did not the Lord enjoin, “Give to him that asketh thee?” Certainly; but the Lord has given certain other words by which I judge as to the propriety of giving in each particular case. The asker might be going to do what I am sure would be absurd or wrong; am I still to give? or is not another principle introduced, namely, due discrimination? Perhaps he that asks has plans of his own which I believe to be worldly: am I to gratify his worldliness? What the Lord has in view is real need; and as there was wont to be great indifference to this among the Jews, as indeed such is apt to be everywhere, the Lord not merely insists upon the Christian helping his brother, but takes the broadest

ground in urging generous giving; not, of course, for anything we may get by it, but out of love according to God.

“Give to him that asketh thee.” We all know there are those who would impose. This shuts up and often hinders pity; and it may oftener still be an excuse for not showing pity. The Lord is guarding against the snare, and shows the great moral value, for our own souls and for the glory of God, of habitual, considerate, ungrudging kindness towards the distressed in this world. Not that I am always to give what a person asks, for he may seek something foolish; but still “Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.” Do you count up how often you have been deceived? Even then why be sore? You are entitled, at the word of Jesus, to do it as unto your Father. The receiver of your bounty may apply it to a bad use: that is his responsibility. I am bound to cultivate unsuspicious generosity, and this quite independent of mere friendship. Even the publicans and sinners are kind to those who are kind to them; but what ought a Christian to be? Christ determines the position, conduct and spirit of the Christian. As He was a sufferer, they are not to resist evil. If there was need, the Lord’s heart went out to it. They might turn His love against Himself, and use the gifts of His grace for their own purposes, like the man who was healed, heedless of the Lord’s warning and the sense of His benefits. But the Lord,, perfectly knowing it all, goes on steadfastly in His path of doing good, not in the mere vague thought of benevolence to man, but in the holy service of His Father.

But now a word as to what follows. It is the very pith and essence of that which concerns our relation towards others here below; the great active principle from which all right conduct flows. This is the question of the true character and limits of love. “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy” (ver. 43). This was the expression that the Jews drew from the general tenor of the law. There had been the sanction of God for the extermination of their enemies; and from that they drew the principle, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.” Here was a thing that the law never could teach — it is grace. In a thousand practical instances, the question is not whether the thing is right. We often hear Christians asking, Is such a thing wrong? But this is not the sole question for the Christian. Suppose wrong is done him; what is to be his feeling then? If there is enmity to him in another, what is he to cherish in his own heart? “Love your enemies… do good to them that hate you… that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven;” thus they show in practical ways that they belong to such a parentage, “For He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.… Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (vers. 44-48).

This has no reference to the question of whether there is sin in our nature or not. There is always the evil principle in a man as long as he lives here below. But what the Lord insists on is this: Our Father is the perfect pattern in His ways with His enemies now, and He calls

upon us to be thorough in that same grace and love in which our Father deals. It is in pointed contrast with the Jew, or with anything that had been enjoined before. Abraham was not called to walk in this way. He was, I believe, justified in arming his servants for the recovery of Lot; ‘as were the Israelites in taking up the sword against the Canaanites. But we are called on (as a rule of Christian life, as that which governs our thoughts and feelings and ways) to walk on the principle of gracious long-suffering. We are in the midst of the enemies of Christ, of our enemies too because of Him. It may not come out at once, nor always. Persecution may pass out of fashion, but the enmity is always there; and if God were only to remove certain restraints, the old hatred would burst out as ever. Nevertheless, only one course is open to the Christian who desires to walk as Christ walked; “Love your enemies;” and this really not by a mere show of smooth ways or words. We know that, in certain cases, to go and speak to an angry person would only draw out bitterness of wrath, and there the right course would be to keep away; but under all circumstances there should be all readiness to seek the blessing of our adversary. To do real kindness to one who has injured me, even if it should never be known by a creature upon earth, is the only thing worthy of a Christian. The Lord thus gives us opportunities of showing love to those that hate us. When the provocation occurs, we should have it settled in our souls that the Christian is here for the purpose of expressing Christ; for indeed we are His epistle, known and read of all men. We ought to desire to reflect what Christ would have done under the same circumstances.

May the Lord grant that this may be true of our own souls, first in secret feeling with Him, and then as manifested lowlily and unselfishly toward others. Let us remember there is no Victory for us but what is an outward reflection of secret victory over self with the Lord. Begin there, and it is surely won in the presence of men, though we may have to wait for it.

Matthew 6

Matthew 6 begins with what is higher even than what we have had. The various exhortations of chapter 5 brought out Christian principle in contradistinction to what was required or allowed under the law. Now the law is dropped: there is no longer any express allusion to it in our Lord's discourse. The first principle of all godliness comes out now in its sweetest shape, namely, the having to do with our Father in secret; who understands us, sees all that is passing within and around us, hears and counsels us, as, indeed, He takes the deepest interest in us. It is the inner, divine relationship of the saint that comes out in this chapter — our spiritual bonds with God our Father, and the conduct that ought to flow from them. Hence, says our Lord, "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them." I take the liberty of altering the word "alms" into "righteousness" (ver. 1), which last a few of the very best authorities support. There are those that differ here as elsewhere, but, at the same time, internal and spiritual reasons confirm the external grounds. Thus, if you use the word "alms" in the first verse, is there not a mere repetition in the next verse? On the other hand, take the word as "righteousness" (so the margin), and all is plain. The context supports it. For

it will be observed in the following verses our Lord divides righteousness into three distinct portions: first, almsgiving; next, prayer; thirdly, fasting. That these are the three parts of the righteous ways of the saint, as viewed by our Lord in this discourse, is evident.

(1) With regard to alms, which was a very practical thing, the principle of mercy comes in, as it might not in all cases of giving. It is a thing done seriously and solemnly, and the heart is drawn out. It is done in the sight of God. The general admonition is this: “Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore” (founded upon this exhortation) “when thou doest thine alms,” which was one branch of this righteousness, “do not sound a trumpet before thee “; alluding to certain ways of notoriety and self-commendation then adopted by the Jews — the spirit of which belongs to men at all times. There are few things in which human vanity betrays itself more glaringly than the desire to be known by almsgiving. And what is it that brings true deliverance from this snare of nature? “When thou doest alms (observe, He now makes it entirely individual), do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly. That is, it is not merely that one is not to blazon abroad what is done, but not to oneself even. Not only another’s left hand is not to know what your right hand does, but your own left hand ought

not. Cutting are the Lord's words to everything like self-gratulation. The grand point is this: that all be done to our Father. It is not a question of duty simply; but our Father's love has been brought out, and this is His will concerning us. He knows what is best, — and we are ignorant of it. We might think to supply the greatest happiness by surrounding ourselves with what we most like; but the letting slip the means of personal enjoyment will open to us fresh sources of blessing. Besides, what we ought to desire is that the alms may be "in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly." We shall find this repeated at every point of what is here called our "righteousness." Room is ever made for the flesh where there is not the cultivated habit of what is done being between our Father and ourselves. Nay, more, our Lord would have us dismiss the very thought into the bosom of the Father, who will not forget it.

(2) We have the same thing as to prayer. The allusion is, it would seem, to the practice that every day, when a particular hour came round, people were found praying in public rather than miss the moment. It is clear that all this was, at best, most legal, and opened the door for display and hypocrisy, It utterly overlooks the grand truth which Christianity brings out so fully, that. to do things for testimony, or as a law, or in any way for others to see, or for ourselves to think of, is totally wrong. We have to do with our Father, and our Father in secret. Therefore our Lord says, "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (ver. 6).

This is in no way denying the propriety of public prayer; but united supplication is not at all referred to here.

As to “the Lord’s Prayer,” it was for those disciples individually who required to be instructed in the very first principles of Christianity. For this is part of what the apostle calls “the word of the beginning of Christ” when he says, “Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection: not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do if God permit.” The apostle allows that all these were very important truths; they are truths that godly Jews ought to have known before redemption was accomplished, but these did not bring in the full power of Christianity. They were quite true, and will ever remain true. There never can be anything to weaken the importance of repentance from dead works and faith toward God. But it is not even said, faith in Christ. No doubt faith Godward always abides; but still, till Christ died and rose, there was a great deal of truth that even the disciples were not able to bear. Our Lord Himself says so. Therefore the apostle tells them, “Leaving the word of the beginning of Christ” (that which Christ here below brought out, and which was perfectly suited to the then state of the disciples), “let us go on unto perfection.” There is no such thought as giving that up; but assuming that as a settled truth, let us go on to the understanding of Christ as He now is, which is the meaning here of the word “perfection.” It is not a better state of our own flesh; neither does it refer to anything that we are to be in a future life; but to the full doctrine

of Christ as He now is, and glorified in heaven — as brought out in this epistle. Christ is in heaven; there is His priesthood; He entered in the power of His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. It is Christ as He is now above; there you have this perfection. In the same epistle he speaks of Christ as “made perfect” through sufferings. He was always perfect as a person — never could be anything else. Had there been any flaw in Christ on earth, He must have been, like the offering that had a blemish in it, incapable of being offered for us. In the Jewish sacrifices, if the animal died of itself it could not even be eaten. So, as to our Lord, had there been the principle of death in Him at all, if He were not the living one in every sense. without the smallest tendency to death, never could He be God’s foundation, nor ours. He did truly suffer death, the willing victim on the cross; but this was just because death had no hold on Him. Every son of Adam has mortality at work in him. The Second Man could say even here below, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Such is the truth as to Christ Himself. While it is perfectly true that Christ was always morally perfect — perfect, too, not only in His divine nature, but in His humanity — absolutely stainless and acceptable unto God; yet for all that there was a mountain of sin that needed to be removed from us, and a new condition to be entered, in which He could associate us with Himself. Though absolutely sinless in Himself, He was made perfect through sufferings; He passed through this course of sufferings into the blessedness in which He stands now as our High Priest before God.

Upon the subject of the Lord’s Prayer I will only make a few remarks now. But again I would notice that it is

entirely individual. Many might unite in saying, “Our Father;” but a soul in his own closet still would say “Our Father,” because he thinks of others, disciples, elsewhere., Yet it is plain that the Lord does not anticipate the use of this prayer, save in the closet and for the condition in which the disciples were. We have no hint that it was employed formally after the day of Pentecost. There were other wants and desires, other expressions of affection toward God, brought out then, into which the Holy Ghost would lead those who were passed out of the condition of nonage by having received Him into their hearts, whereby they could cry, “Abba, Father.” Such is the key to the change, and the New Testament is perfectly clear upon it. (Compare Gal. 3:23-26; Gal. 4:1-7.)

However, let us look at the prayer itself; for nothing can be more blessed, and all the truth of it abides for us. “When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking” (ver. 7). Now it is plain that our Lord does not forbid repetition, but vain repetition. We find our Lord Himself, when He was in an agony in the garden, repeating three times the same words. But vain, formal repetition, whether words read out of a book, or framed sentences of the mind, He does positively forbid. Again, let me press the plain fact, that our Lord here is not providing for the public wants of the Church; nor do we hear that it was so understood. There is not the smallest thought of such a thing after the gift of the Holy Ghost, when the Church was formed and at work in this world. So that while the Lord’s Prayer was given as the most perfect model of prayer, and may have been used as it stands by the disciples previously to the death of our

Lord and the gift of the Holy Ghost, yet it seems plain that afterwards it was not so. The New Testament is, of course, the only test of this. When we come to tradition, we shall find all sorts of difficulty on this as on other subjects, but the word of God is not obscure. In no way does it leave us uncertain as to what God's mind is: else indeed the very purpose of a revelation would be defeated. What then is the permanent use of the prayer? Why is it given in Scripture? The principle always abides true. There is not a clause of that prayer, I believe, but what one might proffer now, even to "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." For it is a mistake to suppose that it puts the sinner upon the ground of prayer in order to acquire forgiveness of his sins. Our Lord speaks of the believer — the child of God, Our daily faults and short-comings we need to spread before our God and Father, as He encourages us to do day by day. It is a question of His government who, without respect of persons, judges according to the work of each; and hence He will not own the petition of one who cherishes an unforgiving disposition toward others, even if they have done us ever so grievous wrong.

The habit of self-searching and confessing to our Father is a very important one in Christian experience; so that this clause I believe to be as true and applicable at the present time as it was to the disciples then. When the poor publican said, "God be merciful to me a sinner," we have another thing as appropriate in his case as this was to the child of God saying "Our Father." Again, when the Holy Ghost was given, and the child was able to draw near to the Father in the name of Christ, you have something different still. The Lord's Prayer does not clothe the believer with the name of Christ. What is

meant by asking the Father in that name? Can it be merely saying, “In His name” at the end of a prayer? When Christ died and rose again, He gave the believer His own standing before God; and then to ask the Father in the name of Christ is to ask in the consciousness that my Father loves me as He loves Christ; that my Father has given me the acceptance of Christ Himself before Him, having completely blotted out all my evil, so as to be made the righteousness of God in Christ. To pray in the value of this is asking in His name * (Compare John 16.) When the soul draws near, consciously brought nigh to God, it may be said to ask in His name. There is not a soul using the Lord’s Prayer as a form that has a real understanding of what it is to ask the Father in the name of Christ. They have never entered into that great truth. Hence, perhaps in their very next petition, they take the place of miserable sinners, deprecating the wrath of God, and still under law. Is it possible for a soul that knows what it is to stand before God as Christ is, to be thus systematically in doubt and uncertainty? It was the case with the Jew; but as a Christian, my place is in Christ, and there is no condemnation: otherwise there cannot be the spirit of adoption, or the exercised function of priests to God. We are made priests to God by virtue of this blessed standing — here upon earth, and we need to exercise it. The conscience is brought to this — you cannot walk with Christ and with the world. And the Christian is properly a man who enters into heavenly thoughts and relationships while he is walking through the world. This is the vocation wherewith we are called. Whether Christians know and do it or not, nothing less does Christ look for from them. “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” This is true from the time that we receive Christ. From that

moment we owe it to Christ, if we would be true soldiers of His, to take our place as those who are not of the world, even as He is not.

This will suffice to show that while the Lord's Prayer always remains inestimably precious, yet it was given to meet the individual wants of the disciples, and that the further revelation of divine truth modified their condition, and would thus lead into another strain of desires, which, in fact, were not then given expression to. It seems to me a happy reflection that it is our Lord Himself who tells us this. "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name." What do I gather from this? That one may use the Lord's Prayer every day, and never have asked anything in the name of Christ. "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy maybe full. "At that day ye shall ask in My name." What day does this mean? A still future time? No, but the present; the day that the Holy Ghost brought in when He came down from heaven. It is this which is connected with that full revelation of truth which is so essential to Christian joy and blessedness, and to the unworldly and heavenly walk of the children of God; and where the one is not entered into, the.other cannot be. There may be vigour of faith and personal love to Christ, but for all that a soul will still savour. of the world in spirit and religious position till he has entered into this blessed place which the Holy Ghost now gives us of drawing near to God in the name of Christ.

I must now pass on to one of the most important practical exhortations which our Saviour gives us in connection with prayer — the spirit of forgiveness. He has known little of prayer who does not know the

hindrances which austerity of spirit brings with it. This was one of the things that our Lord had specially in view. “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (vers. 14, 15). He does not mean that the disciples would not have their sins forgiven in the day of judgment, but speaks of forgiving trespasses as a matter of the daily care and training of God. I may have a child guilty of something that is wrong, but does it therefore lose its relationship? It is my child still, but I do not speak to it in the same way that I would had it been walking in obedience. The father waits till the child feels its sin. In the case of earthly parents, we sometimes do not take sufficient notice of what is wrong, at other times we may deal with things only as they touch ourselves. We may correct, as it is said in Hebrews, “after our own pleasure,” but God for our profit. Our Father always keeps His eye upon what is most blessed for us, but for this very reason He does betimes chasten us. “What son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” If we were not sons, we might perhaps get off; but as surely as we are, the Father’s rod comes upon us for our wrongs, though we may think them little; but though painful for the present, if it be His will, we may be assured that He will make the things that may seem most against us to be unquestionably for us. To maintain the spirit of love, and specially of love toward those that wrong us, costs somewhat; but blessing will be ours in the end, and indeed also by the way.

(3) We now come to the subject of fasting. I believe there is a real value in fasting that few of us know much about. If, on particular occasions which call for special

individual prayer, one were to unite fasting with it, I have no doubt the blessing of it would be felt. There is humbling of spirit expressed in it. There are prayers which are most suitably accompanied by standing, others by kneeling. Fasting is one of those things in which the body shows its sympathy with what the spirit is passing through; it is a means of expressing our desire to be low before God, and in the attitude of humiliation. But lest the flesh should take advantage of even what is for the mortifying of the body, the Lord enjoins that means be taken rather not to appear unto men to fast than to permit any display. For although a true Christian would shrink from putting on false appearances, the devil would cheat him into doing it unless he is very jealous in self-watchfulness before God. “Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (vers. 17, 18).

Then follow the exhortations with regard to the things of this life. And, first, as to the laying up of treasures upon earth. The Lord brings in a principle, not of natural interest, but of spiritual wisdom and freedom from care, which the soul enjoys that does not want anything here below. Supposing there is something that one very much values upon earth, there is proportionate fear lest the thief or some corroding thing should spoil our treasure. Very different is that which the Lord enjoins that we should seek: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break

through nor steal," a most solemn test for examining ourselves by. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (vers. 19-21). We may detect where we are by that which our thoughts chiefly rest upon. If they are heavenward, blessed are we; but if earthward, we shall find that those very things upon which our hearts are set will prove a sorrow one day or another. The Lord traces all this to one grand root — you cannot serve two masters. You have not two hearts, but one; and your heart will be with that which you value most. Everything is thus followed up to its source: God on the one hand and mammon on the other. Mammon is what sums up the raises of the heart of man as to all things here. It may manifest itself in different forms, but this is the root — covetousness. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought [be not anxious] for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on." The great point is indifference to present things, or rather, a peaceful trust about them; not because we do not value the mercies of God, but because we have confidence in our Father's love and care about us. The apostle Paul shows us the most beautiful expression of this when he says, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." He had known changes of circumstances — what it was to have nothing, and what it was to have abundance; but the great point was his thorough content with God's portion for him. This was not a thing that he passed through lightly, but he had learned it. It was a matter of attainment — of judging of things in the light of God's presence and love. The blessing is to be looking onward with this thought: our Father deals with us now with a view to glory; as the apostle adds, "My God shall supply all your need,

according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” How sweet that is! “My God” — the God that I have proved, whose affection I have tasted. I can count upon Him for you as well as for me; and He “shall supply all your need,” not merely according to the riches of His grace, but according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. He has taken you from this world as His children: He is going to have you the companions of His Son above; and he deals with you now according to your place and position then. Whatever is suitable to this great plan of His glory and love, l he Lord will give us to prove the consequence of that.

May the Lord strengthen us, that we may accept this with thankful hearts, knowing that we are not our own masters! The Lord will preserve us from the dangers, the snares, the pains, which our haste or wilfulness in leaving Him out of these outward things brings with it. He shows us in this chapter the exceeding folly of it, even as to the body. He takes instances from the outward world to show how God may be confided in to accomplish His own purposes best. And more than that, He reminds us that these outward things, on which we are tempted to lay such great stress, are only the objects that the Gentiles seek after. A Gentile was a term used in speaking of a man without God, in contrast with a Jew who had God in an outward manner in this world. A Christian is a man who has God in heaven as his Father. “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” Therefore, as our Father knows this, why should we doubt Him? We do not distrust our earthly father; much less then should we doubt our heavenly Father.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” It is not that we are to seek first the kingdom of God and then these things; but seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the rest will come.

“Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.” That is, our Lord prepares us for this, that the anxiety which dreads an evil thing on the morrow is nothing but unbelief. When the morrow comes, the evil may not be there; if it comes, God will be there. He may allow us to taste what it is to indulge in our own wills; but if our souls are subject to Him, how often the evil that is dreaded never appears. When the heart bows to the will of God about some sorrow that we dread, how often the sorrow is taken away, and the Lord meets us with unexpected kindness and goodness. He is able to make even the sorrow to be all blessing. Whatever be His will it is good. ‘Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

Matthew 7

We now come to a very distinct portion of our Lord’s discourse. It is not so much the establishing of the right relations of a soul with God our Father — the hidden inner life of the Christian — but now we have the mutual relations of the disciples with one another, their conduct toward men, the different dangers which they have to dread, and, above all things, the sure ruin for every soul that names the name of Christ if hearing and not doing His sayings. The wise man hears and does. And so the chapter closes. I would desire to dwell a little upon these various points of instruction which our Lord brings before us. Of course it will not be possible to enter

thoroughly into all; for, I need not say, the sayings of our Lord are peculiarly pregnant with profoundness of thought. There is no portion of God's word where you find a more characteristic depth than here.

The point with which the Lord Jesus opens is this. He had before this shown fully that we are to act in grace as children of our Father; but that was more particularly with the world, with our enemies, with persons that wrong us. But then a serious and practical difficulty might elsewhere arise. Supposing that among the wrongdoers were some that bore the name of Christ, what then? How are we to feel about and to deal with them? No doubt there is a difference, and a very weighty one. Still there is a thing that we have to take care of before we touch the question of another's conduct; and that is, to watch against the spirit of censoriousness in ourselves, the habit or tendency to impute evil motives in that which we do not know and which does not meet the eye. We all know what a snare this is to the heart of man, and that it is more particularly the danger of some, through natural character and unwatchfulness as to the allowed habit. There is more discernment in some than in others, and such ought peculiarly to watch against it. It is not that they are to have their eyes shut to what is evil; but they are not to suspect what is not uncovered, nor to go beyond the evidence God gives. This is a most important practical safeguard, without which it is impossible to walk together according to God. People may be together as so many separate units, without any real sympathy or power to enter into the sorrows, difficulties, trials, and it may be the evil, of others. Yet all that has a claim upon the heart of a disciple. Even that which is wrong calls upon love to find out God's way

of dealing with what is contrary to God. For the essence of love is, that it seeks the good of the object that is beloved, and this without reference to self. It may have the bitterness of knowing that it is not loved in return, as the apostle Paul knew, even in early days, and with real Christians — yea, with persons singularly endowed by the Spirit of God. God has been pleased thus to give us these solemn lessons of what the heart is, even in saints of God.

Under all circumstances, this great truth is obligatory on the conscience: “judge not, that ye be not judged” (ver. 1). On the other hand, this principle can be easily abused by the selfishness of man. Were a person going on in an evil course and using this passage to deny the title of brethren to judge his conduct, it is clear that he betrays a want of conscience and of spiritual understanding. His eye is blinded by self, and he is merely turning the Lord’s words into an excuse for sin. The Lord did not, in anywise, mean to weaken the holy judgment of evil; on the contrary, He, in due time, binds this solemnly upon His people: “Do not ye judge them that are within?” It was the fault of the Corinthians that they did not judge those that were in their midst. It is plain, therefore, that there is a sense in which I am to judge, and another in which I am not. There are cases where I should disregard the Lord’s holiness if I did not judge, and there are cases where the Lord forbids it, and warns me that to do so is to bring judgment upon myself. This is a very practical question for the Christian — where to judge and where not to judge. Whatever comes out plainly — what God presents to the eye of His people, so that they know it for themselves, or on testimony which they cannot doubt — they are surely

bound to judge. In a word, we are always responsible to abhor that which is offensive to God, whether known directly or indirectly; for “God is not mocked,” and the children of God ought not to be governed by mere technicalities, of which the cunning craft of the enemy can easily take advantage.

But what does our Lord mean here: “judge not, that ye be not judged?” He refers not to that which is plain, but to what is concealed; to that which, if it does exist, God has not yet laid the evidence before the eyes of His people. We are not responsible to judge what we do not know; on the contrary, we are bound to watch against the spirit of surmising evil or imputing motives. It may be that there is evil, and of the gravest character, as in the case of Judas. Our Lord said of him: “One of you is a devil;” and purposely kept the disciples in the dark about the particulars. just remark, by the way, that it is only in the Gospel of John, which shows us that our Lord’s knowledge of Judas Iscariot was that of a divine person. He says it long before anything came out. In the other Gospels all is reserved till the eve of His betrayal: but John was led by the Holy Ghost to remember how the Lord had told them it was so from the beginning; and yet, though He knew it, they were only to confide in His knowledge of it; for if the Lord bore with him, were not they to do the same? If He did not give them directions how to deal with the evil, they were to wait. That is always the resource of faith, which never hurries, especially in so solemn a case. 1’ He that believeth shall not make haste.”

All is open to God, all is in His hands, and patience is the word, until His time comes for dealing with what is contrary to Him. The Lord lets Judas manifest himself

thoroughly, and then it was no question of bearing with the traitor. While there are certain cases of evil that we are to judge, there are questions that He does not ask the Church to solve.

We have to take care that we go not before God, lest we might find ourselves in detail, if not in the main, against God. We must not break that which is bruised by yielding to personal or party feelings. What a danger this is. The inevitable effect of a judging spirit is that we get judged ourselves. The soul, whose habit is censorious, is universally ill spoken of. “With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.” Then the Lord puts a particular case: “Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” (ver. 3). That is, where this proneness to judge is, there is another still more serious evil — an habitually unjudged evil in the spirit, which makes the person restless, and desirous of proving others to be wrong too. “Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?” (ver. 4). The mote, of course, was but little, but it was made a great deal of, and the beam, an enormous thing, was passed by. The Lord is bringing out, in the most emphatic way, the danger of a suspicious judicial spirit. And He shows that the way to deal rightly, if we desire the good of His people and their deliverance from evil, is to begin with self-judgment. If we really wish to have the mote out of our brother’s eye, how is it to be done? Let us begin with the grave faults we know so little, corrected and confessed, in ourselves: this is worthy of Christ. What is His way of dealing with it? Does He say of the mote in our brother’s eye, Bring it to the judges? Not at all; you

must probe yourself. The soul is to begin there. When I judge the evil that my conscience knows, or that, if my conscience does not know now, it may learn in God's presence — if I begin with this, I shall then see clearly what concerns others; I shall have a heart fitted to enter into their circumstances, an eye purged from what unfits the heart to feel with God about others. "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (ver. 5). This may be found in a believer, in principle; though when the Lord says, "Thou hypocrite," He alludes to the evil in its full form; but even in ourselves, we know it in measure, and what can be more opposed to simplicity and godly sincerity? Hypocrisy is the most hateful evil that can be found under the name of Christ — a thing that even the natural conscience writhes under and rejects. "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

Often and often we find that when the beam is gone, the mote is not to be seen, having already disappeared. And where the heart is set upon the Lord, would we be sorry to find ourselves mistaken about our brother? Should I not rejoice to find the grace of the Lord in my brother, if I discover in self-judgment myself only to be wrong? This, may be painful to one, but the love of Christ in the believer's heart is gratified to know that Christ is spared this further dishonour.

This, then, is the first great principle our Lord here enjoins. The habit of judging others is to be watched against earnestly; and this, too, because it brings bitterness upon the spirit that indulges it, and unfits the

soul for being able to deal rightly with another: for we are set in the body, as the apostle Paul shows, for the purpose of helping one another; and we are all members one of another.

But there is another thing. In watching against hasty and harsh judgment, there might be the abuse of grace. And the Lord immediately couples this with the former: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.” We must carefully remember that the Lord is not here speaking about the gospel going out to sinners. God forbid that we should not carry out the grace of God to every quarter under heaven, because nothing less than this ought to be the desire and effort of every saint of God. All ought to have the spirit of active love going out after others, energetic desires for the salvation and the blessing of souls; for it were a sad shortcoming if it went not beyond souls being brought to Christ. Seeking to grow up into Christ and glorify Him in all things, to know and do the will of God is our calling. In this verse the Lord is not taking up the question of the gospel going out indiscriminately; for, if there be a difference, the gospel best suits those called “dogs”, which, to the Jews, was a figure of all that is abominable. Speaking of thieves, drunkards, extortioners, etc., the apostle says: “Such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

It might be asked, Is not the wickedness of one man greater than that of another? On an earthly platform, one might say, Much every way; but God does not, in saving souls, make these distinctions. So, speaking of

believers from among the Jews, the apostle says they had been “children of wrath, even as others.” There may have been highly moral characters among them. Did this dispose them better towards God’s grace? Alas, where the soul finds a justification of itself in what it is, nothing can be more dangerous. The apostle himself had been an example of this very thing. It is a hard thing for a man who had been building on his righteousness to bow to the truth that he can only enter heaven upon the ground of a publican and a sinner. But so it must be, if the soul is to receive salvation from God through the faith of Jesus.

The Lord, then, is not in anywise restraining the gospel from going out to every quarter; but He speaks of the relations of His own people with the unholy. The believer is not to bring out for these the special treasures that are the Christian portion. The gospel is the riches of God’s grace to the world. But, besides the gospel, we have the special affections of Christ to the Church, His loving care for His servants, the hope! of His coining again, the glorious prospects of the Church as His bride, etc. If you were to talk about these things, which we may call the pearls of the saints, with those out of Christ, you are on wrong ground. If you were to insist upon the duties of the faithful in worldly company, then it is giving that which is holy unto the dogs. There is blessed provision for “the dogs” — the crumbs that fall from the Master’s table. And such is the great grace of God toward us, that the crumbs which fall to our portion, Gentiles as we were, are the best.

Whatever may be the benefits promised to the Jew, the grace of God has brought out in the gospel fuller blessings than ever was promised to Israel. What can

Israel have to compare with the mighty deliverance of God that we know now? The consciousness of being completely cleansed from all sin; of having the righteousness of God for ours at once and for ever in Christ; of present access to Him as Father through a rent veil; and made His temple through the Holy Ghost dwelling in us. As the Lord Himself said to the woman of Samaria, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water." Where Christ is received now, by whomsoever it may be, there is this fulness of blessing, and the well is within the believer. "The water that I shall give hilt shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." Thus we may see how wide and perfect is His grace, while it forbids certain things being thrown indiscriminately among the ungodly. Any act that implies fellowship between a believer and an unbeliever is false. Take, for instance, the question of worship, and the habit of calling the whole round of devotions worship. Worship supposes communion with the Father and the Son, and with each other in it. But the system which, founded on an easy rite which pretends to regenerate all, unites believers and unbelievers in one common form and calls it worship, is casting what is holy unto dogs. Is it not a thinly-disguised attempt to put the sheep and dogs upon the same ground? In vain. You cannot unite before God the enemies of Christ and those that belong to Him. You cannot mingle as one people those that have got life and those that have not. The attempt to do so is sin, and constant dishonour of the Lord. All effort to have a worship of this mixed character is going in the very teeth of the sixth verse.

On the other hand, preaching the gospel, where it is kept distinct from worship, is right and blessed. When the day of judgment comes upon this world, where does the worst stroke fall? Not upon the openly profane world, but upon Babylon, because Babylon is the confusion of what is of Christ with evil — the attempt to make communion between light and darkness. “Come out of her, My people,” says the Lord, “that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” Partaker of her sins is the grave affair with God. It is the acceptance of a common ground upon which the Church and the world can join; when the very object of God, and that for which Christ died, was that He might have a separate people unto Himself, so as to be, by their very consecration unto God, a light in this world — not a witness of pride, saying, “Stand by, I am holier than thou,” but Christ’s epistle, that tells the world where the living water is to be found, and bids them come: “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.”

Where we do not confound the religion of the world with the worship that goes up to God from His people, there you will also have the true line of demarcation — where we ought to judge and where we ought not. There will be active service towards the world with the gospel, but a careful separation of the Church from the world. This is also true individually. Yet persons take advantage of the word of God that says, “If an unbeliever bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go,” etc.; but take care how you go, and for what. If you go self-confident, you will but dishonour Christ; if to please yourself, this is poor ground; if to please other people, it is little better.

There may be occasions when the love of Christ would constrain a soul to go and bear a testimony to His love in a worldly company, yet if we knew how easily words may be said, and things done, that imply communion with that which is contrary to Christ, there would be fear and trembling; but where there is self-confidence, there never can be the power of God.

But now the Lord, having finished the subject of the abuse of judgment and the abuse of grace, indicates the necessity of intercourse with God, and this very particularly in connection with what we have been seeing. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (ver. 7). Here we have different degrees, increasing measures of earnestness in pleading with God: “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (ver. 8). And then He gives them an argument to encourage them in this: “What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?” (vers. 9-11). There is a very interesting difference in the passage that answers to this in Luke 11, where, instead of saying, “give good things to them that ask Him,” it is said, “How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” The Holy Spirit was not yet given. It was not that He did not act in the world, but He was not yet personally imparted, because that Jesus was not yet glorified. Scripture says this expressly. Thus, until the time when He was poured out from heaven, it was quite

right to pray for the Spirit to be given; and the Gentiles in particular being persons that were ignorant about it, this is expressly mentioned in the Gospel of Luke, which especially contemplates the Gentiles. For who can read that Gospel without having the conviction that there is a careful eye upon those that have a Gentile origin? It was written by a Gentile, and to a Gentile; and all through it traces the Lord as Son of Man, a title which links itself, not with the Jewish nation properly and peculiarly, but with all men. This is the great want of man — the Holy Spirit, which was about to be given, and He is the great power of prayer, as it is said, “Praying in the Holy Ghost.” Luke was led to specify that special gift which those that pray would need in order to give them energy in prayer.

But, returning to Matthew, we have the whole passage wound up by this word, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (ver. 12). This is in no way dealing with men according to their ways, but the contrary. It is saying, as it were, “You who know the heavenly Father, who know what His grace to the evil is, you know what is comely in His sight; always act upon that. Never act merely according to what another does toward you, but according to what you would that another should do to you. If you have the slightest love in your heart, you would desire that they should act as children of your Father.” Whatever another person may do, my business is to do to them what I would that they should do to me; namely, to act in a way becoming the child of a heavenly Father. “This is the law and the prophets.” He is giving them exceeding breadth, extracting the essence of all that was blessed there. This

was clearly the gracious wish of a soul that knew God, even under the law; and nothing less than this could be the ground of action before God.

But now we come to dangers. There are not only brethren to try us, but now He says, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (vers. 13-15). There is a moral connection between the two things. One main feature of that which is false is the attempt to make the gate large and the road broad; to deny the special manner in which God calls souls to the knowledge of Himself. How the arrangements in the religious world interfere with this! Take, for instance, the parcelling out of those that belonged to God into companies, as if they were the sheep of man, which people do not scruple to call “our church,” or “such a one’s flock.” God’s rights, His claims, His calling a soul to walk in responsibility to Himself, are all interfered with by such things. We never find even an apostle saying, “My flock.” It is always, “The flock of God,” because this brings in responsibility to God. If they are His flock, I must take care that I do not lead them astray. It must be the object of my soul, in having to do with a Christian, to bring his soul into direct connection with God Himself, to say, “This is one of God’s sheep.” What a change this would make in the tone and ways of pastors, if it were viewed as the flock of God! It is the business of the true servant to keep them in the narrow path on which they have entered.

But there is also the broad-road-going world, who think that they can belong to God by profession of Christ and trying to keep the commandments. There has been the widening of the gate, the broadening of the road, in connection with which the Lord says, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” The true teachers sent from God suffer with the false ones if they are mixed up with the world. Being all bound together for common objects, whether they belong to God or not, those that are really true are often drawn of the rest into what they know to be wrong, And remember another solemn thing. The devil never would be able to accomplish any plan in Christendom if he could not get good people to join the bad in it. Unbelief constantly uses as an excuse, “Such a good man is here “; “The excellent Mr. — does that.” But is the opinion and conduct of a Christian to be the criterion by which I judge? If so, there is nothing I may not fall into; for what evil thing is there that a man, and even a believer, has not done? You know what David had to confess before the Lord. And this is the way the devil takes to keep other persons quiet in evil. The sole standard for the believer is the written word of God; and this is the special security in these last days. When Paul was leaving the Ephesian saints, it was “to God and to the word of His grace” that he commended them. Grievous wolves might enter in among them, not sparing the flock; and of their own selves men might arise, speaking perverse things; but the sole safeguard, as a rule of faith and conduct for the saints, is God’s holy writ.

Mass is the most wicked act of the most corrupt thing under the sun; but if the grace of God could enter there,

and work by His Spirit, spite of the elevated host, who shall put limits? But is this a reason why I should go to a Roman Catholic chapel, worship the wafer, or pray to the Virgin? God in His sovereign grace can go anywhere; but if I desire to walk as a Christian, how am I to do it? There is but one standard — the will of God; and the will of God can be learned only through the Scriptures. I cannot reason from any amount of blessing there, nor from any apparent weakness here. Persons might be allowed to seem very weak for the express purpose of showing that the power is not in them, but in God. Although the apostles were such mighty men, they were often allowed to appear feeble indeed in the eyes of others. It was that which exposed Paul to be thought not an apostle by the Corinthians, though they, of all men, ought to have known better. All this shows that I cannot reason either from blessing that God's grace may work, or from the weakness of God's children. What we want is that which has no fault at all, and this is the word of God. I need it for my rule as a Christian man, and as walking together with all saints. If we act upon that Word, and nothing else, we,;hall find God with us. It will be called bigotry; but this is part of the reproach of Christ. Faith will always appear proud to those who have none; but it will be proved in the day of the Lord to be the only humility, and that. everything which is not faith is pride, or no better. Faith admits that he who has it is nothing — that he has no power nor wisdom of his own, and he looks to God. May we be strong in faith, giving glory to Him!

But, again, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt

tree bringeth forth evil fruit." The Lord does not here speak simply of men being known by their fruits, but of false prophets (vers. 15-20). "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Where grace is denied, the holiness is hollow, or, at best, legal. Wherever grace is really held and preached, you will find two things — much greater care in what concerns God than where it is not equally known, and also greater tenderness, forbearance, and patience in what merely touches man. Winking at sin is one thing, but unscriptural severity is very far from divine righteousness, and may co-exist with the allowance of self in many a form. There are certain sins that call for rebuke, but it is only in the gravest cases that there ought to be extreme measures. We are not left to make laws about evil for ourselves: we are under responsibility to another, even to our Lord. We ought not in this to trust ourselves, but to learn the wisdom of God and confide in the perfectness of His word; and our business is to carry out what we find there. Let the help come from where it may, if we can thus but follow the word of God more fully, we ought to be exceedingly grateful.

Solemn, most solemn, are the words that follow, as the Lord's eye scans the field of profession. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven, Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity" (vers. 21-23). The Lord shows the stability of His word for the obedient heart, from the figure of a

man building upon a rock; He shows also, as none but He could, the end of every one who hears and does not His sayings. But I must not enter upon this now.

The Lord grant that our hearts may be towards Himself! We shall be able to help one another, and we shall be helped of His own grace. Weak as we are, we shall be made to stand. And if through unwatchfulness we have slipped, the Lord will graciously set us upon our feet again.

May He grant us singleness of eye!

Matthew 8

I can well understand a man who received and revered the Bible as the word of the living God, finding himself at fault when he closely examines the Gospels, which recount the Lord's ministry. A casual reader might find no difficulty; but at first, nothing would be more probable than that he who carefully compared the different accounts might be perplexed — I will not say stumbled, because he has too much confidence in the word of God. In comparing the Gospels, he finds that they differ very considerably in the way in which the same facts are recorded in different Gospels. He finds one arrangement in Matthew, another in Mark, and a third in Luke; and yet all these he is sure are right. But he cannot make out how, if the Spirit of God really inspired the different Evangelists to give a perfect history of Christ, there should at the same time be these apparent discrepancies. He is obliged to cast himself upon God, and to enquire whether there be not some principle which can account for these changes of position, and for the different mode in which the same circumstances are displayed. The moment that he thus

approaches these Gospels, light will dawn upon his soul. He begins to see that the Holy Ghost was not merely giving the testimony of so many witnesses, but that while they thoroughly agree at bottom, the Holy Ghost had assigned a special office to each of them, so that their writings present the Lord in various and distinct attitudes. It remains to enquire what are these several points of view, and how they may both give occasion to and explain the variety of statement that is undoubtedly to be found therein.

I have already shown that in the Gospel of Matthew the Holy Ghost has been depicting Jesus in His relationship to Israel, and that this accounts for the genealogy given us in chapter 1, which quite differs from what we have in the Gospel of Luke. It is specially His genealogy as Messiah, which is, of course, important and interesting to Israel, who looked for a ruler of the seed of David. At the same time the Holy Ghost took particular care to correct the narrow worldly thoughts of the Jews, and shows that while He was, according to the flesh, of the seed of Israel, He was also the Lord God; and if Emmanuel and Jehovah, His special work as a. divine person was to save His people from their sins. He may go out far beyond that people and bless Gentiles no less than Jews; but saving from sins was clearly an expectation of Christ that ought to have been gathered from the Prophets. The Jews expected that when Messiah came, He would be the exalted Head over them as a nation; that they consequently would become the head, and the Gentiles the tail. All this they had rightly inferred from the prophetic word; but there was a great deal more that they had not discerned. Messiah is bent upon their spiritual as well as their natural blessing; and

all present hopes must fade away before the question of sin; yea, their sins. Jesus accepts His rejection from them, and effects on the cross for them that very redemption which they thought so little about.

How thoroughly, too, it falls in with the Gospel of Matthew that we should have a long discourse like that of the sermon on the mount without interruption; the whole being given us as a continuous word from our Lord. All interruptions, if there were any, are carefully excluded, so as to bring Him out on the mount in pointed antithesis to Moses, by whom God was bringing in an earthly kingdom; but now it is because He manifests the heavenly King, contrary to everything the Jews were expecting.

The Holy Ghost proceeds in this Gospel to give us the facts of our Lord's life still in connection with this great thought. The Gospel of Matthew is the presentation to Israel of Jesus as their divine Messiah, their rejection of Him in that character, and what God would do in consequence. We shall see whether the facts that are given us even in this chapter do not bear upon this special aspect of our Lord. From the Gospel of Mark it would be impossible to collect it in the same way. In Matthew the mere order of history is here neglected, and facts are brought together that took place months apart. It is not at all the object of the Holy Ghost by Matthew, or even Luke, to give the facts in the order in which they happened, which Mark does. Those that examine the Gospel of Mark with care will find notes of time, expressions such as "immediately," etc., where things are left vague in the other Gospels. The phrases of rapid transition, or of instant sequence, of course bind together the different occurrences thus brought into

juxtaposition. In Matthew this is entirely disregarded; and of all the chapters in this Gospel, there is not one, perhaps, that so entirely sets aside the mere succession of dates as the very one before us. But if this be so, to what are we to attribute it? Why, we may reverently ask, does the Holy Ghost in Matthew disregard the order in which things followed one another? Was it that Matthew did not know the time in which they occurred? Had it been only a man writing a history for his own pleasure, could he not have ascertained with tolerable certainty when it was that each fact occurred? And when he first had published his statement, would anything have been easier than for the other Evangelists to follow, and give their accounts in accordance with his?

But the contrary is the case. Mark takes up a different line of things, and Luke another, while John has a character to himself. On the very face of it we are driven to one of two suppositions. Either the Evangelists were as careless men as ever wrote accounts of their Master, giving different accounts as if to perplex the reader, or it was the Holy Ghost who presented the facts in various ways, so as to illustrate the glory of Christ far more than what mere repetition would have accomplished. The latter is surely the truth. Any other supposition is as irrational as irreverent. For, even supposing that the apostles had written different accounts and had made mistakes, they could very easily have corrected each other’s mistakes; but the reason why no such correction appears was not human error or defect, but divine perfection. It was the Holy Ghost who was pleased to shape these Gospels in the particular form most calculated to bring out the person, mission, or various relations of Christ. The Gospel of Mark proves that the

healing of the leper took place at a different time from what you might have gathered from this chapter — in fact, long before the sermon on the mount. In chapter 1 we have the Lord described as preaching in their synagogues through all Galilee, and casting out devils: “And there came a leper to Him, beseeching... If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean” (Mark 1:40-45). Now, we cannot doubt this is the same story as in Matthew 8. But if we read the next chapter of Mark, what is the first thing mentioned after this? “Again He entered into Capernaum after some days, and it was noised that He was in the house... and they come unto Him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.” Clearly here we have a fact, the cure of the paralytic man, which Matthew does not give us till Matthew 9, after a storm which Mark describes in Mark 4, and after the case of the demoniac, which only appears in Mark 5; so that it is perfectly plain that one of the two Evangelists must have departed from the order of history; and as Mark, by his strict notes of time, evidences that he does not, Matthew must be concluded to have so done. In Mark 3 we have our Lord going up the mountain, and calling the disciples to Him; and there is the place accordingly in this Gospel, where the sermon on the mount would, if inserted at all, come in. Thus, it was considerably after what took place in Matthew 8:2-4 that the sermon on the mount was uttered: but Mark does not give us that sermon, because his great object was the gospel ministry and characteristic works of Christ; and therefore the doctrinal expositions of our Lord are left out. Where brief words of our Lord accompany what He did, they are given; but nothing more.

It may make what I have been saying still plainer, if in Mark 1 we observe further the actual order. Simon and Andrew are called, in verse 16; James and John, verse 19; and straightway, having gone to Capernaum, He entered on the sabbath day into the synagogue, and taught. There we have the man with the unclean spirit: the fact took place a little after the final call of Andrew and Simon, of James and John, The unclean spirit was cast out; “and immediately His fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee. And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon’s wife’s mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell Him of her,” etc. Hence we have positive certainty, from God’s own word, that the healing of Peter’s wife’s mother took place a short time after the call of Peter and Andrew, and considerably before the healing of the leper. Carrying this back to our chapter in Matthew, we see the importance of it; for here the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law only appears in the middle of the chapter. The cleansing of the leper is given first, then the healing of the centurion’s servant, and after that, of Peter’s wife’s mother; whereas, from Mark, we know for a certainty that Peter’s wife’s mother was healed long before the leper.

Looking at Mark again, we find that, on the evening of the same sabbath, after He had healed Peter’s wife’s mother, “they brought unto Him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils.... And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a

solitary place, and there prayed, “which is clearly the same scene alluded to in Matthew 8, and would come in after verse 17. The fact of His going to the desert and praying is not mentioned here; but it took place at the same time. Then, in Mark, we have His going into Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out devils; and after that, He heals the leper. What I draw from this is that, as Mark tells us the very day on which these things happened, we must take him for a witness of their order as to time. When I go back to Matthew, do I find any intimation of the time in which all these events took place? Not a word. It is simply said, “When He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him” (ver. 1), and then we have the healing of the leper. There is nothing to prove that the leper came at that particular time. All that is said is, “And behold, there came a leper,” etc. — an Old Testament form of expression. Whether the healing of the leper took place before He came down, or after, we are not told here. From Mark we infer that the sermon on the mount was given long after, and that the healing of Peter’s wife’s mother took place before the healing of the leper.

Why, let us ask, would it not have suited this Gospel of Matthew to put the healing of Peter’s wife’s mother first, then the leper, and lastly the centurion? — for you will find that in the order of time, this was really the succession. The centurion came up after the sermon was over, and Christ was in Capernaum; the leper had been healed a considerable time before, and Simon’s mother-in-law earlier yet.

But what is the great truth taught by these facts as they are arranged in the Gospel of Matthew? The Lord is met by a leper. You know what a loathsome thing leprosy

was. Notoriously, it was not only most offensive, but hopeless, as far as man was concerned. It is true that in Leviticus we have ceremonies for the cleansing of a leper, but who could give a ceremony for the cure of a leper? Who take away that disease after it had once infected a man? Luke, the beloved physician, gives us the notice that he was “full of leprosy;” the other Evangelists do not state anything but the simple fact that he was a leper. This was enough. Because, to the Jews, the question was whether there was any leprosy at all: if such it was, they could have nothing to say to him till he was cured and cleansed. The Spirit of God uses leprosy as a type of sin, in all the loathsomeness that it produces. Palsy brings out the thought of powerlessness. Both are true of the sinner. He is without strength, and he is unclean in the presence of God. Jesus heals the leper. This at once illustrates the power of Jehovah-Jesus upon earth, and more than that; for it was not merely a question of His power, but of His grace, His love, His willingness to put forth all His might on behalf of His people. For the whole people of Israel were like that leper. The prophet Isaiah had said so long before; and they were not better now. The Lord repeats the sentence of Isaiah: “Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy,” etc., and this leper was a type of the moral condition of Israel in the presence of the Messiah. But, whether few or many, let them only present themselves in all their vileness before the Messiah, and how would the Messiah deal with them? The Messiah is there. He has got the power, but the leper is not sure of His will. “Lord,” He says, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.” We may remember the distress of the king of Israel in the days of Elisha, when the king of Syria sent Naaman to him that he might be recovered of his

leprosy: how, when he had read the letter, “he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?” Only God could do it: every Jew knew this; and this is what the Holy Ghost is desirous of showing. We have had the testimony that Jesus was a man, and yet Jehovah — able to save His people from their sins. But here comes out His presentation to Israel in particular cases, where the Holy Ghost, instead of giving a mere general and historical outline, as in chapter 4, singles out special instances, for the purpose of illustrating the Lord’s relation to Israel, and the manifested effects of it. The leper is the first case, where we have, as it were, the microscope applied by the Spirit of God, that we may see clearly how the Lord carried Himself toward Israel; what ought to have been the place of Israel; and what was their real conduct. At once, when the leper acknowledges His power and confesses His person, “Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean;” when it was merely the question of His will and of His affections, immediately there comes the answer of divine love as well as power: “I will, be thou clean; and immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” He put forth His hand and touched him. It was not only God, but God manifest in the flesh — One who entered fully into the poor leper’s anxiety, yet proved Himself paramount to the law. His touch — it was that of Jehovah. God’s touch! The law could only put the leper at a distance; but if God gives a law, He is superior in grace to the law that He gives. The heart of this leper trembled, afraid lest the blessed Lord should be unwilling to bless him; but He puts forth His hand, He touches him: none else would. The Lord’s touch, instead of contracting defilement to Himself, banishes defilement from the leper. Immediately he is

cleansed. Jesus then says to him, “See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them.” There was no desire that He should publish what Jesus was: God might tell His works. He says, “See thou tell no man; but go, show thyself to the priest,” etc. Nothing could be more blessed. It was not yet the time for the law to be set aside. Jesus waits. The cross must come in before the law could be set aside in any way. We are delivered from the law by the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is the great doctrine of the epistle to the Romans — that we are dead to the law, of course in His death, that we might “be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.” Up to the resurrection of Christ from the dead, there is the most careful guarding of the law. After resurrection, saints passed into another relationship with Him who was risen from the dead. Here we find there was a sedulous maintenance of the claims of God’s law; and it always was so until the cross. Therefore He says, “Go, show thyself to the priest.” Also, had the man gone telling it to every one instead of to the priest, the great enemy might have found means to misrepresent the work, to deny the miracle, to try and make out that he was not the man who had been a leper. Alas! was it the wish of man’s heart to show that Jesus had not wrought such a miracle? But Jesus says, “Go, show thyself to the priest. “Why? Because the priest himself would be the authentic witness that Jesus was Jehovah. The priest that knew the man was a leper before, that had pronounced him unclean, that had put him outside, would now see that the man was cured. Who had done it? None but God could heal the leper. Jesus, then, was God; Jesus was Jehovah; the God of

Israel was in the land. The priest's mouth would be obliged to confess the glory of Christ's person. "Offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them." When had there been the offering of that gift? They had no power to heal the leper, and thus could not offer the gift. So that Jesus had bowed to the obligations of the law, and yet had done what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh. But here was One who was God — God having sent His own Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh." God Himself, and God's own Son withal, He was here working this mighty work that proved His dignity, and He made the priest himself to be the witness of it.

But now we are to hear a different tale; Jesus enters into Capernaum. When, we are not told. It had no connection with the story of the leper; but the Holy Ghost puts them together, because it brings in the Gentiles. We have had the Jew set forth in the history of the leper and the gift Moses commanded for a testimony to Israel. But now there is a centurion that comes and tells about his servant; and this brings in a new kind of confession of the Lord altogether. Here there is no touching — no connection with Christ after the flesh. Hence it is rather the way in which the Gentile knows Christ. The Jew looked for. a Christ that would put forth His hand — a Saviour personally present among them — bringing in this divine power and healing them: as the Scripture had said, "I am the Lord God that healeth thee." And here He was come; but they did not know Him so. And the next witness, that we have brought together in Matthew, but nowhere else, is the centurion; because God would show that the natural children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were going to be cut off. They would not worship

Him as the poor leper did. The testimony to the priest would be disregarded. They become more and more opposed to His claims. God says, as it were, If you Jews will not have my Son, I will send a testimony to the Gentiles, and the Gentiles will hear. Upon the rejection of Jesus by the Jew, upon Israel's refusal of Him who had proved Himself to be Jehovah-God in forgiving all their iniquities and healing all their diseases, what then follows? The door of faith is opened to the Gentiles.

Thus, we have the story of the centurion, which is taken out of its place and put here purposely. And even in the details of the history there are very noticeable differences. You have not the embassy of the Jews in connection with the centurion. This is left out in Matthew, but inserted in Luke. Thus, while Matthew's Gospel gives everything that might be calculated to meet the conscience of Israel, it abstains from giving that which they might have prided themselves on. It was wholesome for the Gentiles that they should hear of the embassy of this good man. He was like the Gentile laying his hand upon the skirt of him that was a Jew, taking his place behind Israel. But his faith goes beyond this; for we find that he comes and beseeches the Lord, and brings out his own personal faith in the most blessed manner. When Jesus says to him, "I will come and heal him," at once his heart is manifest. He answers, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof." For just as he, the centurion, could say to one, "Go, and he goeth; to another, Come, and he cometh; and to his servant, Do this, and he doeth it," how much more could the Lord "speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed?" Jesus had indeed authority over all diseases; but was it merely a question

of His putting His hand upon the leper? Not at all. He had only to utter the word, and it was done. The centurion assumes the grand truth that Jesus was God (not merely Messiah), and therefore full of ability to heal. In short, he looks at Him in a still higher way, not as one whose presence must be connected with the putting forth of power, but as one who had only to speak the word, and it was done. This brings in the character of the word of God, and the absence of Jesus from those who now profit by His grace.

Such is our position. Jesus is away and unseen. We hear His word, lay hold of it, and are saved. This is the beautiful way in which we are here given the different bearing of the Lord on the Jew and on the Gentile; but we learn, moreover, that the blessing would be refused by Israel, and the Gentiles would become the objects of mercy, as it is said here, “Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (vers. 10, 11), that is, many Gentiles shall come. Neither is this all: “But the children of the kingdom” — the natural children that were the seed, but not the true children according to Abraham’s faith, these should be “cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Rejecting their Messiah, the Jews as a nation were going to be rejected. There would only be a line of believing ones; but the mass of Israel should be rejected until the fulness of the Gentiles have come in.

Thus we have here a wonderful view of our Lord in accordance with the general strain of the Gospel of Matthew. We have Jesus proving Himself to be Jehovah-

Jesus, ready to heal wherever there was faith — but where was it? The leper might represent the godly remnant; ‘but as to the mass of Israel, we have their doom pronounced here, and in the very same incident which proves that the grace of God which Israel refused would make a larger channel for itself among the Gentiles, who would partake of the mercies which the Jews rejected. This is just what is here put together in these two stories. Jesus gives proof to Israel that He was a divine Messiah. If they scorned it, the Gentiles would hear. But then there is another thing of great importance, and which shows why the healing of Peter’s wife’s mother is kept in this Gospel till after these events, although Mark gives it before. Mark furnishes the history of the ministry of Christ as it happened. Why does not Matthew the same? Divine wisdom is stamped upon this, as upon everything in the word of God. I believe it is reserved by Matthew for this place because Israel might have the idea that, when the mercy of God flowed out to the Gentiles, His heart might be turned away from them. The maid was not dead, but sleeping: this is the state of Israel now, And as surely as the Lord did raise her up, so surely will He in a future day awaken the sleeping daughter of Zion. We have got better blessing and higher glory now. But it is necessary for the truth of God’s word that Israel should be blessed too; for if God could break His word to Israel, could we trust it for ourselves? Now God positively promised the eventual final glory of Israel on the earth. The only thing needed is that we should not confound these things; that we should not be ignorant either of the Scripture or of the power of God.

In this case we have an incident brought before us which proves that (though the Lord knew the unbelief of Israel and predicted it; and though He knew also that the Gentiles were now to come in by faith) His heart could not but linger over Israel. Therefore, as I think, the Holy Ghost, to illustrate this, brings in here the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. This third incident, then, the healing of Peter's wife's mother, I think we may infer was for Peter's sake, whatever may have been the other reasons. It is a natural relationship, and you will find that the great scene for this is Israel. Peter was the apostle of the circumcision; so that I have not a question that one of the reasons why this event is brought in here is to show that the unbelief of Israel would not finally alienate the Lord's heart. There He was, still healing all their diseases, as was witnessed even to the crowd around the door, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." The Lord, when He wrought a miracle, entered in spirit into the circumstances of him whom He was relieving. If the miracle brought out His divine power, there was also the divine sympathy that entered into the depth of the need that He relieved.

After this, we have the Lord preparing to go to the other side. But this gives occasion for certain persons to be brought out in their true character and ways, and for the Lord to manifest His own. Now when did this happen? This brings out a most peculiar feature of the Gospel of Matthew, and shows how entirely the Holy Ghost was above the mere routine of dates. Look at the Gospel of Luke, and you will find that the conversation with these men, which is recorded here, took place after the

transfiguration. In Luke 9 we are told that after the transfiguration had taken place, the Lord stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem; and then, in verse 57, it is said, “It came to pass, that as they went in the way, a certain man said unto Him, Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head. And He said unto another, Follow Me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father” (Luke 9:57-62). Now, am I too bold in thinking that this was the same incident that we have recorded in Matthew? It is not probable that our Lord should have the same things repeated at different times; nor could we fairly conceive of two distinct persons copying one another so exactly. But mark its importance, if this be so. It took place a very long time after, and yet it is put in here by Matthew. Why? Because it illustrates this — that while the Lord had all this love in His heart toward Israel, spite of their unbelief, there was no heart in Israel toward Him. What was His condition now? He had not even where to lay His head. What a thing for the Messiah of Israel to be obliged to say, when a man offered to follow Him, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.”

This is the first time where He uses the expression “Son of Man.” It is no longer “Son of David.” “Son of Man” is the title of Christ as rejected or glorified. There is no question which of the two it was here. Even His own people will not have Him. And He is going away to the other side — He must leave them. He has done, it now, as we know. But this man proposes to follow Him. The Lord knew all that was in his heart — a mere carnal Jew,

who thought by following Jesus to get a good place with the Messiah. The Lord tells him He had no place to give him. There was not even a nest for the Messiah. What was there for the flesh, offering to follow Christ, to find? The Lord unveils his heart, shows its own deception in seeking something for itself, while Himself had not even a spot which the meanest and most mischievous creature He had made might possess. Had not the foxes their holes, and the birds of the air their nests? But the Son of Man had not even where to lay His head. How could the flesh pretend to follow our Lord? To a disciple who said, “Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father,” the Lord could say, “Follow Me, and let the dead bury their dead” (vers. 21, 22). Mark the difference. Where the call of Christ is, there may be great reluctance, trial felt, and struggling on the part of nature; still the word is, “Follow Me.” When you get a thoroughly carnal man in the presence of the gospel, there is not this backwardness — none of this trial. He thinks it is all beautiful, but it does not lay hold of his soul; and very soon circumstances occur to draw his heart away to other things, and at last the man sinks down again to his own level. But where the Lord does say, “Follow Me,” how often the soul, before or at the time, says, “Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.” Natural relationship had a very serious claim. His father was lying dead: he must go and bury him. People might say, A man must make the burying of his father so urgent that everything must give way to it. Not at all, says the Lord, Christ’s claim ought to be stronger still. If the call of Christ is heard, even as the father lies dead, waiting for burial, we must forego even this. The world may say, There is a man that talks about Christ, and yet does not love his father. But we must be

prepared for this: and if we are not, it is because we do not yet understand the supreme value of our Christ. You will find that natural ties and duties in this world are always apt to come in as a hindrance between Christ and the soul. The claims of nature are continually pressed upon one. But no matter whether it be father or mother, or brother or sister, or son or daughter, where the call of Christ is clear, take care that you do not say, Suffer me to do such and such a thing first. The word of Jesus is, Follow Me, and let the dead bury their dead."

Then the Lord goes. We find Him entering into a ship and His disciples following Him. And thereon follows the history of the tempest, and of the miracle that Jesus wrought in calming the winds and the sea. Now when did this really take place? On the evening of the day when the seven parables of Matthew 13 were uttered, before the transfiguration, but long after the other events mentioned in this chapter. Mark lets us know this positively in the chapter that records the parables (Mark 4) — the very same that are given us in Matthew 13, with this addition, "With many such parables spake He the word unto them, as they were able to hear it; but without a parable spake He not unto them. And when they were alone (when they had entered into the house, as it is given us in Matthew 13), He expounded all things to His disciples. And the same day, when the even was come, He saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side." Then follows the same history that we have here in Matthew 8; and after they come to the other side, there is the man with the legion of devils. There need not be a question that this is the same scene, but brought out in an entirely different connection, and only

occurred a considerable time after its mention here in Matthew.

What follows from this? That the Holy Ghost in Matthew only gives us historical order where it falls in with the special object of the Gospel. All this marks the perfect wisdom of God: and none but God would have thought of such a thing. But how few think of it, or even understand it now. Does it not show the slowness of our hearts to take in the full meaning of the word of God? What is the Lord teaching in these two scenes? We see Him here alone with His disciples. The godly part of Israel are now separated with Himself and exposed to all that the enemies of God could do against them. But it only serves to enlist the power of the Lord for them. Everything is subdued at His bidding. So is it in our own experience. There is never a difficulty, trial, or painful circumstance in which we appear to be utterly overwhelmed by the power of Satan in this world, but that, if our eye is towards Christ, and we appeal to Him, we shall know His power most truly put forth on our behalf. When they realize whom they had in the same boat with them and cry, saying, “Lord save us, we perish,” He rises and rebukes the wind and the sea. “And there was a great calm.” So that the very shipmen marvelled, saying, “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!” The disciples knew it in a still deeper way, but the others were astonished.

But this is not all. It might evince what Christ is for the godly who were with Him. But there were two men, far indeed from the Messiah for they were among the tombs, possessed with devils, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way — just the picture of the most desperate power of Satan in the world. One of

them, as we are told elsewhere, went by the name of Legion, because many devils were entered into him. You could not have worse than this. The power of Satan was stronger than all the fetters of men.

But the Lord is there. The devils believe and tremble. They felt His presence. But the day was not come for Satan to be dispossessed of his title over the world. As yet, it was only the proof of the power to do it: but the full exercise of that power was reserved for another day. I doubt not that our Evangelist gives the casting out of the demons as a witness of Christ's power to deliver the Jewish remnant; and therefore the Holy Ghost, here only, names the two men; as, on the other hand, the possessed herd of swine seems to represent the destruction of the unclean mass of Israel in the latter day.

The history brings out this also — that Satan has power in a twofold way, not. only in the dreadful excesses of those who are completely under his influence, but in the quiet enmity of the heart that could lead others to go to Jesus in order to beseech Him to depart out of their coasts. What a solemn thing it is to know that the secret influence of Satan over the heart, that creates the wish to get rid of Jesus, is even more fatal, personally, than when Satan makes a man to be the witness of his awful power. But so it was then, and so it is that men perish now.

That is the history of the men that wish Jesus to depart from them. The Lord grant us that happy knowledge of Himself, that entering into what He is to us now, which gives the soul calmness and rest in His love, and the certainty of His presence with those that belong to Him:

“I am with you alway, even unto the consummation of the age.” May we know what it is to have Jesus to take care of us, and produce a great calm, whatever may be the effect of the stirring up of Satan’s power against us. The Lord give us to look at Jesus. If it be from our first knowledge of sin to our last trial in this world, it is all a question of whether I trust in myself or in the Lord, 6 A third point, I may add here, of immense moment was to make evident the consequences of His rejection by the Jews, not only to them but to the Gentiles; that is, the change of economy which turned on that solemn fact.

Matthew 9-12

Matthew 9

Whoever attentively examines this chapter with the following one, can hardly fail to see that the proper break is at the end of verse 35, the last three verses forming properly the introduction to chapter 10. What we have in chapter 9, as far as I have understood, is the effect of the presence of Jesus upon the religious leaders of Israel: I believe this is the great subject. Chapter 8 gave us the outline of the Lord's presence in Israel, and its results. That is, it was a general picture; and therefore we saw that the Holy Spirit entirely neglects the mere historical order, putting together passages in the life of Christ that were separated, in point of fact, by months or even a year. There is not here the slightest attempt on the part of the Spirit of God to present them as they happened; but on the contrary, the Holy Ghost goes out of His way for the purpose of culling from different times and places certain grand facts that illustrated the Messiah's presence amidst His people, His rejection by Israel, and what the results of this rejection would be. What we saw was that, first of all, He was proved to be God, the God of Israel — Jehovah; to whom the cleansing of leprosy was merely the question of His will; for even the leper did not doubt His power. "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." None but God could do this. Now none had so strong a feeling about this loathsome evil as a Jew, because God Himself had laid down so carefully the nature and proof of leprosy in His law. For it was a question of hopeless uncleanness — the solemn emphatic lesson of how

horrible sin is, in its effects and in itself. God can cure and God can cleanse: nobody else can. It was not exactly a case of forgiving, but of cleansing and putting away defilement. The Spirit of God reserved the question of forgiveness (which is connected with the rights of God and with His judicial character, as the cleansing of leprosy is more particularly connected with His holiness) till the chapter we are about to look at now. In the first of these chapters (Matt. 8) there was the broad feature that Messiah was there — God Himself in grace, and not acting according to the law, which would have banished the leper outside of dwelling-place and people and His own presence. A most wonderful fact to realize on earth and in Israel that a person was there, as plainly God in His power as He was God in His love! The law merely laid down that which was right, but could give no power, and only condemn the unrighteous. It must make the case of a sinner hopeless, just because it is God's law, for the law can never mix with sin. But here was One who had given the law and yet was above the law. It is evident, indeed, that unless there be some principle in God paramount to the law, there eau be no rescue for the guilty. But grace is that principle. And here was One who showed in His acts and words that He was in nothing more manifestly God than in the fulness of His grace. He touched the leper and said, "I will; be thou clean." The state of this man was just the picture of the true condition of Israel; and what the Lord did for the solitary leper, He was equally willing to do for the whole nation; but "He came to His own, and His own received Him not." Would God then be baffled in His love? If the Jew refused Him, what of the Gentile? They should hear; and therefore we have immediately following the centurion and his servant. But I will not repeat the facts

of chapter 8. In the chapter before us now we have, not the general picture of God's presence and its results in Israel, but its special bearings upon the religious leaders of the people.

We begin again with the Lord's giving a remarkable case of healing; not the obvious case of leprosy, which ought to have struck any Jew, but another equally illustrative. "He entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into His own city" (ver. 1) — that is, Capernaum. Thus we are upon narrower ground now. Capernaum was the place where the Lord lived and wrought His mightiest miracles, and which for that very reason afterwards comes in for the most fearful woe that He could pronounce. This is a most solemn principle. When the day of the Lord comes, the heaviest blow of judgment will fall, not upon the dark parts of the earth, but upon the favoured ones where there has been most light, but alas, most unfaithfulness. For my own part, I do not doubt our own land must suffer in a special measure; but, above all, Jerusalem, and Rome too, to which latter place the most remarkable of all the epistles was written, as laying down the foundations of Christianity, but where there has been the greatest departure. They will come under the judgment of God in a most emphatic manner, not only religiously but civilly. No matter who reigns, or who may be put down, this must be the case wherever, in spite of the special favours of God and the light of His word spread abroad, persons have remained unfaithful, and have even become more lax and superstitious or sceptical. The Lord will remove those that are His before the judgment, and the rest will remain to suffer His just retribution. "As it was in the

days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man."

In this scene the Lord shows the moral necessity for such a judgment. Nor was it merely in the land of the Gergesenes, or of Nazareth. But take the people who ought to have known the Scriptures more than others, whose very profession it was to know and teach them — what was their estimate of Jesus? It is this which comes out in our chapter. "Behold, they brought to Him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer" — a most blessed word, meeting the whole case of the man; a word to touch his affections and meet his conscience. Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. There was comfort for both his heart and conscience. His sins ought to have laid more heavily upon his heart than his palsy did upon his body; but this word met all his need. "And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth" (ver. 3). In this chapter, it is not the scribe in his vain fleshly confidence professing to show honour to Jesus; but the scribes are judging and condemning Him. To their view Jesus was blaspheming when He said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." Awful delusion of man's evil heart. "This man blasphemeth!" And these were not ignorant people, who said within themselves, "This man blasphemeth." "But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk?" And now He brings out a word which ought at once to have told upon the scribes, who were familiar with the Scriptures, where it was said of Israel's God, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy

diseases," and of which they now had an exemplification before their eyes.

This is not the experience of a saint now, though we can take it up in a most blessed sense. But can we say that, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases," is the way the Lord deals now with Christians? Where He forgives a person's iniquities, does He necessarily heal all their diseases? Whereas, here it is evident that the Lord contemplated the union of the cure of bodily diseases with the forgiveness of sins in the same people and at the same time. When will this be? When God takes the government of the world into His own hands. When the One who was crucified will be glorified — not only in heaven, but here below; when that day comes, the outward world, the body of man, and particularly of God's own people Israel, will feel the immediate effect. While we can take the spirit of the Psalms, so far as they apply to our condition now, let us not forget there is much in the Psalms that is not applicable to ourselves.

The forgiveness of iniquities and the healing of bodily distempers, were both promised to Israel, and so the Lord accomplishes both here. He shows that, in His person and by His ministry now in the midst of Israel, there was the witness of the power to do both. That they might know that the Son of Man had "power on earth to forgive sins (then saith He to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house. And he arose and departed to his house." There was a proof of the reality of the forgiveness in the fact that the disease was healed before their eyes. The union of these two things ought forcibly to have struck a scribe. In this

miracle we have the strongest testimony of what the glory of His person was.

This then was the Lord's answer to the blasphemy of the scribes who charged Him with blasphemy. "But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men" (ver. 8). Alas, they did not know that it was the power of God exercised by one who Himself was God. They saw that He was the vessel of the power of God, and this was all. A man might be this, and not be God. He might be pleased to work miracles even by a bad man. So that, while they gave glory to God who had given such power to a man, there was no real faith in the person of Christ. But the great object of the miracle is the bringing out of the true state of heart in the ecclesiastical chiefs of the people. A solemn judgment, to apply any time, begins to dawn with this chapter; and before we have done with it, we shall find that the case is closed, as far as they are concerned. Jehovah-Jesus was intolerable to Israel.; but, most of all, to those who had the highest reputation for learning and sanctity.

The Lord passes from this scene, and sees "a man named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and He saith unto him, Follow Me; and he arose and followed Him." If we compare the Gospels of Mark and Luke, we find that both the palsied man's case and the call of Levi took place long before many of the circumstances that we have already had; but they are reserved for two special purposes in Matthew's account. They are given at the beginning of Mark 2 as they happened in order of time; but the Spirit of God, in Matthew, puts them out of that order for the purpose of giving large pictures, after a dispensational sort, of our Lord's presence upon earth

and its consequences for Israel; and all the facts that would bear upon their blindness for a time and future restoration are grouped together.

Here we see the effect of His presence upon the religious guides. Matthew's call was a most significant one. The Spirit of God led him to give his name here — the name by which he was afterwards known both on earth and in heaven. Matthew accordingly shows the grace of the Lord, spite of the animosities of those scribes against Him, and the form that His grace took in consequence of their unbelief. He goes out and calls Matthew as he was sitting at the receipt of custom. Other people had brought the palsied man, but Matthew does not seem to have manifested faith before the summons of Jesus. It was not Matthew who sought Jesus, but Jesus who called Matthew, busied about the tax, of which he was the licensed gatherer. The publicans were always classed with the sinners, and the Lord goes and calls the publican Matthew as he was in the performance of his office, sitting at the receipt of custom. Obedient to the Messiah's call, Matthew not only follows Him at once, but invites Jesus to sit at meat in the house. "And, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto His disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" It was a positive clear subversion of all propriety and order in the eyes of a Jew. To sit down at meat without the least feeling of contempt for these publicans and sinners was, indeed, strange in the eyes of the Pharisees. What was the Lord doing? He was displaying God's grace increasingly — all the more unbelief broke out from the merely outwardly-religious people: for persons can have

thoughts of God, but not founded upon His word, and may be ever so earnest out of their own minds and hearts, but without either faith or light from God. On the one hand, these men proved their total unbelief in Jesus and His glory; but, on the other hand, God, in the person of Jesus, was going farther in His grace and more counter to the thoughts of these religious people in Israel. He calls Matthew, and He eats with these publicans and sinners; and when fault is found with it by the Pharisees to the disciples, the Lord at once produces that blessed word from the Old Testament, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice” — for “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” He vindicates this call and maintains it, not as an exceptional case, but as a principle.

It was what God was come down to make good upon earth. It was not the law, but grace now. This gives rise to something further, and a very instructive word from the Lord is brought before us here. The disciples were found fault with because they did not fast like the disciples of John and the Pharisees. And the Lord gives this reason for it: “Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?” That is, He shows the absurdity of fasting when the source of all their joy was there. How utterly contrary would it have been to their faith in Him, the Messiah, to submit to this mark of sorrow and humiliation, in the presence of the spring of all their joy and gladness! But there was something deeper than that to be learned. There was not only the presence of One that the disciples understood, and that the others did not, but the Lord shows that you cannot mingle the prescriptions that flow from the law with the principles

and power of divine grace (a most important principle, and the very one that Christendom has practically destroyed). For what has brought about the present state of Christendom? Christianity is the system of grace in Christ maintained in holiness by the Holy Ghost among those that believe. Christendom is the great house of profession, where there are unclean vessels mingled with those that are to honour where principles abound and reign that never came from Christ, and that are adopted, some of them from Judaism, others out of people's own wit, without respect to the Bible. But what the Lord shows is, that even if you take what God once sanctioned under the law, it will not do now. The same God who tried Israel by the law has sent the gospel; and it is the gospel that He is sending now, and not the law. It is grace that we have to do with. It is Christ risen and in heaven that I am in relationship with, and not with the law. I am dead to the, law if I am a Christian. Christendom has forgotten and departed from that; and, arguing from the premises that the law is good, and the gospel also, they say, Will it not be much surer to put them together? The result is, that what our Lord said should not be done, men have been aiming at with the utmost diligence. They have tried to put the new wine into old bottles: that is to say, put the joy-producing grace into the receptacles of legal principles. The Lord has brought in new wine, and He wants new bottles.

The inner virtue and power of Christianity must clothe itself with its own proper forms. The new garments are the due manifestation of the gospel, which totally differs from ways framed according to the law. Legalism is the old garb, and it is despising the goodness of God to merely patch up the old one. And after all, it will never

succeed. The attempt will only make the old worse. This is what Christendom has done. It has tried to mend the old garment with the new piece — to bring a certain measure of Christian morals into the old garment as a sort of improvement upon Judaism. And what has been the result? Besides, there is the pouring of the new wine into old bottles. There is a certain measure of the preaching of Christ, but it is so much in connection with the old bottles! These verses embrace both the outward development and the inward power, and show that Christianity is entirely a new thing, and one that cannot be mingled with the law. If you find a man who thinks he has got some righteousness of his own, you can cut him down by the law. This is the legitimate use of the law. He is really ungodly, and you use the law to prove that he is so. But in the Christian we have one who is godly; and the law, as Paul expressly insists, is not for him. I am not to put the new wine into old bottles, nor the old into new. This leads the Lord to bring out the entire newness of the conduct and principles that flow from Himself and from His grace. And all this was strongly opposed to the thoughts and prejudices of the scribes and Pharisees, who came in afterwards with their questions about fasts. Not that fasting is not a Christian duty (we already looked at this in chapter 6); but then, it must be on Christian principles, and not on Jewish ones.

Now we come to an incident of the deepest interest. A ruler of the synagogue sends for our Lord to heal his daughter, then comes and worships Him, saying, “My daughter is even now dead; but come and lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And Jesus arose and followed him, and so did His disciples” (vers. 18, 19). That was exactly an illustration of the Lord’s attitude

towards Israel. He was there with life in Himself? Israel was like the maid that needed Him; she had no life in her: such was Israel's condition. But the Lord is at once roused, and goes at the call of the ruler. He owns the claim of faith, let it be ever so feeble. The centurion knew that a word would be enough; but this Jewish ruler, with the natural thought of a Jew, wants the Lord to come to his house and lay His hand upon his daughter that she might live. He connected the Lord's personal presence with the blessing that was to be conferred upon his sick child; whereas, we Gentiles walk by faith, and not by sight. We believe in and love one that we do not see. The Jews look for one whom they shall see; and they will have Him in this way. As Thomas, after eight days, was allowed to see the Lord, and bidden to thrust his hand into His side, and see in His hands the print of the nails, so will it be with Israel. "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced." Whereas, we believe in Him on whom we have not looked. So that our position is a totally different one from that of Israel.

Now in this case the Lord hears the summons, and goes at once to raise up the dead daughter of the Jewish ruler. But while He is going, a woman touches Him. While the Lord's errand is to Israel — and so it was, and it only remains suspended — while He is on the way, whoever comes, whoever touches, gets the blessing. No unbelief of scribes, no self -righteousness of Pharisees, ever would or could hinder the Lord in His mission of love. He was about to bring in new principles which would not mix with the law — grace that would go out to all, and would meet the worst; which is plainly set forth by this woman who comes and touches Him. But first of all you have the pledge of the resurrection of Israel; for

we have the warrant of the word of God for looking at the condition of Israel as one of death. Look, for instance, at Ezek. 37, where Israel is compared to dry bones. “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost.... Behold, O My people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves.... And ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land.” So, I believe, in this miracle. It represents, not merely the conversion of dead sinners, but the raising of Israel as a nation. The Lord was refused by the people who had the deepest responsibility to receive Him; but most surely, as He raised up that young woman from the bed of death, so surely will He restore Israel in a day that is coming. But meanwhile, whoever comes gets the healing and the blessing. So it was with this poor woman. The Lord not only gives her the consciousness that she is healed, but lets her know that His affections were thoroughly with her. “Daughter” He says to her, “be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole.” There was at once the word of assurance. The Lord puts His seal upon what her faith had done, though she had done it tremblingly.7 Then, in due time, we have the raising up of the one who was dead, in whom it was not a question of faith, but of the power of God and of His faithfulness to His own promise.

After this (ver. 27) we find that two blind men follow Him: elsewhere only one of them is mentioned; but I believe that both are mentioned here for the same reason as we had the two demoniacs. They cry and say to Him, “Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.” It is the confession of Christ as connected with Israel. They address Him as Son of David. The Lord asked them,

“Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto Him, Yea, Lord. Then touched He their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened” (vers. 28-30). Then came the dumb man possessed with a devil: “And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake; and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel” (ver. 33). I believe that all this is brought together for the same purpose. The Lord was giving type after type, and pledge upon pledge, that Israel would not be forgotten, that Israel would be raised out of death: let them be ever so blind, they would see; ever so dumb, they would speak. Let the Pharisees and scribes be utterly unbelieving and blasphemous, and ready to turn away all from Christ — let it be so now; but death would give way, blindness would be removed, speech would be given to Israel, in a day that was coming. The very confession of the multitude was, that it had never been so seen in Israel.

Let me repeat that in thus applying these miracles of our Lord I am not at all denying the blessing of any part of these for a soul now. But this is no reason to prove that the Lord has not an ulterior view which we ought not to forget. “But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils” (ver. 34). What could be worse than this? Was it not in principle blasphemy against the Holy Ghost? Such is the form which that sin took then. There was the power of the Holy Ghost which wrought in Christ and through Him; and they attributed this power to Satan. There could not be anything more determined than such hostility. They were not able to deny the righteousness of the man, nor the facts of superhuman energy; but they might attribute the power that was entirely above man, not to God, but to the

adversary; and they did so. Their ruin was complete and final. What more terrible! Nothing could convince a man where all these evidences and appeals had been lavished upon him; and the end of it all was that, not the ignorant only, but the wise, the religious, the Pharisee priding himself in the law, the choicest part to man's eye of the chosen nation — even they said, "He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils."

Nothing more is needed. The Lord might send out a testimony through others; but as far as His own ministry was concerned, it was virtually at an end. He sends out the twelve immediately after; but it all comes to the same thing. The Lord is utterly rejected, as we see in Matthew 11. And then Matthew 12 gives the final pronouncing of the judgment on that generation. That sin of which they had been guilty would ripen into blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, and could not be forgiven them, either in this age or in that to come. The consequence is that the Lord turns from the unbelieving race, and introduces the kingdom of heaven, in connection with which He gives us all the parables in Matthew 13. He takes the place of a sower, no longer. looking to gather fruit from Israel, and addresses Himself to the new work in this world that He was about to undertake — which He still carries on to the present moment, though now through the instrumentality of others. So that the beauty of all this arrangement of the Gospel of Matthew cannot be surpassed, though the other Gospels are, for their own objects, equally perfect. Each presents the facts of our Lord's history so as to give a distinct view of Christ's person or service, with the effects of its display; and we ought to understand them all.

May the Lord grant that the effect of looking at these things may be, not only that we may know the Scriptures, but Jesus better! This is what we have most of all to cultivate — that we may understand the ways of God, the wonderful ways of His love, all expressed in Jesus.

Matthew 10

At the close of the previous chapter our Lord, in looking upon the lost sheep of the house of Israel, speaks of them in deep pity as sheep without a shepherd. What the Pharisees really were had fully come out: not but what He knew it before; but the circumstances of their entire rejection of Himself, and their hatred, coming out more and more decidedly, brought up before His spirit the exposure of God's sheep. If their spirit was implacable against Him in whom there was no sin, who was God's own Son, the Shepherd of Israel, what must not be the sorrowful lot of those who had infirmities and failures which laid them open to the malice of those who cared not for them for God's sake, who would have the keenest and most suspicious eye for everything weak and foolish about them! Let us always remember the grace of the Lord, that even that which is humiliating in us draws out nothing but His compassion. I am not now speaking of sin, but of that which is infirm; for infirmities and sins are two different things. We do not want the Lord's sympathy with evil. The Lord has suffered and died for our sin. But we do want sympathy with us in our ignorance, weakness, trembling, liability to anxieties, cares, troubles: in all these things which make us suffer here we do want sympathy; and the Lord has it fully with us. This was also the case with Israel.

Unconscious of their miserable condition, Jesus calls upon the disciples, in the love of His own heart, to pray the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth labourers into His harvest. It was His harvest, and His labourers alone could gather. But immediately after — and this is remarkable — He shows that He is the Lord of the harvest Himself; and He sends forth labourers The next chapter illustrates this, and beautifully evinces the scope of Matthew, who portrays Him as the One who should save His people from their sins — Emmanuel, God with us. Mark the circumstances. This takes place upon His rejection by Israel. His own ministry, full of grace as well as power, we have seen fully exhibited, and terminating in the utter indifference of Israel and the hatred of the religious leaders. Matthew 8 gives us the people, and Matthew 9 their guides, thus severally manifesting themselves.

Now chapter 10 shows that Jesus, as Lord of the harvest, sends forth labourers and this too with full authority and power given to them. But observe, it is still in special connection with Israel; and the Lord is conscious from the beginning of rejection by Israel. Meanwhile it is a Jewish mission of the twelve Jewish apostles to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. I take this quite literally, and not as if it were said of the Church, which is never spoken of as lost sheep; but the sheep of Israel in their desolate condition are most aptly so described. Before the Church is gathered, what we want is a Saviour. We Gentiles were not sheep at all, but dogs, in our Evangelist’s point of view. (See Matt. 15) And after we have been brought into the Church, we are not, and cannot be, lost sheep. Whereas these poor of the flock are spoken of as lost sheep of the house of

Israel. For up to this time the work was not done by which they could be put in the known position of salvation.

Again, when our Lord is sending them forth, it is said, “He called unto Him His twelve disciples, and gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease” (ver. 1). This was peculiarly their mission. Not a word is said about preaching what we call the gospel, or teaching the whole counsel of God; but they were to go with messianic power against Satan and bodily diseases, as a testimony to Israel. They were to declare the kingdom of heaven. “As ye go,” said our Lord, “preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (ver. 7). But the great characteristic feature of the mission was the conferring upon them power against demons and diseases. The appropriateness of this, in connection with Israel, is manifest. It was a bright evidence that the true King, Jehovah, was there, who was able Himself not only to cast out devils, but to confer that power upon His servants. Who but the King, the Lord of hosts, could do this? It was a testimony much greater than if the power had been confined to His own person. The ability to impart power to others (which was what Simon Magus, hoping to profit by it, so earnestly coveted) God here shows to be in His own Son. Now the servants were to be sent out, and in due order — twelve of them, in relation to the twelve tribes of the house of Israel. We find afterward the promise that they should “sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” There need be no question, therefore, that this was a Jewish mission. When the Church was called, God broke in upon the mere Jewish order by calling an

extraordinary apostle, with a special view to the Gentiles — one who was called after Christ had died, and risen, and had taken His place at the right hand of God. Then came in this new work in the calling of the Church, and the apostle Paul became the characteristic minister of the Church, though the twelve had their place too. But at this time the twelve apostles were to be (what Paul was not) the ministers to Israel in testimony of the kingdom of heaven. For, observe, the strictest injunction was given them that they were not to go outside the limits of Israel; not even to visit the Samaritans, nor to enter into the cities of the Gentiles. Their business was solely with the lost sheep of the house of Israel: a positive proof that it means those of the Jews who had a sense of sin, and who were willing to receive the testimony of the true Messiah. With them, their business was exclusively. It is the more remarkable, because in this Gospel we are told that after He had died and was risen, the Lord sent them out to the Gentiles; but then it was on the evident ground that His death had come in. “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.” Christ upon the cross becomes the attractive centre for man, as well as the foundation of all the counsels of God. Now in this case we have nothing of the sort. The Lord’s death is not even referred to. His rejection is brought out, but nothing is said as to the building of a new structure — the Church. There was the waiting for still further rejection before this could be disclosed, as in Matthew 16.

But here the Lord Jesus sends forth the twelve, and commands them, saying, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of

Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses; nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat" (vers. 5-10). That is, they were to go just as they were, with the coat they had upon them, with the shoes they had then on their feet. They were not to provide anything, or to lay up any store as a means of support during their mission. This is not a universal rule for the servants of God at all times. It was a peculiar mission, for a special time, and with reference to Israel only. It was not the gospel of God's grace, but of the kingdom. The two go together now; but then it was not so. Israel did not receive the testimony of the kingdom; an entire change comes in, and the kingdom of heaven, in outward establishment, remains in suspension. The calling of God now to the Gentiles comes in as a vast parenthesis between this message to the lost sheep in Israel and its full accomplishment in the last days. Whatever the Lord commands must be accomplished, but nothing is perfectly fulfilled till the Lord takes all in hand Himself.

Everything that is to be taken up by Christ in power and glory by and by is first committed to man. But man fails everywhere, Israel as a nation breaks down, the Church has become worldly and scattered. All will yet be to the praise of Christ Himself. Thus, no matter what you look at in the ways of God, there is, as a rule, first presenting it to man; it is made to rest upon him to see if he can bear the responsibility and the glory; and he cannot. But whatever man has failed in is destined to rest upon the

shoulders of Christ in the day of glory, and all will then come to perfection, and will shine out in more than pristine brightness, and redound to His glory.

The twelve were sent out on this mission, and instructed to depend upon Christ alone. He would provide for them. They were to announce the kingdom of heaven; and He, the King, would undertake all charges. They were to go with the fullest confidence in Him. Now, although His servants are not to look to the world, or to use human means of acting upon saints, and although they may confidently look to God to provide for them, still they are not put in the same circumstances as these disciples. The difference is strongly marked. Take, for instance, such a command as this: “Into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence” (ver. 11). Is a man going out with the gospel now to ask who is worthy? He seeks the unworthy. But this was a mission to Israel; and Jehovah wanted the excellent in the earth, those whose hearts really desired the Messiah. “And when ye come into a house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.” This is not at all the way of the gospel now. On the contrary, it is peace with God that the servant of Christ is entitled to proclaim to His enemies. The direct bearing of the gospel is toward those who are in misery — the vile and forlorn; because the gospel is the fulness of God’s grace to man who has nothing whatever to give to God. If they are but broken down, feel that they are utterly unfit for God, and that God has provided such a Saviour as His word declares, then we cannot trust Him too fully or too simply. The essence of the gospel is this: That God does not ask me

to give, but to receive. This is the gospel of God — the gospel of His Son; but here, in Matthew, it is the gospel of the kingdom. You will constantly find this phrase in Matthew. This gospel goes out to those that are worthy. If the house were worthy, the messenger's peace comes upon it; and if not, it returns.,,And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet" — judgment would be upon them. "Verily, I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city" — just because they had the messengers of the kingdom coining to them with a gracious message, and they would not receive them.

From verse 16 the Lord warns them of the circumstances in which the gospel of the kingdom was to be preached. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." That is, He calls for prudence, heavenly prudence. There was to be entire holiness in the object and character of the prudence, and free from any just charge of being injurious to men. "But beware of men" — do not suppose that, although you go forth with love in your hearts, you will not meet with wolves. The Jews are plainly intimated. "Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings." While hating the Gentile yoke, they would be quite willing to invoke Gentile authority where it became a question of Christ's followers. The Jews would drag them before the Gentile kings and governors, abhorred as they were. But our Lord adds

this gracious word' 'for My sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles."

Thus God turns the weapons of the adversary against himself. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath Thou wilt restrain." One cannot but feel that such a truth as this, though it has special application to apostles setting out on this mission, most surely remains for us. "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." At the same time He prepares them for most heartless conduct toward them, even from relatives. The brother would know the habits of his brother, the father would know all about the child, and the child about the father: all this would be turned against the servants of Christ. "Ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake; but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (vers. 19-22). "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel," or, as the margin has it, "finished the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come" — a remarkable statement. It recalls the expression that I made use of before, the Church is a great parenthesis. The mission of the apostles was abruptly terminated by the death of Christ. They still carried it out afterwards for a while, but it was terminated completely by the destruction of Jerusalem: the whole thing was ended for the time being, but not for ever. The calling of the Church was then taken up; and when the Lord has taken the Church out of the world to heaven, God will again raise up witnesses to the Messiah upon earth, when the Jew shall

be converted. God has declared that He would give His land to His people, and He will do so, for His gifts and calling are without repentance. God's faithfulness is involved in it, that the Jewish people must be restored to their own land when the fulness of the Gentiles is come in. The calling of the fulness of the Gentiles is the parenthesis that is going on now. When this is over the Lord resumes His links with Israel. They will go back to the land in unbelief. The testimony of the kingdom, which was begun in the time of our Lord by the apostles, will again be taken up until the Son of Man will come. Then "He will send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire.... Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." The Lord will accomplish fully in that day what was committed to man, and which broke down through man's weak or wicked hand. Then everything under the Branch of Israel shall be glorious. This, I conceive, is what goes along with the remarkable expression that they should not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man came. The whole period of the Lord's turning aside to call in the Gentiles is passed over in silence. He speaks of what was going out then, and of what will be resumed in Israel — passing over what is being done meanwhile.

In the latter part of the chapter the Lord gives sweet motives to encourage them. "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord: if they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of His household?" (vers. 24, 25).

He was proving this now, and they would have to feel it in their turn. “Fear them not therefore.” The first motive for not fearing is: I have traversed the same path; do not be afraid. “Fear them not... for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known.” As much as to say: You will understand the reasons and motives of people’s unbelief another day, if not now. Every one that knows the truth and does not follow it, must have a dislike to those who do. As it was with Me, so will it be with you: but do not be alarmed. Be full of good courage, and persevere in the testimony. “What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light; and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops” (ver. 27). He encourages them to the greatest openness and boldness. A second admonition not to fear is on another ground: And what harm can they do? They cannot touch the soul; nor can they even touch the body unless your heavenly Father allows it. “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul.” They cannot injure you, There is nothing which a believer has to dread, except grieving and sinning against God. Therefore He immediately adds, “Rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” A fearful thing is before God’s enemies — the destruction of soul and body in hell!

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows” (vers. 29-31). The special, the minute care of our Father for His own children is drawn from this, that the very sparrow, though so despised and trivial a bird among men, yet cannot fall to the ground “without your

Father.” He might have said, Without God; but He said, Your Father — a father’s love is concerned for his children.

From verse 32 to the end of the chapter, we have the importance of the confession of Christ, and the effects of it in this world. The first great principle is this: “Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven.” We have had the Father’s care; we have now the Son’s confession by and by. The Father’s care we know upon earth, whatever may be the trial. The Son’s confession of us will be in heaven, when all the scene of trial is over.

Then He warns them that the result of their testimony may be very painful — households getting into confusion, members of a family at variance one with another. Be not surprised. “Think not,” He says, “that I am come to send peace on earth.” We know that the Lord can give us peace always by all means: but He is speaking here of the entrance of His testimony, through His disciples, into a world that hates Him. Inevitably, then, the two principles come into collision. It is not that He desires confusion, but it is the natural effect of the knowledge of Christ entering a house where some of its members reject Him.

As it is in the world, so in the house. There are those that believe and those that believe not. “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword.” Dream not that everything is going to be triumphant. The day is coming when the Lord will cause peace to flow as a river; but such is not the effect

of His first coming. It is the badge of war now, because of the opposition which unbelief always creates against the truth. “For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.” The Lord boldly meets the case. I am come to bring in My principle, and it sets child against parent. Now this becomes one of our severest trials — the effect that the testimony of God has upon families. People speak of households being broken up and kindred disunited. The Lord already uses the same words and strengthens us for it. “He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it” (vers. 37-39). He shows that His coming would bring the opposite to a path of ease in this world. Yea, we must make up our minds to suffer trial, rejection and scorn. But then He adds the other side: “He that receiveth you receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me.” There would be those that would receive, as well as those that would reject. “He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet” (that is, as a prophet), if he knew he was a servant of God, and received him as such, in the face of shame and scorn, he should have the same reward as a prophet himself. “And he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man” — other people might call him unrighteous, but he receives him, not as a mere man or friend, but as righteous, and he “shall receive a righteous man’s reward.” He proves that his own heart is right with God.

We show our real state of soul by the opinion we pronounce. Supposing I speak or act unwarrantably against a good man doing his duty, I show that I am not with God in that particular thing. On the other hand, if I have faith to discern what is of God, and to take my part with him in the face of general desertion, happy am I indeed. God alone enables a man to do so. We show where our hearts are by our judgments of and conduct toward others.

“And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward” (ver. 42). It would be the evidence that the Spirit was at work in his soul — his heart drawn out in mercy to, and sympathy with, those who are of God in this world. He should in nowise lose his reward. It is the outward conduct springing from the inward principle. In all these cases it is clearly the Jewish mission of these disciples. I believe we thus get the true character of the chapter and the place it occupies in this Gospel.

The point of view in this whole chapter is, the Lord, as Lord of the harvest, not only bidding them to pray that labourers be sent into the harvest (Matt. 9:38), but Himself anticipating the prayer. “Before they call, I will answer;” and the Lord is acting in the very spirit of that which will be fully true in the last days. He is Himself sending forth the labourers.

In Luke 22:35, referring to this very mission, the Lord asks, “When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing.” Then the Lord tells them now to provide themselves with purse, and scrip, and sword: the very things which they

were not to do before, they were to do from that time. The Lord abrogates what He had before enjoined, as far as the special circumstances were concerned. His goodness and love to them, and their walking in wisdom and harmlessness, would abide; but the peculiar character of this mission terminated at the death of Christ. It will, I conceive, be taken up again by others at a future day: but the disciples actually sent out were soon to be called to a new work, founded upon redemption and the resurrection of our Lord.

Matthew 11

The chapter at which we are arrived is full of interest and importance, especially as it is a kind of transition. What gives occasion for the Spirit of God to bring out this transition from the testimony to Israel to the new order of things which the Lord was about to introduce, is that John the Baptist, in prison because of his own rejection, is found in exercise as to personal faith and patience. While fulfilling his prophetic office, none could be more unwavering than John in his testimony to Christ. But there may be moments when faith is put thoroughly to the proof, and when the strongest may know what it is to be “cast down, though not destroyed.”

Certainly this was the case with John the Baptist. It was not merely his disciples that were stumbled by his being in prison. Infidels ask now, If Scripture be truth, how is it that people do not receive it? Why is it not more widely spread? etc.

We know that at first tens of thousands confessed and followed the name of Jesus in one city alone;. and the moral weight was great, for they walked in superiority to the world. We know, too, how far and wide the power

of Christianity has spread: still, the great difficulty comes up again, and we find that what works in the mind of a sceptic may be found more or less disquieting the believer, because fallen nature is in the believer still; and what Scripture calls “the flesh” is always an unbelieving thing. Hence it came to pass that, blessed as John the Baptist was, yet he sent his disciples with the query, “Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?” Questions seem to have passed through his mind, and a confirmation of faith was wanted. Even a prophet is not beyond Satan’s assault. And here we have this favoured and otherwise faithful man putting such a question, the very last that we might have expected. Instead of answering with the confidence of faith the question of his disciples, if it was such, John sends some of them to Jesus, saying, “Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?” The Lord replies, “Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see… and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me” (vers. 4, 6).

Our Lord’s answer evinces that it was not John’s disciples merely, but himself also that was shaken. These are the two parts of Christ’s ministry — His words and His works, “Those things which ye do hear and see;” the word always having the higher place; the works being what would appeal rather to the senses; whereas the word of Christ is that which deals with the heart and conscience by the Spirit. They were to go and tell John what they heard and saw; and therein we have what the Old Testament had predicted as signs and effects of the Messiah’s power. We have not, I believe, one case of curing the blind before Christ came. It was a miracle which, according to Jewish tradition, was reserved for

the Son of David. He it was who. according to Isaiah 35, was to open the eyes of the blind. The Lord puts the blind receiving their sight as the first outward miracle to indicate that He was really the Christ that was to come; and last, but not least weighty, is “the poor have the gospel preached to them.” What is it but a testimony of the exceeding tender mercy of God that, while the gospel is intended for all, it is especially adapted to those that know misery, trial, contempt in a selfish world? The Lord adds, “Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me.” What a word of warning. A man sent from God for a witness, that all might believe in Christ; and when this very man is put thoroughly to the test, the Lord has to bear witness to him, instead of his bearing witness to the Lord. How constantly do we see man breaking down when tested; but what a blessed thing that we have such a God to go to, if He be only counted on.

But when these messengers departed, the Lord shows His tender compassion and regard for him, and begins to vindicate the same John who had shown his feebleness under suffering and protracted hope. He asks them, “What went ye out into the wilderness to see?” A superficial judgment might have concluded it was but “a reed shaken with the wind” when John sent disciples with his question. But no, the Lord will not allow it. He maintains the honour and integrity of John. He has sent a little rebuke to John privately by his disciples; but before the multitudes He clothes him with honour “But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?” It is in courts that you look for the grandeur of the world. “Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. But what went ye out for to see? A

prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet," because John had a peculiar place and honour that no prophet had assigned to him — to be the immediate forerunner of the Lord, the herald of the Messiah Himself. John not only was a prophet, but the prophets prophesied of John; and the Lord says of him, "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist. "

But mark this word, a striking one, in this transitional chapter, "Notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (ver. 11). What is the meaning? In saying, "Among those born of women there had not risen a greater than John the Baptist," the Lord is excepted. He is speaking of John, not as compared with Himself, but with others. He was the greatest born of women; "Notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." It means clearly that there was a new order of things commencing, in which the privileges that God's sovereign grace would confer would be so great, that the least in the dispensation about to open would be greater than the greatest in all the past. Of course this is not as to anything in themselves; the faith of a weak believer now is not greater than a man's mighty faith in times past; nor is some poor soul, anxious and troubled about his acceptance, in a healthier state than those who could rejoice like Simeon in God their Saviour. Yet the Lord does say that the greatest of those gone by is less than the least now.

"The kingdom of heaven" never means heaven: they are different ideas as well as expressions. "The kingdom of heaven" always means that which, while it has its source in heaven, has its sphere upon earth. It may be applied,

as it often is, to what is going on now; or, as sometimes, to what will go on when the Lord comes in glory, and brings His rule in a manifested form to bear upon the earth. But the kingdom of heaven always supposes the earth as the scene upon which the privileges of heaven are made known.

The Lord Jesus sees Himself rejected; but God, in His sovereign way and grace turns the rejection of Jesus to the introduction of far greater blessing than if Jesus had been received. Supposing the Lord had been accepted by man when He came, He would have blessed man and kept him alive upon the earth: He would have bound the devil, and brought in countless mercies for the creature in general. Still, what would have been all that without the vindication of God in the matter of sin? Neither moral glory nor supreme love would have been shown as they now are. For what could it be more than divine energy barring out the power of Satan?

But the death of Christ is, at once, the depth of man's wickedness and the height of God's goodness; for in the Cross the one proved his utter hatred and iniquity, the other His perfect holy love. It was man's unrighteousness that put Him there — it was God's grace that brought Him there; and Christ risen from the dead takes His place as the beginning, the Head of a new creation, and displays it in His own person now to faith in them that believe; puts them in this place of blessing while they are still in this world struggling with the devil; sheds the joy of redemption into their hearts, and fills them with the certainty that they are born of God — their sins being all forgiven — and they are only waiting for Him to come and crown the work of His love, when they shall be raised from the dead and changed

into His glory. It is true to faith now, and will be true to sight by and by; but it is true always from the time it was introduced. It began with Christ's ascension into heaven, and it will terminate by Christ's descent from heaven, when He will bring in this power of the kingdom over the earth. What, then, has the least believer got now? Look at saints of old. John the Baptist was resting upon promises. Even he, blessed as he was, could not say, My sins are blotted out, mine iniquities are all gone. Before the death and resurrection of Christ, saints could with joy look forward and say, It will be blessed indeed! They might be sure that it was God's intention; but it was not an accomplished thing. And, after all, if you were in prison, you would know the difference between a promise to bring you out and the fact of your liberty when fairly out. This is just the difference. The atoning work is done, and the consequence is, that all who believe are now entitled to say, Sin is no longer upon me in the presence of of God. And this is not true of some Christians in particular, but every Christian should take the place that God gives him in Christ. And what would be the effect of this? Christians would not walk with the world in the way they do.

What I find, then, in the word of God is this: there was a new dispensation about to open, in which the very least is invested with privileges that the greatest could not possess before. And this, because God sets infinite value upon the death of His Son. God puts the greatest possible honour upon the death of Christ.

As an earthly sovereign puts particular honour upon an epoch of special joy to himself, still more faith may expect that God should attach peculiar glory to that work of Christ by which redemption has been

accomplished, through the death and resurrection of His Son.

Now, everything is done, and God can invite souls — not to forget their sins, or turn away their eyes from them; but looking at them fairly and fully before the cross of Christ — He calls upon them to say, “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Knowing this, we must see how entirely evil is the place of a priest now — one man put in a position to draw near to God for others. Every Christian is a priest now. All Christians are not ministers. This is another thing. Ministry and priesthood, though so often confounded, are entirely distinct and different. It is a God-given privilege now, that every believer is a priest of God: that is, he is entitled to draw near into the holiest of all, sin judged, all his iniquities purged away, so that he may be thoroughly happy in the presence of God while he is upon earth. All this is only a part of the privileges of the least in the kingdom of heaven now. And remember this, all the grand prerogatives of Christianity are common privileges. One man may preach, and another may not; but this says nothing about the privileges of the kingdom. Paul, as a servant of God, had something which others had not: a gifted person might preach even without divine life in the soul. Caiaphas might testify, and Balaam too, and both utter true things; and Paul is willing to take such a place, to show that one might preach to others, and yet, if regardless of holiness, be himself a castaway. But this has nothing to do with the blessings I have been speaking of as the portion of believers now.

The privileges of the kingdom are now the universal heritage of the family of faith; the least of them is

greater even than John the Baptist. Great misunderstanding has been shown as to the meaning of this verse. It has been taught that the least in the kingdom of heaven is Jesus Himself! — Jesus, of course, in His humiliation, in His going to the cross. But what misapprehension of the mind of God is there manifested by such a remark. For the kingdom of heaven was not yet come. It was. preached, but not yet actually set up. And Jesus, far from being “the least” in that kingdom, was Himself the King; so that it would be derogatory to His person to call Him even the greatest, not to speak of “the least” in the kingdom. It would be want of reverence, as well as of intelligence, to say that He was in the kingdom at all. It would be more true to say that the kingdom was in Him, both morally, and in divine power.

“If I,” says He to the Jews, “cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.” It was arrived in His person: He being the King, and having the power thereof. But if you look at “the kingdom of heaven” as a state of things introduced into this world, Christ had to go up to heaven first — a rejected King, no doubt, but still as such to sit on the right hand of God — and thereon the kingdom of heaven commenced. The kingdom was not actually established till Jesus went up on high. Then it began, first spiritually, as by and by it will shine in power and glory. Hence it is clear that in this chapter we stand upon the confines of the past dispensation, and of the one that was about to open. John the Baptist is on the scene as the last and greatest witness of that which was closing. Elijah was to come; this might have been fulfilled in the person of John the Baptist. John was doing the moral work that

was associated with Elijah's mission — preparing the way for the Lord. I do not say that Elijah may not come another day, but John was the then witness of Elijah's service. He was come "in the spirit and power of Elias:" and, as our Lord says a little after, "If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." Such he was to faith. Like the kingdom of heaven now, it is a testimony to the future kingdom when displayed in power and glory. John was to faith then what Elias will be by and by. The kingdom of heaven is to faith now what the kingdom of heaven will be to sight hereafter. The Lord intimates that a dispensation of faith is coming in, when the promises were not to be accomplished in the letter.

But just as John the Baptist was cast into prison (a tremendous trial for a Jew who looked at him as a great prophet to usher in the Messiah in visible majesty), so He says here, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." It has to be received by the attentive ear of faith. How extraordinary it must have appeared to the disciples that the forerunner of the Messiah should be in prison, and the Messiah Himself afterwards nailed upon the cross! But before the outward glory comes, redemption through suffering must be effected. Hence, the least now who has this blessing of faith, who enjoys these astonishing privileges which the Holy Ghost is bringing out as the gift of God's sovereign grace, is greater than John the Baptist. For it is God's doing and giving and ordering. It is His joy by Christ to bless the man that has not the smallest claim upon Him. And such is His work now. But what would be the effect of this among the Jews? Our Lord compares them to capricious people who would neither do one thing nor another. If gladness is going on, they have no sympathy with it; neither have

they with sorrow. John the Baptist called them to mourn: they had no heart for it. Then came Jesus, bidding them, as it were, to rejoice at the glad tidings of great joy: but they heeded Him not. They liked neither: John was too strict, and the Lord too gracious. They could not bear either. The truth is, man dislikes God; and there is no greater proof of his ignorance of himself than that he does not believe it. Whatever they might plead in the way of abuse of John the Baptist, or of Himself, “Wisdom is justified of her children.”

Accordingly the Lord shows how wisdom was justified, positively and negatively. “He began to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida!… And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works,” etc. (vers. 20-24). What more solemn! They refuse the voice of heavenly wisdom; and the result must be in judgment more unsparing than that which had of old made Sodom the monument of God’s vengeance. Was there one place or city in the land more favoured than another? It was Capernaum, where most of His miracles were wrought: and yet this very city should be brought down to hell. Even the notoriously depraved Sodom had not come under so fearful a sentence. The Lord only visits in judgment when means and calls for repentance are exhausted; but when He does judge, who shall be able to stand? Thus should wisdom be justified, may I say, by those that are not her children.

But then we have the positive part. “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth.” From the pronounced “woe,” Jesus

could turn round and say, “I thank Thee, O Father.” Not that the events recorded here took place together. The whole scene about John the Baptist occurred long before the Lord alluded to the wise and prudent rejecting Him, and the babes receiving Him. The Gospel of Luke occasionally gives precise marks of time, and shows that the Lord’s reception of John’s messengers was at an early period of His ministry, very shortly after the healing of the centurion’s servant; whereas His thanking the Father was after the return of the seventy disciples who were sent out on the final testimony, which is not mentioned in Matthew at all. The Holy Ghost in our Gospel puts aside, in general, mere successions of time, and welds together separated events to illustrate the great truth that it was His object here to bring out, viz., the true Messiah, presented with adequate proofs to Israel, but rejected; and this turned, of God’s grace, to be the occasion of better blessings than if the Lord had been received.

And while the solemn sight of man’s growing rejection is before us, Jesus says, “I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth” (hopes not limited to the earth now, but God looked to as Lord of heaven and earth — sovereign over all things), “because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight. All things are delivered unto Me of My Father.” The throne of Israel may be refused Him; the Jews may reject, the leaders despise Him: all this may be, but what is the result? Not merely what was promised to David or Solomon, but “All things are delivered unto Me of My Father.” Where were such thoughts as these divulged before? In the Psalms, in the

Prophets, or where do you get anything like them? The rejected Messiah is refused by man: He submits to it. They strip Him of His robes of Messianic glory, and what comes out? He is the Son of the Father, the Son of God from all eternity, the blessed divine Person who could look up and say, “Father.” Refuse Him in His earthly dignity, and He only shines in His heavenly one; despise Him as a man, and He is manifestly God.

“And no man knoweth the Son but the Father: neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him” (ver. 27). He is revealing the Father now. It is not merely that He is come to accomplish the promises of God, but He is revealing the Father — bringing souls into a deeper knowledge of God than was possible before. “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” It is perfect grace: no restriction; no setting the Jew in the foremost seat of honour. But “Come unto Me, all ye that labour” — Jew or Gentile, it matters not. Are you miserable? Can you find no comfort? “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and I will give you rest.” It is without condition or qualification if the needy but go to Him. In John we have,,, All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.” This is the proof of the Father’s drawing — that I go to Jesus. It is the Son of the Father, in John; for grace is always found most full and free where the Son is brought out in all His glory.

“Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (vers. 29, 30). Grace does not leave men to do as they list, but enables the heart that receives it to desire the will of

God. So, after saying, “I will give you rest,” our Lord adds, “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” Mark the difference. In verse 2 8 it is, “Come unto Me.... and I will give you rest” — it is pure grace to the soul in need, with nothing but its sins to bring; but in saying, “Take My yoke upon you.... and ye shall find rest to your souls,” He speaks of subjection to Him, and the effect is finding rest to our souls. When the sinner goes in his wretchedness to Jesus, the Saviour gives him rest — “without money and without price.” But if that soul does not follow on in the ways of Christ, he becomes miserable, and loses the comfort he had at first. Why? He has not taken Christ’s yoke upon him. The terms on which the Lord gives rest to the sinner are, “Come unto Me,” just as you are. The terms on which the believer finds rest are, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.” The Lord keeps His moral government over His people, and they are more disturbed than any, if not subject to Christ; they can neither enjoy Him nor the world. If I have found such a Saviour, and yet am not bearing His yoke, God does not intend that I should be happy. All else is a false happiness.

Matthew 12

Matthew 12 completes the picture of the transition begun in chapter 11, and shows that, before God, the crisis was come. The Lord might continue to become the object of still deeper rejection, but the spirit that crucified Him had already manifested itself clearly. In the centre of this chapter we have the warning of the unpardonable sin, not merely against the Messiah, but

against the Holy Ghost bearing His testimony to the Messiah; and, further, the fact that Israel as a nation would be guilty of that sin, and hence be given up to the power of Satan beyond example in all their sad history. So that the evil for which God had allowed them to be carried captive to Babylon was little in comparison with the iniquity of which they were now, in spirit, guilty, and into which they were about to sink. This brings the crisis closing the announcement of the kingdom to Israel; and chapter 13 introduces a new thing — the kingdom of heaven about to begin in its present mysterious form, because of the rejection of the Messiah.

I must now proceed to show how far all the incidents in this chapter are in harmony with the leading thought — the break between Christ and Israel. Therefore the Holy Ghost does not here confine Himself to the mere order of time in which the events took place. “At that time Jesus went on the sabbath-day through the corn, and His disciples were hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat” (ver. 1). We are not to suppose that “at that time” means “at that exact moment.” It is a general term, embracing connected events, though there might be months between them. It is not like “immediately,” or “forthwith,” or “the week after,” etc. What did intervene we must gather from the other Gospels. In Mark we find that the scene of the corn-fields took place early in our Lord’s ministry. Thus, in chapter 2, on the sabbath-day following the call of Levi and the discourse about fasting, we are told that “He went through the corn-fields,” Here we have this incident taken completely out of its historical connection. Mark adheres to the order of events: Matthew departs from it in order to give the great change consequent on the Messiah’s rejection by

Israel. Our Lord's word of woe upon Chorazin and Bethsaida, and the blessedness of those who received Him, was spoken by no means early. Here they are put together, because the object of the Holy Ghost in Matthew is to show this change.. Hence, what would prove the change is selected and reserved for this place.

In short, the Holy Ghost is giving us an historical picture apart from the mere date in which the events took place; and the events and discourses that illustrate the great transition are all grouped together. The disciples passed through the corn, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat, according to the liberty allowed them in the law.,,When the Pharisees saw it, they said unto Him, Behold, Thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath-day." Our Lord then cites two incidents: one of them a constantly-recurring fact among the priests; the other recorded of their most conspicuous king, David; both proving the sin and the utter ruin of Israel. What was the state of things when David was obliged to use the showbread? Was it not because the true king was a despised, persecuted man — because the king of their own hearts' choice was there? It was the same thing now. The sin. of Israel profaned the holy bread. God would not accept aught as holy from people that were living in sin. No ceremonial is worth a straw if the heart does not honour Christ. Why were the disciples reduced to pluck and eat the ears of corn? Why were the followers,of the true King reduced to hunger?

Besides, "Have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath-days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?" (ver. 5). The priests did a very important work upon that day. They offered sacrifices then, because there was sin; and the people's

sin demands what, according to the letter of the law, would seem to a Pharisee to be a breach of it. It does not matter what the law may ordinarily claim, if there is sin on the part of God's people, sacrifice cannot be deferred. Thus, whether you take the particular instance of the Lord's anointed in Saul's day, or the constant priestly service on the sabbath-day, one thing,accounted for all disorder, whether real or apparent — Israel were sinners. They had allowed the chosen of the Lord to be hunted upon the mountains when he was there; and a greater than David was here. And so as to the priests and their work. One infinitely greater than the temple was there — Messiah Himself: and what was not their indifference, nay, their enmity, towards Him?

Another sabbath-day was necessary to complete the sketch. And now Jesus does work Himself; and these two things are brought together here. "When He was departed thence, He went into their synagogue; and behold, there was a man which had his hand withered; and they asked Him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-days? that they might accuse Him." The Lord accepted the challenge. "He said unto them, What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it and lift it out?" Of course they would deliver the poor sheep out of the pit, because it was their own sheep. They had no conscience about doing what was to their own advantage because it was the sabbath-day. And the Lord does not blame them; but He presses this most pungent conclusion upon them — "How much, then, is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath-days." In a word, He shows by this second case, that not only was Israel a

guilty people respecting the true Beloved, but that, if they knew their own condition, would own themselves to be like the man with the withered hand, in need of His mighty power. He was there in grace to accomplish all necessary healing. The Lord pressed upon them their dismal condition. The whole nation before God was morally as withered as that man's hand physically; but not willing, alas, to be healed like him. "Then saith He to the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth, and it was restored whole as the other" (ver. 13). Why is this recorded here as having occurred on the sabbath-day — especially in connection with the incident of the corn-field? In the first, the Lord proves Israel's guilt in contrast with the sanctity of the sabbath; and in the second, He declares Himself thereto work restoration even on the sabbath. It is an account of all importance, because the Lord is, as it were, tearing in pieces the outward letter of the bond between Him and Israel, of which the sabbath-day was a special sign.

I may here observe, the Lord's day differs essentially from the sabbath; and in the early Church there was scrupulous care taken not to confound the two things. The sabbath and the Lord's day are signs of wholly distinct truths. The first owed its origin to God hallowing His rest when creation was done; and it was the token that, when God would finish His works, there would be a holy rest for man. Then sin came in, and all was ruined. We do not hear a word about it (at least, directly), till a people is called out from among all others to serve the true God, as His chosen nation. We have seen, in the Old Testament as well as the New, how utterly they failed; and now the only hope of having a true sabbath is when Christ Himself shall bring it in. When Adam sinned,

death passed upon all, and the creation-rest was broken. Then (after the type of Christ in the manna, with the sabbath following), came in the law, which took up the sabbath, incorporated it in the ten words and the statutes of Israel, and made it not only a hallowed day, but a day of command, which was enjoined upon them like the other nine words; a day in which every Israelite was bound, not only to abstain from work himself, but to give rest to everything that was his. It was not a question of a spiritual people. All Israel were bound by it, and they shared its rest along with their cattle. The Lord's day, on the other hand, never was heard of till Christ rose from the dead. Thence issued an entirely new order of things. Christ, the beginning, the Head of a new creation, rose from the dead on the first day of the week. Thus, while the old world goes on, sin still at work, and Satan not yet bound, God has wrought salvation, which He is giving to every soul that believes. These recognize that Christ risen is their Saviour, and that they consequently have new life in Him. This, and much more than this, they come together to acknowledge on the Lord's day. They "show the Lord's death till He come." Nothing can be plainer in Scripture, if our desire is to know and follow the word of God. It was no longer a question of whether people were Jews or Gentiles. Were they Christians? Had they Christ as their life and Lord? If they thankfully confessed Him, the Lord's day was the day for them. Such of the Christians as had been Jews continued to frequent the synagogue on the sabbath. But this only shows the more plainly that it was not a mere change of day. To the Roman saints the apostle insists that the man who regarded the day, to the Lord he regarded it; and that the man who regarded it not, to the Lord he did not regard it. Was

this the Lord's day? No, but Jewish days and fasts. The apostle would never treat the Lord's day as optionally to be regarded or not. Some of these believers saw that they were delivered from the law, and did not observe the Jewish feasts or fasts. The Gentiles, of course, were not under the law at all. But some, at any rate, of the Jewish believers, still had a conscience about the ancient holydays, and of them the apostle speaks. The Lord's day never was and never will be a Jewish day. It has its own proper character stamped upon it; and Christians, though not under the law as Jews with the sabbath, are yet by grace called on far more solemnly to use it for the Lord, as that which summons them to meet together in the name of Jesus, in separation from this world, conscious of redemption and justification through His death and resurrection. It is the type of the blessing that the Christian has got, yet to be manifested in glory. The world always confounds it, as do many Christians, with the sabbath. One hears sometimes real believers, but uninstructed, talk of the "Christian sabbath." This is, of course, because they do not see their deliverance from the law, and the consequences which flow from their belonging to Him who is risen from the dead. The apostle develops these blessed truths.

Our Lord merely deals with the Jews here. His disciples were not hindered from plucking the ears of corn on the sabbath, as on another He openly wrought a miracle in the presence of all (thus giving occasion for the Pharisees who sought one against Him). It is true that the works were works of mercy and goodness; but there was no necessity for either, had there not been a purpose. He could have spoken without doing a single thing. So with the blind man in the Gospel of John. All

the clay in the world could not have cured him, but for the power of our Lord. His word would have been enough; but He does something Himself, and makes the man do something else upon the sabbath. We are told expressly, “It was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.” The Lord was breaking the seal of the covenant between Jehovah and Israel. The sabbath scaled that bond, and was in Israel now worse than useless in God’s sight, because the people who pretended to keep the sabbath so carefully, were the bitterest enemies of His Son. It was utterly false to subject Him to the Sabbath. The Son of Man was “Lord even of the sabbath day.” He takes that ground boldly, as we are here told (ver. 8), and the following sabbath performs this miracle. The Pharisees felt that it was a death-blow to their whole system, and they, gathering together, “held a council against Him how they might destroy Him.” This was the first conclave for the purpose of putting Him to death. Jesus, knowing it, withdraws Himself from thence, “and great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all” — a picture of what He would do when Israel put Him to death. Thenceforth, the great work was to be among the Gentiles. The prophet Isaiah is quoted in connection with this occurrence, to show what our Lord’s character was: “Behold My Servant, whom I have chosen; My Beloved, in whom My soul is well pleased. I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall show judgment to the Gentiles: He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets; a bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory. And in His name shall the Gentiles trust.”

The Lord was departing from Israel; but this is not all. There is a final testimony before He pronounces sentence upon Israel: “Then was brought unto Him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb, and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.” This was the condition in which Israel was about to be, without an eye or a voice for Jesus; the apt figure of the nation’s condition, the Messiah unseen and His praise unuttered in their midst. And here is the solemn thing. The poor, the ignorant, all the people might cry, “Is not this the Son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand?” — He condescends to reason with them. “And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you” (vers. 27, 28). But they were dumb and blind. The man that submitted to Jesus was healed; but the Pharisees were consulting to slay the Son of David. The Lord answers them yet more. He tells them that now it was come to a point. “He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad.” All depended upon being and acting with Him; wherefore our Lord adds, “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men” (ver. 31). The reason of it was this: not only the Son of Man was working these miracles, but the

power of the Holy Ghost was there too. Although Jesus might submit to humiliation, He could not but assert the glory of God. The Holy Spirit was putting forth these mighty deeds, and the unbelief that refused the testimony of the Spirit when Jesus was there, would be even stronger against it on His departure. They would prove themselves to be like their fathers: “Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.” And what the consequence? They would be guilty of the unpardonable sin, of rejecting (not only Jesus Himself, as a man presented here, but) the power of the Holy Ghost, whether working in Him then, or now by Him and for Him.

It is the final rejection of the Spirit’s testimony to Christ. It was true when the Lord was here, but is still more complete now that He is in heaven. They refused Christ on earth, and after He went up to heaven, when, through the power of the Holy Ghost, His name alone caused the dead to rise, and thus proved even more His glory than what He had done personally when here below. Those who resisted such testimony as this were evidently hopelessly lost in unbelief and scorn of God in the person of His Son. Therefore our Lord pronounces this blasphemy to be such as nothing can meet. It is not ignorance which thus rejects Christ. A man may be without light; and when it comes, he may, through grace, be enabled to receive Him. But he who refuses all divine testimony, and makes the displayed power of the Holy Ghost the occasion of showing his spite against Jesus, is evidently lost for ever: he bears the unmistakable stamp of perdition upon his brow. This was exactly the sin into which Israel were fast falling. The Holy Ghost might be sent down, and work even greater

acts of power than the Lord Himself had done; it made no change in their heart. The blaspheming unbelieving race of Israel should be forgiven neither in this “age,” nor in that which is to come. I am not particular about the word “dispensation” — which means a certain course of time, ruled by particular principles; but the point is, that neither in this age (αἰῶν) nor in that which is to come, could this sin be forgiven. The age to come is that wherein the children of Israel are to be under the Messiah’s rule; as now, and since the Babylonish captivity, they have been under the rule of the Gentiles. This sin should be forgiven neither now nor then. As to all other iniquity, there was still a hope that what was not forgiven now might be when the Messiah came. Granted that there is unlimited forgiveness for every soul that receives Him; but they refused Him: they attributed the Spirit’s power working in His person to Beelzebub; and that blasphemy would never be forgiven. Such was the growing danger of Israel. Rejecting the Messiah thus, they are doomed. It was rejecting the Holy Ghost’s testimony; and a new work of God must then be brought in.

Hence the Lord pronounces them a generation of vipers. “The tree is known by his fruit.” It. was a bad tree, and no good fruit would He expect from it. “O generation of vipers,” He adds, “how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word (that is, I suppose, everything betraying contempt for God) that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of

judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (vers. 34-37). What God insists upon is testimony to Jesus. These idle words betray the heart's rejection of Jesus, and slight the Holy Ghost's testimony to Him. "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." It is with the mouth that confession is made unto salvation; and the words that leave out Jesus prove that the heart prefers its sin to Him. The words of the mouth evidence the state of the heart. They are the outward expression of the feelings, and they show a man in one way as much as his conduct does in another. If the heart is evil, the words are evil, the conduct is evil: all therefore comes into judgment.

After this the Pharisees ask a sign, and the Lord gives them a most significant one: but, before that, He pronounces His moral sentence on the nation: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas" (ver. 39). What was the special feature of Jonah as a prophet? To whom did he prophesy? He was sent away from Israel to the Gentiles; and, more than that, before Jonah performed his message aright, he must pass through the figure of death and resurrection. So obstinate was he in not going where he was bidden, that the Lord took care Jonah should be pitched out of the ship; and then He dealt with him as a dead man, and wrought a great work in his soul. Jonah having passed through this most remarkable type of death and resurrection was now ready for the message that the Lord gives him. This is the sign which the Lord puts before the Pharisees. Such was the state of the Jewish nation that He must leave them and go to the Gentiles;

and that too after death and resurrection in reality, when Israel's hopes had perished. The Lord has blessing in store for Israel by and by; but for the present all is lost for them. They had rejected their Lord. God was going now to occupy Himself with the Gentiles. Hence it is that the instances used to confirm this are, first, the case of the men of Nineveh, who repented at the preaching of Jonah; "and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." Then the queen of Sheba, also a Gentile, who did not merely repent because of sin, but showed an energy of faith, I may say, worthy of all note, without even a message sent to her. Such was the ardour of her heart, and her desire after wisdom, that, hearing of Solomon, she hastened in order to hear it from his own lips. What a rebuke for Israel! "A greater than Solomon is here"; and wisdom as much beyond Solomon's as the person of Jesus was above that of Solomon. But they were an evil and adulterous generation. They knew not that their Maker was their husband; they despised Him; and, adds our Lord, "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it." But now He proclaims what will be their final condition. The link of Israel to Himself was broken; and for this blasphemous contempt of the Spirit's testimony to Jesus as the Son of Man they should be judged.

This is what the Lord now shows. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none" (ver. 43). Every student of Scripture will acknowledge that the unclean spirit means idolatry, and its worship connects with demons, instead of God. Are we to suppose that our Lord suddenly breaks off from what He had been saying of the nation to treat of mere individuals? Clearly it is

about Israel. As a nation Israel never fell into idolatry after the return from Babylon, as before. Not that they were better men; but the unclean spirit of idolatry was no longer their special temptation. There were new ways in which the devil tempted them to sin, if not after the old sort. The house had been swept and garnished. Such it was when our Lord was here below. Israel had laid aside their idolatrous habits; they went to the synagogue every sabbath day; and they were zealous enough to compass sea and land to make a proselyte. The house was apparently clean, and nothing outwardly to shock the eye if you looked at it. But the unclean spirit is to go back. “Then goeth he and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.” The unclean spirit is to return, with the full power of Satan — “seven spirits more wicked than himself.” More wicked than idolatry! The figure of a man is used to illustrate the state of Israel, as the words that follow plainly show: “Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.” And when is that to be? It is their last state, yet to be. The empty, swept and garnished state existing then may be still going on. Humanly speaking, they may be moral. They may not abandon the books of Moses, but take their stand as worshipping none but the true God. This will go on for a certain time, but not forever; for we know from Scripture that God has kept that nation for special purposes, first in judgment, and then in mercy. He will convert them, and make them a holy, as they are the lineal, seed of Abraham. Israel is yet to show the last results of Satan’s power over their souls before God converts a remnant, and makes it a strong, a saved nation.

But meanwhile, what was He going to do? Was He merely pronouncing judgment on Israel? Far from it. While He yet was speaking to the people one came and told Him, “Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with Thee” (ver. 47). The Lord immediately takes this opportunity to show that He no longer acknowledged mere relationships according to the flesh. He had special relationship with Israel, “of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came.” He owns it no longer. They would not have Him, and will become the tenement for the devil in all his power — their last state to be worse than their first. But, says the Lord, I am going to have a new thing now — a people according to My own heart. And so He stretches forth His hand toward His disciples, and says, “Behold My mother and My brethren.” His only true relations were those who received the word of God, and did it. “Whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother” — He renounced all earthly connection) for the present time. The only tie He acknowledges now is relationship to a heavenly Father, formed through the word of God received into the soul.

Thus we have in this chapter the Lord closing with Israel, as far as testimony is concerned. In the next chapter we shall find what comes dispensationally of those new relations that the Lord was about to unfold.

7 Let us note this open confession of Christ unto salvation. In Mark 5:30-34 and Luke 8:45-48 we see how the Lord draws out and urges the timid soul to an open confession of grace received through the touch of faith. Then follow the Lord’s blessed words of assurance and of relationship: “Daughter,… go in peace,” which her confession brings out, to her lasting joy and comfort. Ed.

Matthew 13 -16

Matthew 13

At the close of the previous chapter our Lord disowned all the natural ties which bound Him to Israel. I speak now simply of His bringing it out as a matter of teaching; for we know that, historically, the moment for finally breaking with them was the cross. But ministerially, if we may so say, the break occurred and was indicated now. He took advantage of an allusion to his mother and brethren to say who His real kindred were — no longer those who were connected with Him after the flesh: the only family He could own now were such as did the will of His Father in heaven. He recognizes nothing but the tie formed by the word of God received into the heart and obeyed accordingly. The Holy Ghost pursues this subject by recording, in a connected form, a number of parables which were intended to show the source, the character, the conduct and the issues of this new family, or at least of those who professed to belong to it. This is the subject of Matthew 13. A striking instance it is how manifestly the Holy Ghost has grouped the materials into the particular shape in which we actually have them; for we know that our Lord spoke more parables than are here given. Comparing it with the Gospel of Mark, we find a parable that differs materially from any which appears in Matthew. In Mark it is a person who sows the ground and sleeps and rises night and day, waiting for the germination and the full growth and the ripening of the corn, and then himself gathers it in. This diverges very considerably from all the parables of the earlier Gospel;

yet we know from Mark that the parable in question was uttered on the same day. “With many such parables spake He the Word unto them, as they were able to hear it; but without a parable spake He not unto them.... And the same day, when the even was come, He saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.”

Just as the Holy Ghost selects certain parables in Mark which are inserted, while others are left out (and the same in Luke), so also was it the case in Matthew. The Holy Ghost is conveying fully God’s mind about the new testimony, commonly called Christianity, and even Christendom. Accordingly, the very beginning of this chapter prepares us for the new scene. “The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside” (ver. 1), Up to this time the house of God was connected with Israel. There God dwelt, as far as this could be said of the earth; He counted it as His habitation. But Jesus went out of the house, and sat by the seaside. We all know that the sea, in the symbolic language of the Old and New Testaments, is used to represent masses of men, roving hither and thither outside, and not under the settled government of God. “And great multitudes were gathered unto Him, so that He went into a ship and sat.” From thence He teaches them. “And the whole multitude stood on the shore.” The very action of our Lord indicated that there was to be a very widespread testimony. The parables themselves are not confined to the sphere of our Lord’s previous dealings, but take in a much more extensive range than anything which He had spoken in past times. “He spake many things unto them in parables” (ver. 3). It is not intimated that we have all the parables our Lord spoke; but the Holy Ghost here gives us seven connected parables, all brought together

and compacted into a consistent system, as I shall endeavour to show. The Holy Ghost is clearly exercising a certain authority as to the parables selected here, for we all know that seven is the scriptural number for that which is complete: whether it speak of good or evil, spiritually, seven is regularly the number used. When the symbol of twelve is used it expresses completeness, not spiritual, but as to what has to do with man. Where human administration is brought into prominence for carrying out the purposes of God, there the number twelve appears. Hence we have the twelve apostles, who had a peculiar relation to the twelve tribes of Israel; but when the Church is to be presented, we hear again the number seven — “the seven churches.” However that may be, we have seven parables here, for the purpose of giving a complete account of the new order of things about to begin — Christendom and Christianity, the true as well as the spurious.

The first question, then, that occurs is, How comes it that we have this series of parables here and nowhere else? Certain of them are in Mark, and certain in Luke; but nowhere, except in Matthew, have we seven, the complete list. The answer is this: Nothing can be more beautiful, or more proper, than that they should be given in a Gospel presenting Jesus as the Messiah to Israel; then, on His rejection, showing what God would next bring out. To the disciples, when their hopes were melting away, what could be of deeper interest than to know the nature and end of this testimony? If the Lord should send out His word among the Gentiles, what would be the result? Accordingly, Matthew’s Gospel is the only one that gives us a complete sketch of the kingdom of heaven; as it also gives us the intimation

that the Lord was going to found the Church. It is only in Matthew that we have both brought out. This, however, I reserve for another day; but I must observe that the kingdom of heaven is not the same thing as the Church, but rather the scene where the authority of Christ is owned, at least outwardly. It may be real or not, but every professing Christian is in the kingdom of heaven. Every person who, even in an external rite, confesses Christ, is not a mere Jew or Gentile, but in the kingdom. It is a very different thing from a man's being born again and being baptized by the Holy Ghost into the body of Christ. Whoso bears the name of Christ belongs to the kingdom of heaven. It may be that he is only a tare there, but still there he is. This is a very solemn thing. Wherever Christ is outwardly confessed, there is a responsibility beyond that which attaches to the rest of the world.

The first parable clearly was true when our Lord was on earth. It is very general, and would apply to the Lord in person or in spirit. Hence it may be said to be always going on; for we find in the second parable the Lord presented again, still sowing good seed: only here it is the "kingdom of heaven" that is likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field. The first is Christ's work in publishing the word among men, while He was here below. The second rather applies to our Lord sowing by means of His servants; that is, the Holy Ghost working through them according to the will of the Lord while He is above, the kingdom of heaven being then set up. This at once furnishes an important key to the whole subject. But inasmuch as the matter of the first parable is very general, there is a great deal in all the moral teaching of it which applies as truly now as when our Lord was upon

earth. “A sower went forth to sow” — a weighty truth indeed. It was not thus that the Jews looked for their Messiah. The prophets bore witness of a glorious ruler, who would establish His kingdom in their midst. No doubt there were plain predictions of His suffering as well as of His exaltation. Our parable describes neither suffering nor outward glory; but a work carried on by the Lord, of a distinct character from anything the Jew would naturally draw from the bulk of the prophecies. Nevertheless, our Lord, I conceive, was alluding to Isaiah. It is not exactly the gospel of grace and salvation to the poor, wretched, and guilty, but it is one who, instead of coming to claim the fruits of the vineyard set up in Israel, has to begin an entirely new work. A sower going forth to sow marks evidently the commencement of that which did not exist before. The Lord is beginning a work not previously known in this world. “And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up.” That was clearly the most desperate case of all. It was null and void, not because of any fault of the seed, but from the destructive agency of the fowls which devoured what was sown.

Next we have, “Some [that] fell upon stony (rocky) places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth.” There was a more hopeful appearance in this case. The word was received, but the ground was stony; there was no depth of earth. Appearances were very quick — “forthwith they sprung up.” There is little or no sense of sin. All is taken in but too readily. “The plan of salvation” may be thought to be excellent; the enlightenment of the mind may be undeniable; but such an one has never measured his awful condition in God’s sight. The good

word of God is tasted, but the ground is rocky. Conscience has not been properly exercised. Whereas, in a real work of heart, conscience is the soil in which the word of God takes effect. There never can be a real work of God without a sense of sin. Where warm feelings are excited, but sin slurred over, it is the case spoken of here — the word received at once, but the ground remains really unbroken — rocky. There is no root because there is no depth of earth: consequently, “when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root they withered away.”

But, further, “Some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them.” This is another case; not exactly that wherein the heart received the word at once. And we should have as little confidence in the heart as in the head. The flesh differs in different individuals. Some may have more mind, and some more feeling. But neither can savingly receive the word of God, unless the Holy Ghost acts on the conscience and produces the sense of being utterly lost. Where this is the case, it is a real work of God, which sorrows and difficulties will only deepen. Those that received the seed among thorns are a class devoured by the anxieties of this age, and led away by the deceitfulness of riches, which choke the word, so that no fruit comes to perfection.

But now comes the good ground. “Other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear” (vers. 8, 9). The sower here is the Lord Himself, yet out of four casts of the seed, three are unsuccessful. It is only the last case where the seed bears ripe fruit; and even there the issue is chequered

and hindered — “some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold” — natural things still hinder fruitfulness, more or less.

What a tale of man’s heart and the world these parables disclose! Even where the heart does not refuse, but outwardly receives the truth, it can abandon it as quickly. The same will that makes a man gladly receive the gospel, makes him drop it in the face of difficulties. But, in some cases, the word does produce blessed effects. It fell upon good ground, and brought forth fruit indifferent degrees. “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” A solemn admonition to souls, to look well to it whether or not they produce according to the truth they have received.

The disciples now come and say unto Him, “Why speakest Thou unto them in parables?” and the Lord makes it an occasion to explain these things unto them. “He answered and said unto them, Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.” The same parable would be just like the cloud of Israel in a former day — full of light to those within, full of obscurity to those without. Thus it is with the sayings of our Lord. So solemn was the crisis with unbelieving Israel now, that it was not His intention to give clearer light. Conscience was gone. They had the Lord in their midst, bringing in full light, and He was refused, especially by the religious leaders. He had now broken with them: here was the clue to His conduct. “To you it is given to know,” etc. It was kept from the multitude, and this because they had already rejected the clearest possible proofs that Jesus was the Messiah of God. But, as He says here, “Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance.” Such

was the case with the disciples. They had already received His person, and now the Lord would supply with truth to lead them on. “But whosoever hath not” (the Christ-rejecting Israel), “from him shall be taken away even that he hath” — the Lord’s bodily presence and the evidence of miracle would soon pass away. “Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand” (ver. 13). That judicial sentence of darkness which Isaiah had pronounced upon them hundreds of years before, was now to be sealed, though the Holy Ghost still gives them a fresh testimony. And this very passage is afterwards quoted to mark that it is a finished thing with Israel. They loved darkness rather than light. What is the good of a light to one that shuts his eyes? Therefore would the light be taken away too. “But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see and have not seen them: and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them” (vers. 16, 17).

Then follows the explanation of the parable. We have the meaning of “the fowls of the air” given us. It is not left to any conjecture of our own. “When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom” (this was being preached then: it is not exactly the word of the gospel,” but “of the kingdom”) and understandeth it not,” etc. In Luke it is not called “the word of the kingdom,” nor is it said, “understandeth it not.” It is interesting to observe the difference, because it shows the way in which the Holy Ghost has acted in this Gospel. Compare Luke 13. The first of these parables is given us in Luke 8:11. “Now the

parable is this: The seed is the word of God" — not the word of the kingdom, but "of God." There is, of course, a great deal in common between the two; but the Spirit had a wise reason for using the different expressions. It would, rather, be giving an opportunity to an enemy, unless there had been some good grounds for it. I repeat that it is "the word of the kingdom" in Matthew, and "of God" in Luke. In the latter we have "that they should believe," and in the former, "that they should understand." What is taught by the difference? It is manifest that, in Matthew, the Holy Ghost has the Jewish people particularly in view; whereas in Luke, the Lord had particularly the Gentiles be. fore Him. They understood that there was a great kingdom which God was about to establish, and destined to swallow up all their kingdoms. With the Jews, already familiar with the word of God, their great point was understanding what God taught — which self-righteousness never understands. You might be controverted had you said to a Jew, You do not believe what Isaiah says; and a serious question came, Do you understand it? But for the Gentile, who had not the lively oracles, instead of setting up his own wisdom, the question was believing. what God said; and this is what we have in Luke. In Matthew, speaking to a people. who had the word already, the great thing was to understand it. This they did not. The Lord shows that, if they heard with their ears, they did not understand with their hearts. This difference, when connected with the different ideas and objects of the two Gospels, is alike interesting and instructive.

"When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not" (ver. 19). Another solemn truth we learn from this: the great thing that hinders spiritual

understanding is religious prejudice. The Jews were charged with not understanding. They were not idolators or open infidels, but had a system of religion in their minds in which they had been trained from infancy, which darkened their intelligence of what the Lord was bringing out. So it is now. But among the heathen, though the state be morally evil, yet in the barren waste the word of God might be freely sown, and, by grace, be believed. That is not the case where people have been nurtured in ordinances and superstition: there the difficulty is to understand the word. “Then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in the heart.” The answer to the fowls, in the first parable, as we saw, is the wicked one taking away the word of the kingdom as soon as it is sown.

“But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it” (ver. 20). There you have the heart, moved in its affections, but without exercise of conscience. Anon with joy the word is received. There is great gladness about it, but there it ends. It is only the Holy Ghost acting upon the conscience that gives what things are in God’s sight. “Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.”

Then we have the thorny ground: “He also that received seed among the thorns is he. that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.” There is a case that might have seemed promising for a time; but anxiety about this world, or the flattering ease of prosperity here below, rendered him unfruitful, and all is over. “But he that received seed into the good ground is

he that heareth the word, and understandeth it" (all through it is spiritual understanding); "which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Now we come to the first of the similitudes of the kingdom of heaven. The parable of the sower was the preparatory work of our Lord upon earth. "Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way" (vers. 24, 25) — exactly what has come to pass in the profession of Christ. There are two things necessary for the inroad of evil among Christians. The first is, the unwatchfulness of the Christians themselves. They get into a careless state, they sleep; and the enemy comes and sows tares. This began at an early epoch in Christendom. We find the germs even in the Acts, and still more in the Epistles. 1 Thessalonians is the first inspired epistle that the apostle Paul wrote; and the second was written shortly after. There he tells them that the mystery of iniquity was already at work; that the apostasy and the man of sin were to follow; and that when the lawlessness should be fully manifest (instead of working. secretly), then the Lord would put an end to the lawless one and all concerned. The mystery of iniquity is akin to the sowing of the tares spoken of here. Some time after, "when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit" — when Christianity began to make rapid strides in the earth, "then appeared the tares also." But it is evident that the tares were sown almost immediately after the good seed. No matter what the work of God is, Satan is always close upon its heels.

When man was made, he listened to the serpent, and fell. When God gave the law, it was broken even before it was committed into the hands of Israel. Such is always the history of man.

So the mischief is done in the field, and never repaired. The tares are not for the present taken out of the field: there is no judgment of them. Does this mean that we are to have tares in the Church. If the kingdom of heaven meant the Church, there ought to be no discipline at all: uncleanness of flesh or spirit, swearers, drunkards, adulterers, schismatics, heretics, antichrists, would have to be allowed within it. Here is the importance of seeing the distinction between the Church and the kingdom. Of the tares now in the kingdom of heaven the Lord says: “Let both grow together until the harvest” (ver. 30), that is, till He come in judgment. Were the kingdom of heaven the same as the Church, it would, I repeat, amount to no less than this: that no evil, let it be ever so flagrant or plain, is to be put out of the Church till the day of judgment. We see, then, the importance of making these distinctions, which too many despise. They are all-important for truth and holiness; nor is there a single word of God that we can do without.

But this parable has nothing to do with the question of Church communion. It is “the kingdom of heaven” that is spoken of — the scene of the confession of Christ, whether true or false. Thus Greeks, Copts, Nestorians, Roman Catholics, as well as Protestants, are in the kingdom of heaven; not believers only, but all who outwardly profess Christ’s name. Some may be immoral or heretical, yet are not to be put out of the kingdom of heaven. But would it be right to receive ouch at the

table of the Lord? God forbid! The Church (the assembly of God) and the kingdom of heaven are two different things. A person falling into open sin is not to be allowed in Church communion; but you cannot put him out of the kingdom of heaven. In fact, it could only be done by taking away his life; for the rooting up of the tares involves this. And this is what worldly Christianity did fall into, in no very long space of time after the apostles were departed from the earth. Temporal punishments were brought in for discipline; laws were made for the purpose of handing over the refractory to the subservient civil power. If they did not honour the so-called church, they were not to be suffered to live. Thus, the very evil our Lord had been guarding the disciples against came to pass: and the emperor Constantine used the sword to repress ecclesiastical offenders. He and his successors introduced temporal punishments to deal with the tares, to try and root them up. Take the church of Rome, where you have.;o thoroughly the confusion of the Church with the kingdom of heaven: they claim, if a man is a heretic, to hand him over to the courts of the world to be burnt; and they never confess or correct the wrong, because they pretend to be infallible. Supposing that their victims even were tares, this is to put them out of the kingdom. If you root up a tare from the field, you kill it. There may be men outside profaning the name of God; but we must leave them for God to deal with.

For Christian responsibility towards those who surround the Lord’s table we have full instructions in what is written about the Church. “The field is the world;” but the Church only embraces those who are members of Christ’s body. Take 1 Corinthians, where the Holy Ghost

gives us the order of God's house and its discipline. Supposing some there are guilty of unrepented sin; such persons are not to be owned, while they are going on in that sin. A real saint might fall into open sin, but the Church, knowing it, is bound to intervene to express God's judgment about the sin. Were they deliberately to allow such an one to come to the Lord's table, they would in effect make the Lord a party to that sin. The question is not whether the person be converted or not. If unconverted, men have no business in the Church; if converted, sin is not to be winked at. The guilty are not put out of the kingdom of heaven; they are to be put out of the Church. So that the teaching of the word of God is most plain as to both these truths. It is wrong to use worldly punishments to deal with a wicked person in spiritual matters. I may seek the good of his soul, and maintain God's honour with regard to sin, but this is no reason for using worldly punishment. The unconverted are to be judged by the Lord at His appearing. This is the teaching of the parable of the tares; and it gives a very solemn view of Christianity. There is a remedy for evil which enters the Church, but not yet for evil in the world.

This is the only Gospel containing the parable of the tares. Luke gives the leaven. Matthew has the tares also. It particularly teaches patience for the present, in contrast with Jewish judicial dealings, as well as with their just expectation of a cleared field under the reign of Messiah. The Jews would say, Why should we allow enemies, ungodly heretics? Even when our Lord was here below, and some Samaritans received Him not, James and John wished to command fire to come down from heaven to consume them. But the Lord had not

then come for judgment, but to save. The judgment of the world must wait for His return.

But we have further instruction. “Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into My barn” (ver. 30). Thus the heavenly saints are to be gathered into the Lord’s barn, to be taken out of the earth to heaven. But “the time of the harvest” implies a certain period occupied with the various processes of ingathering. It is not said that the wheat is to be bound in bundles in order to be taken to heaven. There is no intimation of any special preparatory work about the saints before they are taken up. But there is such a dealing of God with the tares. The angels are to gather the tares in bundles before the Lord clears them out of the field. I do not pretend to say how that will be, or whether the system of associations in the present day may not pave the way for the final action of the Lord as regards the tares. But the principle of worldly association is growing apace.

The parable of the wheat-field had fully shown, what must have been an unexpected blow to the thoughts of the disciples, that the opening dispensation would, as regards man’s maintaining the glory of God, fail as completely as the past one. Israel had dishonoured God; they had wrought, not deliverance, but shame and confusion in the earth; they had failed under law, and would reject grace so thoroughly that the King would be obliged to send His armies to destroy those murderers and burn up their city. But if there was to be a new work in gathering disciples to the name of Jesus by the word preached to them; was that also to be spoiled in the

hands of man? The salvation of souls is indeed secure in God's hands; but the trial of what is committed to man's responsibility turns out now, as ever, a complete failure. Man came short of the glory of God in Paradise, and outside he corrupted his way and filled the earth with violence. Afterwards God chose a people to put them to the test, and they broke down. And now came the new trial: What would become of the disciples who professed the name of Christ? The answer has been given: "While men slept, the enemy sowed tares;" and the solemn announcement declares that no zeal on their part could remedy the evil. They might be faithful and earnest themselves; but the evil that has been done by the introduction of the tares — false professors of Christ's name — will never be eradicated. The Lord evidently speaks of the vast field of Christian profession, and of the sad fact that evil was to be introduced from the very beginning; and, once brought in, it would never be turned out till the Lord Himself returns to judgment, and by His angels gathers the tares in bundles to burn them, while the wheat is gathered into the barn.

If the Church is in our thoughts in reading Matthew 13, we shall never understand the chapter. "The field is the world" — the sphere where the name of the Lord is professed, and extending much beyond what could be called the Church. There might be, and are, many persons who would call themselves Christians, and yet show by their ways that there was no real faith in them. These are called "tares." There are many, whom nobody believes to be born of God, who, nevertheless, would be shocked if they were regarded as infidels. They acknowledge Christ as the Saviour of the world, the true Messiah, but it is as entirely inoperative upon their

souls, as theirs was who believed in Christ when they saw the miracles which He did (John 2:23). Jesus does not commit Himself to such now any more than He did then.

The next parable intimates that the evil would not be merely the intermingling of a false profession, but something quite different would surely follow. It might be connected with the tares, and grow out of them; but another parable was required to set it forth. Beginning with the smallest nucleus, most humble as regards this world, there was to be that which would assume vast proportions in the earth, which would strike its roots deeply among the institutions of men, and rise up into a system of vast power and earthly influence. This is the mustard-seed springing into a great tree, into whose branches the birds of the air come and lodge. These last the Lord had already explained as the wicked one, or his emissaries. (Comp. vers. 4 and 19.) We must never depart from the meaning of a symbol in a chapter unless there be some fresh and express reason for it, which in this case does not appear. Thus we have the smallest of all the seeds that grow into anything like a tree; and from this very small beginning there comes a stem with branches sufficiently capacious to yield a shelter and a home to the birds of the air. What a change for the Christian profession! The destroyer is now housed in its bosom!

Then follows the third parable, again of a different nature. It is not a seed, good or bad. It is not the small now becoming lofty and large, a protective power in the earth, and for what? But here we find that there would be the spread of doctrine within — “leaven,” used here, as well as elsewhere, for doctrine. For instance, we have

“the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees,” which our Lord called, leaven.” The thought here is to symbolize that which spreads and permeates what is exposed to it. “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (ver. 33). The three measures of meal are not legitimately assumed to mean the whole world, as many have done, and still do.8 It is not usual to find the truth make such way. We know what the heart is, and we may infer that the doctrine which is so thoroughly spread under the name of Christ must be very far departed from its original purity when it becomes welcome to masses of men. We have, moreover, seen the tares — which do not imply anything good — mingled with the wheat. We have had the mustard-seed grown into a tree, and strangely harbouring the birds of the air, which erst preyed on the seed that Christ sowed. Again, whenever “leaven” occurs symbolically in the word of God, it is never employed save to characterize corruption which tends to work actively and spread; so that it must not be assumed to be the extension of the gospel. The meaning, I doubt not, is a system of doctrine which fills and gives its tone to a certain given mass of men. On the other hand, the gospel is the seed — the incorruptible seed — of life, as being God’s testimony to Christ and His work. Leaven has nowhere anything to do with Christ or giving life, but expressly the contrary. Hence there is not the smallest analogy between the action of leaven and the reception of life in Christ through the gospel. I believe that the leaven here sets forth the propagandism of dogmas and decrees, after that Christendom became a great power in the earth (answering to the tree — which was the case, historically, in the time of Constantine the

Great). We know that the result of this was an awful departure from the truth. When Christianity grew into respectability in the world, instead of being persecuted and a reproach, crowds of men were brought in. A whole army was baptized at the word of command. Now the sword was used to defend or enforce Christianity.

“No meat (meal) offering which ye shall bring unto the Lord shall be made with leaven” (Lev. 2:11) — the woman here in the parable is doing what the law strictly forbids. Leaven being always in Scripture a type of evil, putting it in the meal is introducing evil doctrine in the bread of God — the food of His people. See John 6:32, 33.

The woman too in this parable should remind us of Eve leading “in the transgression”; and still more of “that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants,” etc. (Rev. 2:20) — again doing what is forbidden. See 1 Tim. 2:12-14. Why should commentators interpret leaven as good spreading out, or the gospel subduing the whole world? It is like the twelve in Luke IS: 31-34 to whom the Lord spoke of His rejection, His sufferings, death, and resurrection; but “they understood none of these things.” In their mind the kingdom was about to be restored to Israel; so they could not understand the plainest words about Messiah’s rejection. Preconceived ideas prevent the reception of most simply-expressed truth. Ed.

Observe, too, that thus the interpretation flows on harmoniously. We have parables devoted to distinct things, which may have a certain measure of analogy one to another, and yet set forth distinct truths in an

order which cannot but commend itself to a spiritual, unprejudiced mind. Much depends on a, due understanding of that which is meant by “the kingdom of heaven.” ‘Let us not forget that it is simply the authority of the Lord in heaven acknowledged upon the earth. When it becomes a thing the world takes cognizance of as a civilizing power in the earth, it is no longer the mere field sown with good seed which the enemy may spoil with bad, but the towering tree, and the wide and deeply-working leaven. Such is the very unexpected disclosure which our Lord makes. The multitude might admire, but the wise would understand. The disciples needed to be instructed that there was to be a state of things wholly different from what they expected; that although the Messiah was come, He was going away; that, while He would be in the heavens, the kingdom would be introduced in patience, not power — mysteriously, and not yet to sight; and that therein the devil would be allowed to work just as before, only taking his usual advantage to spoil and corrupt, in a special way, the new truth and condition about to be introduced.

So far, then, these parables show the gradual growth of evil. First, there is the mingling of a little evil with a great deal of good, as in the case of the wheat field. Then the rising up of that which is high and influential from the lowly origin of early Christianity. Instead of having tribulation in the world, the christian body becomes a patron or benefactor, exercising authority in it, and the most aspiring of the world seeking to it for what they want. After that a great propagation of doctrine suited to worldly conditions follows, as the folly of Paganism and the narrowness of Judaism became the

more apparent to men, and as their interests carried them with the new worldly system.

Mark a change now. The Lord ceases to address Himself to the multitude, who had been in view thus far. As it is said, “All these spake Jesus to the multitude: and without a parable spake He not unto them.” But now Jesus sends the multitude away, and goes into the house. I would call your attention to this, because it divides the parables, and inaugurates a distinct set. The parables which follow were not such as the multitude could see or enter into. In the separation of these last three parables from the previous four, we have an analogy to those feasts set forth in Leviticus 23, where after the passover and the unleavened bread, the offering of the first-fruits and the feast of weeks following one another, you have an interruption; after which come the feasts of trumpets, of atonement, and, finally, of tabernacles. The apostle teaches us that Christ our passover has been sacrificed for us; so that we have to celebrate the feast of unleavened bread inseparably connected with it. Then we have the resurrection of Christ — the sheaf of first-fruits, followed by Pentecost, as we read in Acts 2, “When the day of Pentecost was fully come.” These feasts are accomplished in us Christians. But the feast of trumpets, the day of atonement, and the feast of tabernacles which follow the first four, it would be absurd to apply to the Church; their application will be to the Jews. Thus, as in the middle of Leviticus 23 the break indicates a new order of subjects, so in this chapter, where it is just as marked. And while the first parables apply to the outward profession of Christ’s name, the final ones pertain especially and intimately to what concerns real Christians. The multitude could not

enter into them. They were the secrets of the family, and, therefore, the Lord calls the disciples within, and there He unfolds all to them.

But before He enters upon a new subject, He gives further information on the former. The disciples ask Him, “Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.” Ignorant as they might be, still they had confidence in their Lord, and that what He had spoken He was willing to explain. “He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man: the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom: but the tares are the children of the wicked one” (vers. 37, 38). The Son of Man and the wicked one, it has been well remarked, are opposed to each other. As in the Trinity, we know there is a suited part which each blessed Person bears in their work of blessing, so the sad contrast appears in evil outside. As the Father brings out specially His love, and separates from the world through the revelation of it in Christ; as you have the Holy Ghost, in contrariety to the flesh, the great agent of all the Father’s grace, counsels, and ways; so Scripture holds forth Satan always acting as the grand personal antagonist of the Son. The Son of God has come “that He might destroy the works of the devil.” The devil makes use of the world to entangle people, to excite the flesh, stirring up the natural liking of the heart for present honour and ease. In opposition to all this, the Son of God presents the glory of the Father as the object for which He was working by the Holy Ghost.

Discrimination runs strongly through the Lord’s explanation to the disciples in the house. In the first of the parables, the good is thoroughly separate from the

evil, but in the last of the three all is merged into an undistinguished lump. At first, all was plain. On the one hand the Son of Man sows the good seed, and the result is the children of the kingdom. On the other hand, there is the enemy, and he is sowing his bad seed — false doctrines, heresies, etc.; and the result of this is the children of the wicked one. The devil has taken the opportunity of Christianity for making men worse than if there never had been any fresh and heavenly revelation. In God's sight, that which falsely bears the name of Christ is a more wicked thing than any other. Never has so much righteous blood been shed as by the hand of so-called religion, and from whom it shall be required. See Matt. 23:34-36. Popery has been the full carrying out of this earthly religion. And every religious system of the world tends to persecute whatever falls not in with it. The bitterness and opposition towards those who are seeking to follow the Lord in our day is the same kind of thing that broke out into the horrors of the dark ages, and lingers still in the "holy office" of the inquisition when and where ever it holds up its head.

To continue: "The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels." "The world" inverse 38 must not be confounded with "the world" in verse 39. They are totally distinct words and things. "The world" inverse 39 means the age. It is a course of time, and not a geographical sphere. In verse 38 the sphere is intended, wherein the gospel goes forth; in verse 39 it is the space of time in which the gospel is either advancing or hindered by the enemy's power. The harvest is the consummation of the age, that is, of the present dispensation — the time while the Lord is absent, and the gospel is being proclaimed over the earth. Grace is

actively going forth now. The only means which God employs to act upon souls are of a moral or spiritual sort. The angels introduce providential judgment; while the gospel lays hold of poor sinners to save them. The Lord intimates here that an end will be put to the present sending out of the word of the kingdom, and a day when the effects of Satan's working must be fully developed and judged. "The reapers are the angels." We have nothing to do with the judicial part, only with the spread of the good; the angels, with the judgment of the wicked. "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world." The same word is used for "world" in verse 40 as in verse 39. Unfortunately, our version gives only the same English word in all.

Many scriptures show a future time and state of things for the world totally different from what the gospel contemplates. I will refer to one or two in the prophets. Take Isaiah 11, which speaks first of our Lord under the figure of a branch out of the roots of Jesse. It is plain that this is true of Christ, whether at His first or second advent. He was born an Israelite, and of the family of David. And again, as to the Holy Ghost resting upon Him, we know that this was true of Him when He was a man here below: but in verse 4 we find another thing: "With righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth." If you argue that this applies now, because in the kingdom of heaven the Lord acts upon the souls of the meek, etc., I ask you to read a few words more:,,And He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked." Is the Lord doing this now? Clearly not. Instead of slaying. the wicked

with the breath of His lips, is He not converting the wicked by the word of His grace? — in entire contrast with what is described here. In Rev. 19 we have the same period of judgment, where the Lord is seen with a sword proceeding out of His mouth. It represents righteous judgment executed by the bare word of the Lord. As He spoke the world into being, He will speak the wicked into perdition. Taking this as the indubitable meaning of what is mentioned here in Isaiah, what follows? — a state of things quite unlike what we have now under the gospel: "Righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

All this is not what we have now. Instead of the world being converted by preaching the gospel, Scripture emphatically declares that in the latter days perilous times should come; and that in the last times shall prevail, not the truth of Christ, but the lie of Antichrist (1 John 2); not the triumph of the good, but of the bad, till the Lord puts forth His own hand; and this is what is reserved for His appearing and kingdom. "He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked." The Lord is not smiting the earth now. He has opened heaven: but by and by He will take the earth. In the Revelation you have the vision of the mighty angel, with his right foot upon the sea and the left on the earth. It is the Lord taking the whole universe under His own immediate

government. Now the mystery of iniquity is left unjudged. Evil is allowed to go on rampant in the world. But this will not be for ever The mystery of God is to be finished. Then will begin this amazing change, “the regeneration,” as our Lord styles it, when the Spirit of God shall be poured out, and the earth be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. But till these times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord, Scripture calls the intervening space the evil age. So in Galatians 1:4, not the material world is meant, but the moral course of things, that is, “this present evil age.” The new age, on the contrary, will be glorious, holy and blessed.

In the very next verse, of Isaiah 11, we have the restoration of God’s ancient people foretold, the gathering in of all Israel as well as. of Judah. At the return from the Babylonish captivity such was not the case. A small fraction of Judah and Benjamin came back, and only a few individuals of Israel. The ten tribes are universally called “the lost tribes;” whereas, “It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.... And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea” — a thing that has never been done, nor anything

like it. “And with His mighty wind shall He shake His hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dryshod. And there shall be a highway for the remnant of His people which shall be left from Assyria, like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.” Both in the Egyptian sea and in the Nile there be will this great work of God, outstripping what He did when He brought the people out the first time by Moses and Aaron.

This will be the age to come, but in the present age the tares and the wheat are to grow together till the harvest, which is the consummation of this age; and when it arrives, the Lord sends forth His angels, “and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.” The severing then takes place: the tares are gathered and cast into a furnace of fire, and “then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Mark the accuracy of the expression, I’ Then shall they shine forth;” not “Then shall they be caught up.” It will be a new age, in which is no mingling of the good and bad: but the gathering out of the wicked for judgment closes this age, in order that the good may be blessed in the next.

So here, we have the upper region, called the kingdom of the Father; and the lower, the kingdom of the Son of Man. “The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.” These are not even allowed to be on the earth, but are cast into a furnace of fire. “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” Both are “the kingdom of God.” What a glorious prospect! Is it not a sweet

thought that even this present scene of ruin and confusion is to be delivered? that God is to have the joy of His heart, not only in filling the heavens with His glory, but in the Son of Man honoured in the very place where He was rejected?

But let us now look at the next parable. The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field" (ver. 44). This is the first of the new parables within the house. The Lord is there showing, not the state of things found under the public profession of the name of Christ, but the hidden things, or those which require discernment. It is a treasure hid in a field, which a man finds and hides, and for joy thereof sells all that he hath and buys the field. I am aware that it is the habit of persons to apply this to a soul finding Christ. But what does the man in the parable do? He sells all that he has to buy the field. Is this the way for a man to be saved? If so, salvation is a question not of faith, but of giving up everything to gain Christ, which is not grace, but works carried to the utmost. When a man has Christ, he would doubtless give up everything for Him. But these are not the terms on which a man first receives Christ for his soul's need. But this is not all: "The field is the world." Am I to buy the world in order to obtain Christ? This only shows the difficulties into which we fall whenever we depart from the simplicity of Scripture. The Lord Himself confutes such an interpretation. He shows that there is one Man, one only, who saw this treasure in the midst of the confusion. It is Himself, who gave up all His rights in order that He might have sinners washed in His blood and redeemed to God; it

was He who bought the world, in order to acquire the treasure He valued. The two things are distinctly presented in John 17:2, “As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him.” There is the treasure: “As many as Thou hast given Him.” He buys the whole, the outside world, in order to possess this hidden treasure.

But, moreover, “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (vers. 45, 46). The parable of the hid treasure did not sufficiently convey what the saints are to Christ. For the treasure might consist of a hundred thousand pieces of gold and silver. And how would this mark the blessedness and beauty of the Church? The merchantman finds “one pearl of great price.” The Lord does not see merely the preciousness of the saints, but the unity and heavenly beauty of the assembly. Every saint is precious to Christ; but ‘He loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.” That is what is seen here — “One pearl of great price.” I do not in the least doubt that its spirit may be applied to every Christian; but I believe it is intended to set forth the loveliness of the Church in the eyes of Christ. It could not be fully said of a man awaking to believe the gospel, that he is seeking goodly pearls? And before conversion, the sinner is rather feeding on husks with the swine. Here it is one who seeks “goodly pearls,” which no unconverted man ever really sought. There is no possibility of applying these parables except to the Lord Himself. How blessed it is that, in the midst of all the confusion which the devil has wrought, Christ sees in His saints a treasure, and

the beauty of His Church, spite of all infirmities and failure!

Then we have all wound up by the parable of the net which is thrown into the sea (vers. 47-50). It is a figure used to remind us that our energies and desires must be directed after those who are floating about in the sea of the world. The net is cast into the sea, and gathers of every kind, “which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.” Who are “they”? Never do we find the angels gathering the good, but always severing the wicked for judgment. The fishers were men, like the servants in the first parable. But it is not only the gospel that we have here. The net gathers in of every kind. It is shown us that out of every class, before the Lord returns in judgment, there was to be a mighty operation of the Spirit through the fishers of men, gathering saints together in a way quite unexampled. May not the spirit of this be going on now? The gospel is going out with remarkable power over all lands. But there is another action — the gathering the good together and putting them into vessels. The bad are cast away; but this is not the end of them. “The angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire.” The angels’ business is always with the wicked; the servants’ with the good. The severing of the wicked from among the just is not the fishermen’s work at all; and their casting of the bad away is not the same thing as the furnace of fire.9 Then “the pearl of great price” — the Church which He loves and for which “He gave Himself,” and will adorn Himself with it as His companion and bride, in heavenly glory.

Then “the net” cast into the Gentile sea after the Church is “caught up” to meet her Bridegroom-the Gospel of the Kingdom going out and gathering a multitude, to be sorted by the administrators of the government of God at the close of that brief age. We commend the pamphlet to the reader, also the “Numerical Bible” on the Gospels, by the same author. Ed.

In commenting on chapters 8 and 9 of our Gospel, some striking instances of displacement have been already pointed out. Thus the incidents of crossing the lake in the storm, of the cured demoniacs, of the raised daughter of Jairus, and of the woman healed on the way, belong, as matters of history, to the interval between the parables we have been lately occupied with and the despising of our blessed Lord, which our Evangelist proceeds to* set down next in order. I have sought to explain the principle on which, as I believe, the Holy Spirit was pleased to act in thus arranging the events, so as most vividly to develop our Lord’s Messianic ministry in Israel, with His rejection and its consequences. Hence it is that the intervening facts having been inserted in that earlier portion, the unbelief of Israel in presence of His teaching naturally follows. He was in His own country and taught them in their synagogues; but the result, spite of astonishment at His wisdom and mighty works, is the scornful inquiry, “Is not this the carpenter’s son?... And they were offended in Him.” A prophet He is, but without honour in His own country and in His own house. The manifestation of glory is not denied; but Him in whom it was manifested, is not received according to God, but judged according to the sight and apprehensions of nature (vers. 54-58).

Matthew 14

Nor is this the whole sad truth. About this time the twelve were sent forth. This we have had in chapter 10, forming part of the special series of events transplanted into that part of the Gospel; but, in point of time, it followed the people's fleshly judgment of Christ. Their mission was beautifully given before by Matthew, so as to complete the picture of Christ's patient persevering grace with Israel, as well as to testify the rights of His person as Jehovah, the Lord of the harvest. Here consequently the fact is omitted, but the effect appears. "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist: he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him."

This gives occasion to the Spirit of God to tell the tale (vers. 3-12) of the extinction of John the Baptist's testimony in his own blood. It was not only a blinded people, but in their midst ruled a false and reckless king, who feared not first to imprison, and finally to slay, that blessed witness of God. Not that he did not fear the multitude (ver. 5); for his passions would have impelled to do the deed; nor that he had not sorrow and qualms when it came to the point (ver. g); but what can these restraints avail against the wiles and power of Satan? Bad as Herod was, he was not altogether without a conscience, and the preaching of John had reached it, so far at least as to render him uneasy.' But the issue was what one might expect who knows that an enemy is behind the scene, hating all that is of God, and goading man on to be his own slave and God's foe, in the gratification of lust and the maintenance of honour worse than vanity. What an insight into the world and

the heart we have here from God! And with what holy simplicity all is laid bare which it would be profitable for us to hear and weigh! “Man being in honour abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish. This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve their sayings. Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning.” So sang the Psalmist, and surely it was right and of God. “And he (the king) sent and beheaded John in the prison; and his head was brought in a charger and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother” (vers. 10, 11). Such is man, and such woman, without God.

When word was brought to the Lord about John’s death, He marks His sense of the act at once — “He departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed Him.” There was no insensibility in Him, whatever His longsuffering and grace. He felt the grievous wrong done to God and His testimony and His servant. It was the harbinger of a storm still more violent and a deed of blood darker far — the awful sin of His own rejection. He would not hurry the moment, but retires. He was a sufferer, a perfect sufferer, as well as a sacrifice; and while His sufferings rose to their height in that most solemn hour when He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, it would be to ignore much if we limited our thoughts and feelings of His love and moral glory to His closing agony. The Lord, then, so much the more felt the evil, because of His unselfish love and unstained holiness. It is ever felt most in God’s presence, where Jesus felt everything. The work of rejection goes on.

Did this deep sense in His spirit of the growing power of evil in Israel interrupt the course of His love? Far from it. “And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and He healed their sick” (ver. 14). Let murderous unbelief act as it may, He was Jehovah, present here below in humiliation, but in divine power and grace.

The disciples poorly profit by His grace, and leave small space for the display of His beneficent power. So, when it was evening, they “came to Him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals” (ver. 15). “Send the multitude away!” — Away from Jesus? what a proposal! The greatness of the strait, the urgency of the need, the difficulty of the circumstances, which to unbelief are so many reasons for men to do what they can, are to faith just so much the more the plea and occasion for the Lord to show what He is. “Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.” Oh, the dullness of man! — the folly and slowness of heart in disciples to believe all! And yet, beloved friends, have we not seen it? Have we not proved the selfsame thing in ourselves? What lack of care for others! What measuring of their wants, in the forgetfulness of Him who has all power in heaven and on earth, and who, in the same breath that assures us of it, has sent us forth to meet the deepest necessities of sin-darkened souls!

“And they say unto Him, We have here but five loaves and two fishes.” Ah! were they, are we, so blind as to overlook that it is not a question of what, but whom, we have? Jesus is nothing to the flesh even of disciples.

He said, “Bring them hither to Me.” Oh for more simplicity in thus bringing every lack and every scanty supply to Him whose it is to provide, not for us only, but for all the exigencies of His love; to reckon on Him more habitually as One who cannot act beneath Himself.

“And He commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, He blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to His disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children” (vers. 19-21).

How blessed the scene, and how the perfectness of Christ shines through it all! In nothing does He depart from grace, spite of the recent display of murderous hatred in Herod; His very retiring apart before it is but a further step in the path of His sorrow and humiliation; and yet there, in the desert, to this great multitude, drawn out by their wants, comes forth this striking testimony. Should they not have assuredly gathered who and what He was? Jehovah had chosen Zion — had desired it for His habitation — had said, “This is My rest forever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it.” But now an Edomite was there, the slave of a ravening Gentile; and the people would have it so, and the chief priests would shortly cry, “We have no king but Caesar.” Nevertheless, the rejected One spreads a table in the wilderness, abundantly blesses Zion’s provision, and satisfies her poor with bread. The miracle may not be the fulfilment of Psalm 132:5, but it is the witness that He was there who could, and yet will, fulfil it. He is the Messiah, but the rejected Messiah, as ever in our

Gospel. He satisfies His poor with bread, but it is in the wilderness, whither He had withdrawn apart from the unbelieving nation and the wilful apostate king.

But now a change opens on our view. For “straightway Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a ship and to go before Him unto the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone” (vers. 22, 23). The crown was not yet to flourish upon Himself. He must leave His ancient people because of their unbelief, and take a new position on high, and call out a remnant to another state of things also. Rejected as Messiah on earth, He would not be a king by the will of man to gratify the worldly lusts of any, but go above, and there exercise His priesthood before God. It is an exact picture of what the Lord has done. Meanwhile, if the masses of Israel (“the great congregation”) are dismissed, His elect are ushered into a scene of troubles in the absence of their Master during the night of man’s day. “The ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves; for the wind was contrary.”

Such were some of the consequences of Christ’s rejection. Apart on high, and not in the wilderness, He prays for His own; locally severed, and yet in truth far nearer, He prays for the disciples left alone, to outward appearance. They are “such as should be saved,” the chosen ones, companions of His own humiliation while the nation despised Him.

“And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is

a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (vers. 25-31.) Without dwelling now on the moral lesson, with which we are all more or less familiar, a few words on the typical instructions conveyed by the passage may be welcome.

He will leave His intercessional place above, and rejoin His disciples when their troubles and perplexity are deepest. The mountain, the sea, storm and calm, darkness and light, are all, as to security, alike to Christ; but His taking part in the distress is the terror of the natural mind. At first even the disciples "were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear," only hushed by the sign of His speedy presence. This hardly goes beyond the circumstances and condition of the Jewish remnant. If there be any part which does, it is set forth in Peter, who, on the word of Jesus, quits the ship (which presents the ordinary state of the remnant), and goes to meet the Saviour outside all support of nature. It is our part to cross the world by divine power; for we walk by faith, and not by sight. The wind was not hushed, the waves as threatening as ever; but had not Peter heard that word "Come"; and was it not enough? It was ample as from the Lord and God of all. "And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the

water, to go to Jesus." As long as Jesus and His word were before his heart, there was no failure any more than danger. "But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me." Peter failed, as the Church has failed, to walk toward Christ and with Christ; but, as in his case so in ours, Christ has been faithful, and has delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in "whom we trust that He will yet deliver." "And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth Thou art the Son of God" (vers. 32, 33).

Jesus now rejoins the remnant, and calm immediately follows, and He is owned there as the Son of God. Nor this only, for "they came into the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place had knowledge of Him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto Him all that were diseased, and besought Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment; and as.many as touched were made perfectly whole" (vers. 34-36). The Lord is now joyfully received in the very scene where before He had been rejected. It is the blessing and healing of a distressed and groaning world, consequent on His return in acknowledged power and glory.

Matthew 15

We find in this chapter striking evidence of the great change which was now fast coming in through the rejection of Jesus by Israel. For, first, we have certain religious guides, "Scribes and Pharisees which were of Jerusalem," who had the best spiritual opportunities of their nation, and who came clothed with all that

savoured of antiquity and outward sanctity. These men put the question to our Lord, “Why do Thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.” The Lord proceeds to deal with conscience. He does not enter into an abstract discussion about tradition; nor does He dispute with them as to the authority of the elders; but He at once lays hold of the plain fact that, in their zeal for the tradition of the elders, they were setting themselves point-blank against the clear, positive commandment of God. This I believe to be the invariable effect of tradition, no matter with whom it may be found. If we take up the history of Christendom, and consider any rule that ever was invented, it will be found to carry those who follow it in opposition to the mind of God. It may seem to be the most natural thing possible, and growing out of the new circumstances, of the Church; but we are never safe in departing from God’s word for any other standard.

I am not now contending for the bare literal interpretation of Scripture. A certain course that the word of God binds upon His saints in dealing with one evil may not be their duty at some other crisis. New circumstances modify the path the Church ought to pursue. Were you to apply the directions given for judging immorality to fatal error touching our Lord’s person, you would have a very insufficient measure of discipline. False doctrine does not touch the natural conscience as gross conduct. Nay, you may too often find a believer drawn away by his affections to make excuses for those who are fundamentally heterodox. All sorts of difficulties fill the mind where the eye is not really single. Many might thus be involved who did not

themselves hold the false doctrine. If I hold the principle of dealing with none but him who brings not the doctrine of Christ, it will not do; for there may be others entangled with it. What is any individual, what is the Church even, in comparison with the Saviour, the Son of the Father? Accordingly, the rule laid down by the Spirit for vindicating Christ's person from blasphemous assailants, or their partisans, is far more stringent than where it is a question of moral corruption, be it ever so bad.

Again, there is a strong tendency to stereotype our own previous practice, and when some fresh evil comes in, to insist on what was done before, or generally, without inquiring afresh of God and searching into His word in view of the actual case before us and our own responsibility. The spirit of dependence is needed in order to walk rightly with God. There is in the written word of God that which will meet every claim; but each case should be a renewed occasion for consulting that word in His presence who gave it. People like to be consistent with themselves, and to hold fast former opinions and practices.

Our Lord, in this place, asserts that deference to mere human tradition leads into direct disobedience of God's will. Washing the hands might have seemed to be a most proper act. Nobody could pretend that Scripture forbade it; and, no doubt, the Jewish doctors could press its great significance. They might very well argue how calculated it was to keep before their minds the purity God insists on, and especially that we ought never to receive anything from His hand without putting away all defilement from ours. They might reason thus to a people who loved all outward routine. At all events they

might say, What was the harm of such a tradition? But our Lord simply comes to this issue: “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? “By means of their tradition God was disobeyed. The command to honour the father and mother was the first commandment with promise, as the apostle says in writing to the Ephesians. Other commandments had the threat of death annexed to them; this commandment carried the promise of long life upon the earth. The apostle’s reasoning is, that, if a Jewish child was not only bound, but encouraged by such a promise, to venerate his parents, how much more is a christian child to obey them — not merely in the law, but in the Lord.

The Lord, then, confronts the Pharisees with, “God commanded, saying, honour thy father and mother; and he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.” Honour to parents was valued by God; and disrespect was deadly in His sight — “But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, and honour not his father or his mother...” The Jews had brought in a cheat (to quiet their consciences) by which they might free themselves from the obligation to meet filial duties. They had only to pronounce the word, “It is a gift” (Corban), and a parent might be forgotten! Doubtless, it was one of their authorized traditions, and for the priest’s profit, but in God’s sight a direct breach of His command. “Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.” And this is what tradition usually does, whether in Romanism or elsewhere. To add to Scripture is ruinous: it does not matter by whom it may be done, or for whatever holy motives men may allege; God is jealous about it, and will not have His

word enlarged or amended. Revelation is complete, and our simple business is to be obedient to the word of God.

Take, for instance, the choice of a minister. People, Christians, say, We must send for ministers, and choose between them who is to be ours. I am willing to conceive care and conscience in exercising their judgment. But where is the warrant for choosing any one whatever to preach the gospel, or to teach the Church? Is there one precept, or one instance, in all the New Testament? Did God, then, not foresee the difficulties and the wants of congregations? Surely He did. Why, then, is there absence of all such directions for them? Because it was a sin to do it; not only not His mind but contrary to it. There is not a single case, nor anything like it, in Scripture from the time the Holy Ghost was sent down at Pentecost. Yet multitudes of churches are spoken of in Scripture. What, then, is a congregation to do when they want a minister? Why not search and see the Scripture way of meeting the need? The difficulty arises from their being in a false position already. The central truth of the Church is the presence of the Holy Ghost. I am speaking now of the Christian assembly, wherein the Spirit is personally present to act according to His own will in the midst of disciples there gathered for the purpose of glorifying God and exalting Christ. In such a meeting the question of choosing a minister would not arise. So that, if you take this common Protestant tradition of choosing a minister, it is in distinct opposition to the word of God. It might be good for a Christian assembly to feel their weakness. There might be none with any special gift among them: some might be able to help in worship and prayer, though not in preaching or teaching. But the blessed comfort is that, even if there were none

specially gifted in the Word, the Holy Ghost is able to edify the saints without such. God in His wisdom may be pleased to raise up none in a particular assembly, or He may send there two, three, or more to minister. I do not believe that any one man has sufficient gifts for the Church. The notion of having a single person to be the exclusive organ of the communications of God to His people is a wrong to them and, above all, to the Lord. At, the Reformation the point was to get the Bible that poor souls might learn of Christ for their salvation. But nearly all that was known of the truth ended there. The Reformation never touched the true question of the Church. The reformers had to deal with a very rough enemy. They had to blow up the masses of rock in the quarry; and we must not find fault if they could not fashion the stones nor build them with equal skill. But we ought not to stop at their hewings.

Here, with the Pharisees, it was not mere following tradition, but using it to indulge hypocritical selfishness. “Ye hypocrites,” says our Lord,” well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.” Those who pretended such zeal for the law were the while destroying it by their tradition, dishonouring God’s own authority in the earthly relationships He had established and honoured. So He adds, “But in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

Upon this, the Lord calls the multitude, and says to them, “Hear and understand: not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.” It is the religious leaders chiefly that occupy themselves with tradition.

The great general snare is denying the evil of men. The deception which Satan constantly uses now is the idea that man is not so bad but moral culture may improve him. The progress of the world is astonishing, they say. There are societies for promoting every philanthropic object, and for the improvement of man. The faults are sought for in the circumstances of surroundings instead of in man. Here is a word that pronounces on these efforts of men in the gross: “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.” The real secret of man’s deplorable condition is his heart. This affects all that comes out.

It is not in any wise what God made. Man is now a corrupt creature, whose corruption is imparted to what he takes in. Therefore mere restraining of the flesh is entirely useless in God’s sight and essentially false. The Lord says to the multitude, “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.” Observe, He has done with the question of Jerusalem and of tradition. He speaks of what touches human nature. Man is lost. But no one thoroughly believes this about himself, till he has found Christ. He may believe he is a sinner, but does he believe he is so bad that no good toward God can be got out of him? Is not the prevalent theory and effort to better man’s condition? But our Lord declares here that the heart is bad; and till the heart is reached, all else is vain. “But the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart.” God’s way is to deal with the heart. What so simple, so blessed, so mighty, as the gospel? And the gospel needs no handmaid? The handmaid has lost her mission and is discharged. Hagar was sent out of the

house, and the son born after the flesh only mocks the child of promise. Man is not now in a state of probation. The trial has been made. God has pronounced that the flesh is utterly worthless; and yet man is constantly re-trying the question, instead of believing God.

The disciples did not altogether relish what the Lord had been saying. They came and said unto Him, “Knowest Thou that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying?” They might not be offended themselves, but were disposed to sympathize with the people who were. But our Lord answers still more sternly, “Every plant which My heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.” There needs a new life from God, not an improving of the old one. A plant of heavenly origin must be planted, then, and the heavenly Father must do it. Every other plant shall be rooted up. “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind.” Reasoning with these Pharisees is altogether vain. They require first principles, and the work of God in their souls. All discussion therefore is useless. “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind.” He did not apply this to the multitude, but to the leaders that were stumbled by the doctrine of man’s total corruption. Such are best left to their own devices. “Let them alone… And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.”

But the Lord does not leave the disciples where they were. Peter answers and says unto Him, “Declare unto us this parable.” What did he mean by calling it a parable? He did not understand it himself. Here was one, the very chief of the twelve apostles, and he cannot understand our Lord when He tells them that man is altogether wrong — his heart most of all; making that which comes out of him evil — not that which goes in.

And this is a parable! The difficulty of Scripture arises less from difficult language than from unpalatable truth. Truth is contrary to people's wishes; they cannot see it, because they do not like to receive it. A man may not be always conscious of this himself, but it is the real secret that God sees. The obstacle consists in man's dislike of the truth. Jesus answered, "Are ye also yet without understanding? Do ye not yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." The source of man's evil is from within. And, therefore, until there is a new life brought in — till man is born again, of water and of the Spirit — all is useless. "These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man."

Here closes our Lord's blessed and weighty instruction, showing that the day of outward forms was past, and that it was now a question of the reality of man's state in the sight of God.

The Lord now turns away from these scribes and Pharisees and goes to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, at the very extremity of the Holy Land, and that particular quarter of the border of it which had been expressly the scene of the judgments of God.

In chapter 11 our Lord had referred to them, and said that it would be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for the cities where His mighty works had been done. They were proverbial as the monuments of God's vengeance among the Gentiles.10

There a woman of Canaan meets Him. If there was one race more particularly under God's ban, it was Canaan. "Cursed be Canaan," said Noah. The youth, Canaan, seems to have been specially the leader of his father in his wickedness against his grandfather Noah. "Cursed be Canaan. A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren." And when Israel was brought into the land, the Canaanites, sunken in deep corruption, were to be exterminated without mercy. Their abominations had gone up to heaven with a cry for vengeance from God. Here, this woman came out of the coasts of Canaan, and cries unto Him, saying, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, Thou Son of David: my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil" (ver. 22). If we could conceive any case most opposed to what we had before — scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem, full of learning and outward veneration for the law — we have it in this poor woman of Canaan.

The circumstances too were dreadful. Not only was it in Tyre and Sidon, recalling the judgments of God, but the devil had taken possession of her daughter. All these circumstances together made the case as deplorable as one could find. How was the Lord to deal with her? The Lord shows, in meeting her case, a great change in His ways. The Jews He had pronounced hypocrites; their worship intolerable to God, and declared such through their own prophets: for in pronouncing them hypocrites, He did it out of the lips of their own prophet Isaiah. Now comes one that had not the smallest tie with Israel. How would the Messiah deal with her? She cries unto Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But He answered her not a word." Not a word!

Why was this? She was on totally wrong ground. What had she to do with the Son of David? Had the Lord merely been the Son of David, could He have given her the blessing He had in His heart? She appealed to Him as if she were one of a chosen people who had claims upon Him as their Messiah. Was it ever promised that Messiah was to heal the Canaanites? Not a word about it. When the Messiah does come as Son of David, the Canaanites will not be there. Look at Zechariah 14, when our Lord shall be King over all the earth, “In that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of Hosts.” The judgments which were not thoroughly executed by Israel, because they were unfaithful to the trust of the Lord, are to be executed when the Son of David will take His inheritance. This woman was altogether confused about it. She had the conviction that He was much more than the Son of David, but she did not know how to bring it out. It is, I think, in much the same way that many persons now, anxious about their sins, have tried the Lord’s Prayer, and have asked the Father to forgive them their sins as they forgive others. They go to God as their Father, and ask of Him to deal with them as children. But this is the very thing which is not yet settled. Are they children? Can they say that God is their Father? They would shrink from it. It is that which they chiefly desire, but they fear it is not so; that is, they have no right to draw near to God on the footing of a relationship which does not exist. And when persons are thus confused, they never get thorough peace to their souls. Sometimes they are hoping they are children of God, sometimes fearing they are not, cast down with the sense of the evil within them. The fact is, they do not understand the matter at all. They are quite right in wishing to turn to God, but

they do not know how to do it. They fear going to God just as they are giving up all thought of having promises or anything else. This shows the wrongness of an anxious soul seeking after God on the ground of promises. A good deal is said about sinners “grasping the promises:” but promises in the Old Testament were for Israel; in the New, for Christians. But you are neither an Israelite nor a Christian. A soul brought to that point is confounded.

It is good for a soul to be brought to this: I have no claim upon God for anything; I am a lost sinner. If God shakes a person from what they have no right to, if He strips them of everything, it is for the purpose of giving them a blessing that He has a right to give them. People forget that now it is the righteousness of God — God’s right to bless through Christ Jesus, according to all that is in His heart. Men are lost; but they are afraid to confess the true ruin in which they are found. To this the Lord was leading the poor woman of Canaan. He was bringing her down to feel that she had no right to the promises — made indeed to Israel, but where were any promises to the Canaanites? Thus, on the ground of His being the Son of David it was impossible for the Lord to give her what she asked. She did not understand this. She thought that if an Israelite might go on the ground of promise, she might. But it is a mistake. The poor woman thus made it meet not to answer her. It was grace and tenderness that led Him not to answer her: He remains silent till she drops the ground that she had first taken.

But the disciples were not silent; they wanted to get rid of her importunity; they did not like the trouble of her. “They came and besought Him, saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us.” But the Lord confirms what has

been already said as to the wrongness of her plea. He says, as it were, She does not belong to the house of Israel: I cannot give her a blessing on the ground she takes, but I will not send her away without a blessing. He was there with special privileges to the sheep of the house of Israel, but she was not a sheep. “He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Then the poor woman “came and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me.” She drops the words “Son of David.” She no longer uses the title which connects Him with Israel, but acknowledges generally His authority. Now He answers her, though she is not yet low enough. When she appeals to Him as Lord, a suitable title, He answers, “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and to cast it to dogs.” The moment that this is uttered, all the secret is out. “Truth, Lord,” she says, “yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” She takes the place of being a dog. She acknowledges that Israel was, in the outward ways of God, the favoured people, as children eating of bread upon the table; whereas, the Gentiles were but the dogs underneath. She acknowledges it, and it is very humbling. People do not like it now. But she is brought down to it. The Lord may, for the purpose of leading us into deeper blessing, break us down to the very lowest point of the truth about ourselves. But was there no blessing even for a dog? She falls back upon this truth: Let it be that I am a dog; has not God some blessing for me? Here the Lord meets her with fullest blessing. He meets her with the strongest approbation of her faith — “O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.” The Lord had pronounced the sentence upon the nation of the Jews who were only hypocrites, and gone out to the Gentiles. Faith meets Him there; a faith

that penetrates through outward circumstances, and bears the discovery of the low place we ought to take; and the poor woman is blessed to her heart's content. "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour." Unlimited grace is bestowed upon a Gentile under special curse; and the heart of our Lord is refreshed by her faith.

But there is more. Having visited the Gentiles, the Lord now returns to Israel in sovereign goodness. "Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the Sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto Him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them: insomuch that the multitude wondered when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel" (vers. 29-31). I consider that this is a picture of Israel feeling their real condition. They are coming to Jesus, looking to Him, and saying, as it were, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." They are to speak thus by and by; and the Lord declared they should not see Him till they should say, "Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord." What they saw in Jesus led them to glorify the God of Israel. Thus the Lord will have relations with Israel. They come, not now in controversy, but as a poor, maimed, blind, and miserable multitude; and the Lord heals them all. But this is not all: He feeds them as well as heals them; and we have the beautiful miracle of the loaves.

But mark the differences. In a former case, the disciples were for sending the multitudes away; and the Lord

allowed them to show out their unbelief., In the present instance, it is Christ Himself who thinks of them and purposes to bless them. “I have compassion on the multitude,” He says, “because they continue with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way” (ver. 32). You may remember that it is said in Hosea 6, “After two days will He revive us; in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight.” It is the adequate time of the trial of the people. Literally, it was the time our Lord lay in the grave. But it is connected also with the future blessing of Israel. “I will not send them away fasting lest they faint by the way. And His disciples say unto Him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?” How slow they are to learn the resources of Christ, as before to learn the worthlessness of man! “Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few fishes.” It is not now five loaves and twelve baskets full left; but with seven loaves they begin, and with seven baskets full they end. The reason is this: seven stands for spiritual completeness in Scripture, and this is intended to show the fulness with which the Lord makes the blessing to flow to His people — the fulness of provision that they have in Him. “He took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to His disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.” I conceive this to be a picture of the Lord providing amply for the Jews — the beloved people of His choice, whom He never can abandon, to whom He must accomplish His promises, because He is the faithful God. Here the Lord, out of His own heart, is providing fully even for their bodily refreshment. This will be the character of the millennial day, when not only

the soul will be blessed, but when every kind of mercy will abound; God vindicating His earth from the hand of Satan, who had long defiled it. In the seven loaves before they ate, and the seven baskets of fragments taken up after they had eaten, you have the idea of completeness, an ample store for the present and for wants to come.

Matthew 16

In the last chapter, which introduces a new part of the subject in Matthew, we saw two great pictures: first, the hypocritical disobedience of those who boasted of the law completely exposed out of their own prophets, as well as by the touchstone of the Lord Himself; and, secondly, the true nature of grace shown to one whose circumstances demanded nothing but sovereign mercy if she were to be blessed at all. At the close, the Lord's patient and perfect grace towards Israel is manifested, spite of the condition of the Jewish leaders. If He compassionated the Gentiles, His heart still yearned over His people, and He showed it by repeating the great miracle of feeding thousands in their needy condition; with no figure here of retirement from earth, which we saw in chapter 14, following the first miracle of feeding the multitudes — the type of our Lord's occupation at the right hand of God.

Now we have another picture, quite distinct from the previous one, though akin to it. It is not the flagrant disobedience of the law through human tradition, but unbelief — the source of all disobedience. Hence, in the language employed by the Holy Ghost, there is only a shade of difference between the words unbelief and disobedience. The former is the root of which the latter

is the fruit. Having shown us the gross systematic violation of God's law, even by those who were religious leaders in Israel, and having convicted them of it, a deeper principle is now brought out, All that disobedience Godward flowed from unbelief of Himself, and, consequently, misapprehension of their own moral condition. These two things always go together. Ignorance of self flows from ignorance of God; and ignorance of both ourselves and God is proved by despising Jesus. And what is true in full of the unbeliever, partially applies to the Christian who in any measure slights the will and person of the Lord. All these are only the workings of that heart of unbelief of which the apostle warns even believers. The grand provision against this, the operation of the Holy Ghost, in contrast with the working of the natural mind of man, comes out here plainly.

"The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting, desired that He would show them a sign from heaven." They were beginning the same story over again; but now it is higher up the source, and, of course, therefore, worse in principle. It is an awful thing to find opposed parties with one only thing uniting them — dislike of Jesus; persons who could have torn each other to pieces at another time, but this is their gathering point — tempting Jesus. "The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting," etc. There was no conflict between the scribes and Pharisees, but a wide chasm separated the Sadducees and Pharisees. Those were the freethinkers of the day; these the champions who stood up for ordinances and the authority of the law. But both joined to tempt Jesus. They desired a sign from heaven. The most significant token that God ever

gave man was before them in the person of His Son, who eclipsed all other signs. But such is unbelief, that it can go into the presence of the full manifestation of God, can gaze at a light brighter than the sun at noonday, and there and then ask God to give a farthing candle.

But Jesus “answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?” (vers. 2, 3). Their own moral condition was the sign and proof that judgment was imminent. For those who could see, there was the fair weather, the Day-spring from on high that had visited them in Jesus. They saw it not! But could they not discern the foul weather! They were in the presence of the Messiah, and were asking for a sign from heaven! The God that made heaven and earth was there, but the darkness comprehended it not. “He came to His own and His own received Him not.” They were utterly blind. They could discern physical changes, but had no perception of moral and spiritual glories actually before them. How truly — “A wicked and adulterous generation seek after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And He left them and departed.”

Men constantly err as to the character of Jesus. They imagine that He could use no strong language and feel no anger; yet there it is in the Word, written in the light. Unbelief is always blind, and betrays its blindness most against Jesus. The same unbelief that could not then discern who and what Jesus was, sees not now Jesus coming, and discerns not the signs of their own

impending ruin. It is the moral condition of men, no matter where they are, only the more remarkably manifested where the light of God is.

Our Lord does not hesitate to touch the evil with unsparing hand. He was the perfect manifestation of love: but let men remember He is the one who said, “wicked and adulterous generation,” “generation of vipers,” etc.”? It flows from true love — if men would but bow to the truth that convicts them. To submit to God’s word, to the truth now, in this world, is to be saved; to be convicted of the truth only in the next world is to be lost for ever. Christ was the faithful and true Witness; He brought God face to face with man, and caused His perfect light to shine upon them. Jesus can meet a soul in its ruin; He may eat with publicans to show that He is able to receive sinners — yea, came to seek and to save the lost, and to forgive sins to the uttermost; but He will never give any sign to satisfy the unbelief that rejects Him. These Pharisees and Sadducees would not hear His voice of grace, and they had to hear their own sentence from the judge of all the earth: “A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.” Had Jesus not been there, to ask for a sign would not have been so wicked; but His presence made it audacious unbelief and frightful hypocrisy. And what was this sign? The sign of one that disappeared from the earth; that, through the figure of death, passed away from the Jewish people, and after a while was given back to them. It was the symbol of death and resurrection, and our Lord immediately acted upon it. He “left them and departed.” He would pass under the power of death; He

would rise again, and the message which Israel had despised, He would carry to the Gentiles.

But there are other forms of unbelief; and the next scene (ver. 5) is with His disciples: so true is it that what you find working in its grossest shape in an unconverted man may be traced, in another way perhaps, in believers. “Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” They did not understand Him; they reasoned among themselves; and whenever Christians begin to reason, they never understand anything. “They reasoned among themselves saying, It is because we have taken no bread.”

There is such a thing, of course, as sound and solid deduction. The difference is that wrong reasoning always starts from man and tries to rise to God, while right reasoning starts from God towards man. The natural mind can only infer from his experience, and thus forms his ideas of what God must be. This is the basis of human speculation in divine things; whereas, God is the source, strength and guide of the thoughts of faith. How do I know God? In the Bible, which is the revelation of Christ from the first of Genesis to the end of Revelation. I see Him there, the key-stone of the arch, the centre of all Scripture speaks of; and unless the connection of Christ with everything is seen, nothing is understood aright. There is the first grand fallacy, the leaving out of God’s revealing Himself in His Son. It is not the light behind the veil as under the Jewish system, but infinite blessing now that God has come to man, and man is brought to God. In the life of Christ I see God drawing nigh to man, and in His death man brought nigh to God. The veil is rent; all is out, of man on the one

hand, and of God on the other, as far as God is pleased to reveal Himself to man in this world. All stands in the boldest relief in the life and death of Christ. But disciples are apt to be very dull about these things now as ever; and so when He warned them about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they thought that He was merely speaking of something for daily life — very much like what we see at the present time. But our Lord "said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread" (ver. 8). Why did they not think of Christ? Would they have troubled themselves about loaves if they had thought rightly of Him? Impossible! They were anxious, or thought Him so, about bread! "Do ye not yet understand," says the Lord, "neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that He bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (vers. 9-12). And this is what disciples even now often misapprehend. They do not understand the hatefulness of unsound doctrine. They are alive to moral evils. If a person gets drunk or falls into any other gross scandal, they know, of course, it is very wicked; but if the leaven of evil doctrine work, they do not feel it. Why is it that disciples are more careful of that which mere natural conscience can judge, than of doctrine which destroys the foundation of everything both for this world and for that which is to come? What a serious thing that disciples should need to be warned of this by the Lord,

and even then not understand! He had to explain it to them. There was the darkening influence of unbelief among the disciples, making the body the great aim, and not seeing the all-importance of these corrupt doctrines, which menaced souls in so many insidious forms around them.

But there is another way and scene in which unbelief works. This chapter is the dissection of the root of many a form of unbelief. “By faith we understand,” says the apostle to the Hebrews. The worldly man tries to understand first and then to believe; the Christian begins with the feeblest understanding, perhaps, but he believes God: his confidence is in One above himself; and thus, out of the stone there is raised up a child unto Abraham. The Lord now questions the disciples as to the real gist of all the matter, whether among Pharisees, Sadducees, or disciples themselves. “He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” It is now Christ’s person which comes out; and this, I need hardly say, is deeper than all other doctrine. “Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? And they said, Some say that Thou art John the Baptist; some Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets” (vers. 13, 14). There are so many opinions among men, unbelief argues, that certainty is impossible. Some say one thing and some another: you talk of truth and Scripture; yet, after all, it is only your view. But what says faith? Certainty, from God, is our portion, the moment that we see who Jesus is. He is the only remedy that banishes difficulty and doubt from the mind of man. “Whom say ye that I am?” (ver. 15). This was for the purpose of bringing out now what is the pivot of man’s blessing and God’s glory, and becomes

the turning point of the chapter. Among these very disciples we are to have a blessed confession from one of them — the power of God working in a man who had been rebuked for his want of faith before, as he was indeed just after. When we are really broken down before God about our little faith, the Lord can reveal some deeper higher view of Himself than we ever had before. The disciples had mentioned the various opinions of men: one said He was Elias; another, John the Baptist, etc. “But whom say ye that lam? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Glorious confession! In the Psalms He is spoken of as the Son of God, but very differently. There He is dealing with the kings of the earth, who are called upon to take care how they behave themselves. But the Holy Ghost now lifts up the veil to show that the “Son of the living God” involves depths far beyond an earthly dominion, howsoever glorious. He is the Son of that living God who can communicate life even to those dead in sin. “Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven.”

First, the Father is revealing; and the moment Christ hears Himself confessed as the Son of the living God, He also sets His own seal and honours the confessor. It is the assertion of one who at once rises up to His own intrinsic dignity: “And I say also unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” He gives Simon a new name. As God had given to Abraham, Sarah, etc., because of some fresh manifestation of Himself, so does the Son of God. It had been prophetically announced before; but now comes out for the first time the reason

why it was affixed to him. “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church.” What rock? The confession Peter had made that Jesus was the Son of the living God. On this the Church is built. Israel was governed by a law; the Church is raised on a solid and imperishable and divine foundation — on the person of the Son of the living God. And when this fuller confession breaks from the lips of Peter, the answer comes, Thou art Peter — thou art a stone: a man that derivest thy name from this Rock on which the Church is built.

In the early chapters of the Acts, Peter always speaks of Jesus as God’s holy Servant. He speaks of Him as a man who went about doing good; as the Messiah. slain by the wicked hands of men, whom God raised up from the dead. Whatever Peter might know Jesus to be, yet when preaching to the Jews, he presents Him to them simply as the Christ, as the predicted Son of David, who had walked here below, whom they had crucified and God had raised again. Then, at Stephen’s martyrdom, a new term is used about the Lord. That blessed witness looks up and says, “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.” It is not now merely Jesus as the Messiah, but “the Son of Man,” which implies His rejection. When He was refused as the Messiah, Stephen, finding that this testimony was rejected, is led of God to testify of Jesus as the exalted Son of Man at God’s right hand. When Paul is converted, which is given in the next chapter but one, he straightway preaches “Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” He did not merely confess Him, but preached Him as such. And to Paul was entrusted the great work of bringing out the truth about “the Church of God.”

So here, upon Peter's confession, the Lord says, "Upon this rock I will build My Church." You understand the glory of My Person; I will show you the work I am going to accomplish. Mark the expression. It is not, I have been building; but I will build My Church. He had not built it yet, nor begun to build it: it was altogether new. I do not mean there had not been souls believing in Him before, and regenerate of the Spirit; but. the aggregate of saints from the beginning to the end of time it is an error to call "the Church." It is a common notion which has not one shred of Scripture for it. The expression in Acts 7:38, "The church in the wilderness," means the whole congregation — the mass of Israel — the greater part of whose carcasses fell in the wilderness. Can you call that "the Church of God?" There were but few believers among them. People are deceived in this by the sound. The word, "church in the wilderness," merely means the congregation there. The very same word is applied to the confused assembly in Acts 19, which would have torn Paul to pieces. If it were translated like Acts 7, it would be the "church in the theatre," and the blunder is obvious. The word that is translated "church" simply means assembly. To find out what is the nature of the assembly, we must examine the scriptural usage and the object of the Holy Ghost. For you might have a good or bad assembly: an assembly of Jews, of Gentiles, or of God's assembly distinct from either and contrasted with both, as can be readily and undeniably seen in 1 Cor. 10:32. Now it is this last which we mean, i.e., God's assembly, when we speak of "the Church."

What then, to return, does our Lord intimate when He says, "Upon this rock I will build My Church"? Clearly something that He was going to erect upon the

confession that He was the Son of the living God, whom death could not conquer, but only give occasion to the shining forth of His glory by resurrection. “Upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hades” — the power of death — “shall not prevail against it.” This last does not mean the place of the lost, but the condition of separate spirits. “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

The Church and the kingdom of heaven are not the same thing. It is never said that Christ gave the keys of the Church to Peter. Had the keys of the Church or of heaven been given to him, I do not wonder that the people should have imagined a pope. But “the kingdom of heaven” means the new dispensation about to begin on earth. God. was going to open a new economy, free to Jews and Gentiles, the keys of which He committed to Peter. One of these keys was used, if I may so say, at Pentecost when he preached to the Jews; and the other, when he preached to the Gentiles.11 It was the opening of the kingdom to people, whether Jews or Gentiles. “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (ver. 19). The eternal forgiveness of sins has to do with God only, though there is a sense in which forgiving was committed to Peter and the other apostles, which remains true now. Whenever the Church acts in the name of the Lord, and really does His will, the stamp of God is upon their deeds. “My Church,” built upon this rock, is His body — the temple of believers built upon Himself. But “the kingdom of heaven” embraces every one that confesses the name of Christ. This was begun by preaching and baptizing. When a

man is baptized, he enters “the kingdom of heaven,” even if he should turn out a hypocrite. He will never be in heaven, of course, if he is an unbeliever; but he is in “the kingdom of heaven.” He may either be a tare or real wheat in the kingdom of heaven; an evil or a faithful servant; a foolish virgin or a wise one. The kingdom of heaven takes in the whole scene of Christian profession.

But, as we have seen, when Christ speaks of “My Church,” it is another thing. It is what is built upon the recognition and confession of His person — “the Son of the living God.” We know that “he that believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” And, again, “He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God overcometh the world.” But there is a deeper power of the Holy Ghost in acknowledging Him as the Son of God; and the higher the acknowledgment of Christ, the more spiritual energy in going through this world and overcoming it. If one believer is more spiritual than another, it is because he knows and values the person of Christ better. All power for Christian walk and testimony depends upon the appreciation of Christ.

Mark also the order of our Lord’s words. First, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven.” Christ must be found outside the Church, and before it; Christ must be discerned first and foremost by the individual soul; Christ and what He is must, before and above all, be revealed to the heart by the Father. He may employ persons who belong to the Church as instruments, or may directly use His own word. But whatever the means employed, it is the Father revealing the glory of the Son to a poor sinful man; and when this is settled with the individual, Christ says, “Upon this

rock I will build My Church." Faith in Christ is essentially God's order and way before the question of the Church comes in. This is one great controversy between God and the mystery of iniquity which is now working in this world. The aim of the Holy Ghost is to glorify Christ; whereas that of the other is to glorify self. The Holy Ghost is carrying on this blessed revelation that the Father has made of the Son; and when the individual question is settled, then comes the corporate privilege and responsibility — the Church.

If I have got Christ, it is infinitely blessed. But I ought to believe, also, that He is building His Church. Do I know my place there? Am I found walking in the light of Christ — a living stone in that which He is building — in healthy action as a member of His body? Salvation was wrought here upon earth, and here it is that the Church is being built upon this rock; and the gates of hades — the invisible state, or separate condition — shall not prevail against it. Death may come in, but the gates of hades shall not prevail against it. The Lord says in Revelation that He has the keys of death and hades. The death of the Christian is in the hands of Christ. By the cross He has annulled the power of Satan, and He is the Lord both of the dead and of the living; death is not our Lord, but Christ. "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether, therefore, we live or die, we are the Lord's." The Lord has absolute right over us; and therefore death is robbed of all that makes it so terrible. In Revelation you have the Lord with the keys of death and hades. The keys of the kingdom of heaven He gives to Peter because he it was who was to preach to Jews and Gentiles. The door was flung open on the day of Pentecost first, and

afterward yet more widely when the Gentiles were brought in.

Administration is also committed to Peter, both in binding and loosing; it is authority to act publicly here below, with the promise of ratification above: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." That is first said to Peter; and doubtless, from what we have in Matt. 18:18: "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," the binding and the loosing applies also to the other disciples; not to the apostles only, but, I believe, to the disciples as such. Compare also the charge in John 20:19-23. On that principle people are received into the Christian Church, and on that principle wicked persons are put away till repentance justifies their restoration. Apostles or disciples do not forgive sins as a matter of eternal judgment, of course, which God alone has the power to do. But God requires of us to judge a person's state for reception into or exclusion from the circle which confesses the name of Christ here below. In Acts 5 Peter bound their sin on Ananias and Sapphira. This does not prove that they were lost; but the sin was bound upon them, and brought present judgment. Neither Peter nor Paul was at Corinth; and there the Lord Himself laid His hand upon the guilty: some were weak and sickly, and some had fallen asleep. This does not decide against their final salvation — rather, indeed, the contrary. When they were judged of the Lord they were chastened, that they should not be condemned with the world (that is, that they should not be lost). They might be taken away

by death, and yet be saved in the day of the Lord. The Church puts away a wicked person. The man at Corinth, whom they were told to excommunicate, was guilty of heinous sin, but was not lost. He was delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be "saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." In the next epistle we find this person so overwhelmed with sorrow on account of his sin that they were charged to confirm their love to him. Simple indeed is the binding and loosing which people often make so mysterious. The only sins that the Church ought to judge are those that come out so palpably as to demand public repudiation according to the word of God. The Church is not to be a petty tribunal of judgment for everything. We ought never to claim the assembly's intervention except about the evil that is so plain as to be entitled to carry the consciences of all along with it. This I take to be the meaning of binding and loosing.

"Then charged He His disciples that they should tell no man that He was the Christ." A remarkable change comes here. Peter had confessed Him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God: now the Lord charges them to tell no one that He was the Christ. It was as good as saying, It is too late; I am rejected as the Christ — the Messiah, the Anointed of Jehovah. He is refused by Israel, and He accepts the fact. But mark another thing: "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (ver. 2 1). In Luke 9:20, we are told, "He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God." "The Son of the living God" is not

mentioned in Luke: consequently, nothing is said about the building of the Church. How perfect is Scripture! In Luke the Lord goes on to say, “The Son of Man must suffer many things,” etc. There is a great distinction between “the Christ” and “the Son of Man.” The latter is His title as rejected, then as exalted in heaven.

Forbidding the disciples to tell that He was the Christ is the turning-point in Christ’s ministry. The meaning is that Christ drops His Jewish title, and He speaks of His Church. Before it comes, He says, “Upon this rock I will build My Church.” From that time He began to show unto them how that He must “go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” Luke adds that “He must first suffer,” etc. All this is connected with the building of the Church, which began to be built after Christ rose from the dead and took His place in heaven. In Ephesians the Church is spoken of only after Christ’s resurrection and His taking a new place in heaven have been brought out. We had God choosing the saints in Christ Jesus, but, not the Church. Election is an individual thing. He chose us — you and me, and all the other saints — that “we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” But when Paul has introduced Christ’s death and resurrection, he says that God “gave Him to, be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.”

But mark a solemn fact. Immediately after Simon had made this glorious confession of the Lord Jesus, he is called, not Peter, but Satan! He had not said one improper word, according to human judgment. He had not even indulged in haste, as was often his wont. The

Lord never called mere excitement “Satan”; but He so called Peter. because he sought to turn Him away from suffering and death. The secret was this: Peter had his mind on an earthly kingdom, and neither fully felt what sin was nor what the grace of God was. He stood in the way of the Lord’s going to the cross. Was it not for Peter that He was going there? Had Peter thought of this, would he have said, “Be it far from Thee, Lord?” It was man thwarting Christ, and He pronounces it Satan. “He turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (ver. 23). Peter thus feeling and acting connects with the mystery of iniquity; not with what was taught by the Father.

Our Lord turns to the disciples and puts before them that not merely is He going to the cross, but they must be prepared to follow Him there. If I am to be in the true path of Jesus, I must deny myself and take up the cross and follow — not the disciples — not this church or that church, but — Jesus Himself. I must turn from what is pleasing to my heart naturally. I must meet with shame and rejection in this present evil world. If not, depend upon it, I am not following Jesus; and remember, it is a dangerous thing to believe in Jesus without following Him. Following Jesus maybe like losing one’s life. At the present time much confession of Christ is, comparatively, an easy matter. There is little opposition, or persecution. People imagine that the world is changed; they talk of progress and enlightenment. The truth is, Christians are changed. Let us ask ourselves whether we desire to be found taking up our cross and following Jesus. “If any man will come after Me, let him

deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it" (vers. 24, 25).

What lessons for our souls! The flesh easily arrogates superiority over the spirit; and indulgence to the path of ease comes in (though of Satan) under the specious plea of love and kindness. Is the cross of Christ our glory? Are we willing to suffer in doing His will? What a delusion is present honour and enjoyment!

8 If we but turn to Scripture as its own interpreter, the "three measures of meal" in the parable would naturally refer us to the meal offerings prescribed in the law. They were to be food for the priests, eaten in the holy place, without leaven. See Lev. 6:14-17, and 1 Cor. 5:8.

9 In a pamphlet "The Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven" by F. W. Grant, the meaning of these three parables is made luminous. The "treasure hid in the field," setting forth Israel, Jehovah's "peculiar treasure" (Ps. 134:4) — sought by the Lord, who acquires title over field and treasure by His humiliation and sufferings unto death; and now keeps the hidden treasure for a future day.

10 The overthrow of Tyre predicted in Isa. 23 and Ezek. 26 was only partially accomplished by Nebuchadnezzar who took Judah away captive to Babylon. This ancient and princely merchant-city upon the sea was afterwards not only captured but utterly destroyed by Alexander according to Ezek. 26:3, 4, who sold the remnant of her inhabitants into slavery. — [Ed.

11 It has been thought that the "baptizing" and "teaching," which the risen Lord commanded in sending

the disciples to all nations Matt. 28:18-20 are really the “keys” of the kingdom. — [Ed.

Matthew 17 - 20

Matthew 17

Our previous chapter has shown us Jesus rejected as Christ or Messiah, confessed as the Son of the living God, and about to return in glory as the Son of Man. But along with the glory in which He is to come and reward each according to his works, we have His suffering: not merely rejection, but His being put to death — raised the third day indeed, but still the suffering Son of Man, and to return in glory. Following up the subject of His Father's glory, in which He declares He is to come with His angels and judge in His kingdom, we have now a picture given on the holy mount — a striking picture in a twofold point of view. The glory, as we saw, of the kingdom depends upon His being the Son of Man, the exalted Man who had erst suffered, and in whose hands all glory is committed — who had at every cost retrieved the honour of God, and is to make effectual the blessing of man; who, by virtue of His suffering, has already brought to naught the power of Satan for those who believe, and who eventually, when the kingdom comes, is to expel Satan altogether, and bring in that for which God has been waiting — a kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world. Accordingly, "After six days" (type of the ordinary term of work here below), "Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart" (ver. 1). That is, He takes chosen witnesses; for it was merely a testimony to the kingdom — the sample of what He had referred to when He said, "There be some standing here

which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

The point there is the Son of Man coming, rather than the kingdom itself; and what follows in our chapter is only a partial illustration of the glory of the rejected Son of Man. Partial though it be, nothing could be more blessed, save the kingdom itself; and faith brings us into a very real present realizing of that which is to be. It is "the substantiating of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The kingdom, of which our Lord spoke, is not yet arrived, of course. When it is said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," He speaks of a kingdom which we do enter now. For John does not present it as a thing of mere outward manifestation, but gives a deeper revelation of the kingdom, true now, into which every one that is born of God comes, and which shall yet be displayed in its heavenly and its earthly power. But Matthew, who takes up the Jewish part, or Old Testament predictions of the kingdom, sketches us the presentation of the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.

The Lord, accordingly, takes these disciples "up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them. And His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light." The sun is the image of supreme glory, as that which rules the day. "And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Him" — Moses, by whom the law was given, and Elias, the grand sample of the prophets, who recalled the people to the law of Jehovah. They were thus the pillars of the Jewish system, to whom every true Israelite looked back with the deepest feelings of reverence: one of them singled out as the only Jew taken to heaven, without

passing through death; the other, lest he should become an object of worship after his death, having the singular honour of being buried by Jehovah. These two appear in the presence of our Lord. They were known to be Moses and Elias: there seems to have been no difficulty in recognizing them. So, in the resurrection-state, the distinction of persons will be kept up thoroughly. There will be no such thing as that kind of sameness which blots out the peculiarities of each. Though earthly relationships shall have passed away, and no peculiar earthly links which connected one with another on earth will survive, in heaven, yet each will retain his own individuality — with this mighty difference, of course, that all saints will bear the image of the heavenly; for while in the body we all resemble fallen Adam now, yet we are not all lost in one common indistinguishable throng. We each have our own proper character and our peculiar conformation of body. So in glory each will be known for what he is. Moses and Elias are seen as glorified, but as Moses and Elias still; and the Lord is transfigured in their midst. “Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias” — showing that he perfectly well knew which was which. “While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and, behold, a voice out of the cloud which said, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye Him” (vers. 4, 5).

Herein, I conceive, lies the depth of the whole passage. Peter, meaning to do honour to his Master, but in a human way — still savouring in a measure the things of men and not of God — proposes to put his Master on

common ground with the heads of the law and of the prophets. But it must not be. Whatever might be the honour of Moses, whatever the special charge of Elias, who were they, and what, in the presence of the Son of God? The Son may make nothing of Himself; but the Father loves the Son. Peter would put Him on a level with the most honoured of mankind; but the Father's purpose is that every knee shall bow to Him — that all men shall honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. Man never does this, seeing simply man in the Son, in no adequate way honouring Him with divine homage. Faith does, for it sees God in the Son, hears God in Him, and also finds Him in the peculiarly blessed relationship with the Father. For if Jesus were conceived to be simply God, and not the Son, it would be an incomparably less blessed revelation than that which we actually have. As to ourselves, if we had a divine nature without the blessed relationship of sonship before the Father, we should lose the very sweetest part of our blessing. And it is not barely the deity of Jesus that has to be owned (though this lies at the bottom of all truth), but the eternal relationship of the Son with the Father. Not merely was He Son in this world: it is most dangerous to limit the Sonship of Christ thus, for it is from all eternity. People reason, that because He is called Son, He must have a beginning in time, subsequently to the Father. All such argumentation ought to be banished from the soul of a Christian. The Scripture doctrine has no reference to priority of time. He is called Son in respect of affection and intimate nearness of relationship. It is the pattern of the blessed place into which grace brings us through union with the Lord Jesus Christ. Though in Him, of course, there are ineffable heights and depths beyond. But if we are

simple about it, we gather from it the deepest joy that is to be found in the knowledge of the true God — and that in His Son.

The Father, then, interrupts the word of Peter, and answers Himself. The bright cloud that overshadowed them, Peter knew to be the cloud of Jehovah's presence: and the Father adds, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It is not, This is your Messiah — He was that, of course, but He brings out the grand New Testament revelation of Jesus. He reveals Him as His own beloved Son, and His unqualified delight in Him. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye Him" — this last also a statement of all importance. What was Moses, and what Elias now? They are entirely left out here by the Father. I need not say that every one who knows Jesus as the Son of God would be very far from despising Moses and Elias. They who understand grace have a far deeper respect for the law than the man who muddles grace and law together. The only full way to value anything that is of God is in the intelligence of His grace. I do not understand myself nor God till I know His grace; and I cannot know His grace, except as I see it revealed in His Son. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." He was full of grace and truth.

"Hear ye Him," is the Father's demand. It is no longer, Hear Moses, or Hear Elias, but "Hear ye HIM." Could anything be more startling to a Jew? All must give place to the Son. The dignity of the others is not denied, nor their due position slighted. To assert the glory of the sun in the heavens is in no way to despise the stars. God set Moses in his place, and Elias in another, as He saw fit; but what were they compared with His Son? How plain

and sad that men should still be making two tabernacles — one for Moses (if not for Elias), and one for the Lord Jesus! They talk about God being the unchangeable God: but He who ordained the night made the day; and as surely as He once spake the law, He has now sent the gospel. I see here the display of the glory of God, showing out now one part of His character and now another.

This is not changing. God gives us to see His different attributes, and His various wisdom, and His infinite glory; but I must see each in its own sphere, and understand the intent for which God has given each. Moses and Elias were the two great cardinal points of the Jewish system; but now there is One who eclipses all that system — Jesus, the Son of God; and in presence of Him not even the representatives of the law or the prophets are to be heard. There is a fulness of truth that comes out in the Son of God; and if I want to understand the mind of God, as it concerns me now, I must hear Him. This was most difficult for a Jew to enter into, because His religion was based upon the law. Now, the beloved Son of God in whom the Father Himself expresses His perfect satisfaction is set before all — "Hear ye Him."

As Jesus is the object of the Father's infinite love, so He is the means of that same love reaching even to us. If I see Him to be the beloved Son of the Father, my soul rests upon Him and enters into communion with the Father. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." What is fellowship? It is our having common joy in a common object which we share with one another. We share in the joy of the Father and of the Son. The Father bids me hear the Son, and the

Son declares the Father. We have fellowship with the Father, who points out to our hearts Him in whom He Himself delighted; we have fellowship with the Son, inasmuch as He makes known to us the Father. How shall I know the Father? — how know His feelings? In one way: I look at His Son, and I see the Father. The Son speaks, and I hear His voice. I know how He acts; I know His love — a love that can come down to the very vilest. Such was Christ; and now I am sure such is the Father also. I know what God the Father is when I follow the Son and listen to the Son. It is the Father He is revealing, not Himself: the Son came to make known what the Father is in a world that knew Him not. Even those who had faith, what thoughts had they about the Father? We have only to look at the disciples to see what scant answer to the Father's heart. Although they were born of God, up to this time they knew not the Father was revealing Himself in Jesus. Philip said, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Not that he did not divinely know Jesus as the Messiah; but he had not entered into the blessedness of what He was as the Son revealing the Father. It was only after the Holy Ghost came down, after the Son's departure to heaven, that they acquired the consciousness of the grace wherein they stood. So, yet more, the apostle Paul says, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more." To know Christ at the right hand of God — to appreciate what He is there, is to know Him far better than if we had heard every discourse, and seen every miracle of His upon earth. The Holy Ghost brings it out more fully through His word. I am not saying now how far we enter practically into what the Holy Ghost is teaching, because this must after all, and rightly, depend on the measure of our spirituality. But the Holy Ghost is

here to take of the things of Christ and show them to us — to make His glory known, and His sufferings, as it is the Father's delight that He should be known. But there were many things that they could not then bear. When the Holy Ghost was come, He should lead them into all truth.

Such is the object of the Father. He takes occasion of the glory of Jesus, manifested as Son of Man, to show that a still deeper glory attaches to Him. The kingdom of Christ by no means exhausts the glory of His person: and it is as connected with His deeper glory that the existence of the Church is brought out. It was the confession of His Sonship that elicited the word, "Upon this rock I will build My Church." This is the pith of the New Testament revelation — it is the Father revealing His Son, and the Spirit enabling us to receive what the Son is, both as the image of the in ' visible God, and as introducing us into fellowship with the Father. It is not God merely known as such, but the Father in the Son made known by the Holy Ghost. Hence it is that here in a Gospel especially written for Jewish believers, the Holy Ghost particularly marks this. (Compare the close of Matt. 11).

The disciples, confounded by what they heard, fall on their faces and are sore afraid. There was no communion with it yet. For the present they enter into it but slightly, though it was afterwards recalled to them by the Spirit of God. "And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only" (vers. 7, 8). The heavenly vision had passed away for a time: they were on the mount alone with Jesus. What a joy! — if it vanish, He abides!

Let us just refer, briefly, to the account of this scene as given in the other Gospels. In Mark, the words, “In whom I am well pleased” are left out. The emphatic point, forgotten nowhere, is that He was the Son — in Mark, as in Matthew (not a Servant only, though truly such) — who is to be heard. But Matthew adds, “In whom I am well pleased.” The satisfaction of the Father in the Son is given as the ground why He should be heard, as the full expression of His mind. In Luke we have another thing: “Behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias” (Luke 9:30). They are called “men” here in a distinct manner — this Gospel having been written more particularly in view of men at large. These men “appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.” It is the subject of their conversation — of the deepest interest for us all. The death and sufferings of Jesus are the great theme on which men in glory converse with Jesus, the Son of God. And Jerusalem — Jerusalem! — would be the place of His death, instead of welcoming Him to reign! But we find here the sad traits of human weakness: Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep. Here again we find the Father’s affection for His Son. The highest glories of Judaism wane — the Son is to be heard. The moral features are prominent throughout.

But, let us observe, John leaves out the transfiguration altogether; because his proper work was to dwell, not upon Christ’s outward manifestation to the world as Son of Man in His kingdom, but on His eternal glory as the only-begotten Son of God; or, as he says himself, “We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father.”

In 2 Peter 1:16-18, we have an allusion to this scene. It is said there, “He received from God the Father honour and glory” (confirming the remark, that this scene does not show us so much His essential glory as that which He received from God the Father) — “when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory” (or the cloud, which was the known external symbol of Jehovah’s majesty), “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Peter leaves out “Hear ye Him,” because, the revelation of Jesus having come out, the point that remains is the Father’s delight in Jesus. I do not pretend to say how far the inspired writers knew all the mind of God in such a thing: they wrote as moved by the Holy Ghost.

As the disciples came down from the mount, the Lord charges them, saying, “Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead” (ver. g). It was no longer a question of testifying to the kingdom of Christ. This was rejected. The vision was for the disciples, for strengthening their faith in Jesus. The Lord was occupying Himself with the souls of believers, not with the world. There is always a period when testimony of an outward kind may close. You may remember the time when Paul separates the disciples that were at Ephesus from the multitude, and leads them into what more particularly concerned them. For the time, till the Holy Ghost was given, till the Lord was risen from the dead, and power came from on high to make these things a fresh starting-point, it was of no use to speak of them any further.

Then we have, “His disciples asked Him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first

come and restore all things; but I say unto you that Elias has come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed" (vers. 10-12). He shows that, to faith, Elias was come. If the nation had received the word preached by John, Elias' mission would have been fulfilled, according to the prophecy in Malachi; but the nation refusing Jesus as well as His forerunner, faith alone could recognize the testimony of John the Baptist as being virtually that of Elias. This accords with the statement we had in Matthew 11, "If ye will receive it, this is Elias which was to come;" showing that it was not Elias actually and literally, but the spirit and power of Elias in the person of John the Baptist. The Messiah is coming in glory by and by, and Elias is coming too. But the Messiah was come in weakness now, and humiliation, and His forerunner had been put to death. It was Elias who was come in the person of the suffering John the Baptist, and his testimony was despised. The disciples are led into the secret of this: "Elias is come already, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that He spake unto them of John the Baptist" (vers. 12, 13).

But at the foot of that same mountain where the Lord displayed the glory of the kingdom, Satan also displayed his power. It was not broken yet. The kingdom was only a matter of testimony. The disciples failed to draw on the resources of Christ to put down the power of the enemy. A man comes to the Lord, kneeling down to Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son; for he is lunatic and sore vexed; for ofttimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water" — the most opposite trials were thus brought together. "And I brought him to Thy disciples,

and they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? Bring him hither to Me. And Jesus rebuked the devil, and he departed out of him. And the child was cured from that very hour" (vers. 15-18). The disciples wanted to know how it was that they could not cast him out, and He tells them, "Because of your unbelief." It is as sad as wonderful that unbelief is at the root of the difficulties Satan foists in; for he has lost his power over those that have faith. This child is a lunatic and sore vexed; but unbelief is unable to use the power of God, which ought to have been at the command of the disciples. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place." The least working of faith in the soul is so far available for present difficulties. The power of the world, the settled power of anything here, which is what the mountain sets forth, would completely disappear before faith. "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (vers. 20, 21). There must be dependence upon God in the conflict with the power of evil. It was Christ's moral glory and the secret of strength. The assumption of power, because of association with Jesus, simply fails and turns to shame. There must also be self-emptiness and self-denial, that God may act. When Jesus descends all Satan's power is broken and vanishes.

Then comes another declaration of His sufferings, but I will not dwell upon this now, beyond remarking that, as in Matthew 16:21 we had His sufferings through the Jews (elders, chief priests and scribes), so here it is rather Gentile rejection: "The Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of men." This follows the

manifestation of His glory as Son of Man, while the other followed the confession of His still deeper glory as Son of God.

In conclusion, let us look at the beautiful lesson in the piece of money demanded for the temple. Peter there answers quickly according to his usual warmth of character. When the tax-gatherer came, who was connected with the temple, and the usual fee was demanded, Peter answered, very hastily, that of course his Master would pay the tribute. His mind went not beyond their Jewish position. It was not that any king of the earth was demanding tribute now of them; this was for Jehovah's temple. And our Lord anticipates Peter when they come to the house, and says to him, "What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? — of their children or of strangers?" Peter answers truly enough, "Of strangers." Then Jesus says to him, "Then are the children free." Nothing can be more beautiful than the truth taught us here: whatever be the glory of the coming kingdom, whatever the power of Satan, which disappears before the word of Jesus, whatever the faith which can remove mountains, nothing can take the Son of God out of the place of grace. He is the King, and Peter one of the "children" who are free, and yet to whom this demand was made. "Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them," says the Lord, "go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money, that take, and give unto them for Me and thee" (ver. 27).

This is the great wonder of Christ, and the practical wonder of Christianity, that while we have the

consciousness of glory, and ought to pass through the world as sons of glory as well as sons of God, for this very reason the Lord calls us to be the humblest and meekest, taking no place upon the earth — I do not mean claiming no place for Christ, of course. It is our business to live for Christ and the truth: but where it is a question of ourselves, to be willing to be trampled on and counted as the off-scouring of the world. Flesh and blood are against it; but it is the power of the Spirit of God raising us above nature.

The Lord provides for all demands. He directs Peter how to find the piece of money, and says, “That take, and give unto them for Me and thee.” What a joy that Jesus associates us with Himself, and provides for everything! — that Jesus, who proves Himself in this very thing to be God the Creator, with divine knowledge, having the command of the restless deep, making a fish to provide the money needed to pay the tax of the temple, should thus give us a place with Himself, and undertake for all our need! Nothing can more beautifully show us how, with the consciousness of glory, our place should ever be that of the bending and lowliness of Christ. How blessedly the Son stooped to be the servant, and leads the children into the same path of grace!

The Lord grant us to know how to reconcile these two things. We can only do it so far as our eye is upon Christ.

Matthew 18

In Matthew 16 we had two subjects connected with the revelation of the Lord’s person to Simon Peter: one of them, the Church, entirely new, or for the first time divulged; the other, the familiar subject of the kingdom of heaven. We shall find in the chapter before us these

two things again brought together — not confounded or identified. We are called to see the kingdom and the Church in their practical bearing. We have already learned that the Lord was to build the Church. “Upon this rock” (the confession of His person) “I will build My Church.” Afterward, He promised to give the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter.

Now we find (connected, I think, with the principle which actuated Himself) the consciousness of glory, and of the absolute command of all that He had made. He was the Lord of heaven and earth — if, in grace, He paid the tribute of the temple; for grace gives up its rights; at least, it does not seek to claim and exercise them for the present. And in the very consciousness of the possession of all glory, it can bow in this evil world. But, then, carefully observe that the soul is never to yield God’s rights, but our own. We must be as unbending as a flint wherever God is in question. Grace never surrenders the true holiness, the claim, or will, of God; in fact, it is what strengthens the soul to value them and walk in them. There is often a practical difficulty that people do not understand. While we are called upon to walk in grace, it is a misuse of grace to suppose it to be an allowance of evil or indifference to it in our relations with God. Grace, while it meets us in our ruin, imparts a power we had not before, because it reveals Christ, strengthens the soul, gives a new life, and acts upon that life so as to carry us forward in the obedience as well as in the enjoyment of Christ. Our Lord shows that this ought to govern everything.

But first we have the spirit that befits us. “At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” This furnishes

opportunity for our Lord to indicate the spirit that becomes the kingdom of heaven: “Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (ver. 3). Now this is what is wrought in a soul when it is converted: there is a new life given, even Christ. Hence there is much more than a change. That would be very far short of the truth as to a Christian. Of course the Christian is a changed man; but then the change is because of something still deeper. A Christian is a man born again, possessing a life now that he possessed not before. I do not mean merely that he lives after a new sort, but that he has a, new life given to him which he had not before. It is in this way that he becomes a little child. Then this new life has to be cultivated and strengthened. Our natural life as men develops, or it may be checked and hindered by various circumstances. So it is with the spiritual life.

Our Lord shows here what is the characteristic moral feature that suits the kingdom of heaven; and this in opposition to Jewish thoughts of greatness. They were still thinking of the kingdom according to certain Old Testament delineations of it. When David came to the kingdom, his followers that had been faithful before were exalted according to their previous worth. You have the three great chiefs, and then thirty other warriors, and so on; all of them having their place determined by the way in which they had carried themselves in the day of trial. The disciples came with similar thoughts to our Lord, full of what they had done and suffered. The same spirit broke out on many occasions, even at the last supper. Our Lord here uses it

to show that the spirit He loves in His disciples is to be nothing — to be without a thought of self, in a spirit of lowliness, dependence, and trust, that does not think about itself. This is the natural feeling of a little one. In the spiritual child this self-forgetfulness is exactly the right feeling. The little child is the standing witness of true greatness in the kingdom of heaven. In our Lord Himself this was shown, fully. The wonder was that He who knew everything, who had all power and might, could take the place of a little child; yet He did. And, indeed, you may be sure that the lowliness of a child is in no wise incompatible with a person being deeply taught in the things of God. It is not a lowliness that shows itself in phrases or forms, but the reality of meekness that confides not in itself, but in the living God; and this has the respect which God Himself loves there should be toward those around it. Perfect humility was just as much a feature of our Lord Jesus as the consciousness of His glory. The two things may go well together; and you cannot have becoming Christian humility unless there be the consciousness of glory. To behave ourselves lowlily, as children of God, is the beautiful thing the Lord is here putting before us.

“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (ver. 4). It is not merely the becoming like little children as begotten of God, but there, is the practical humbling of ourselves. And not only the humbling of ourselves, but how we feel toward others: “Whosoever shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me.” Whatever may be the lowliness of the Christian, he should be viewed with all the glory of Christ, which is meant by receiving him in the name of Christ. It is a

person that does not defend his rights, nor assert his own glory, but is willing to bend and make way for any one, while conscious of the glory that rests upon him. There may be the very opposite of this — “Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me.” What is meant by this? Anything calculated to shake their confidence in Christ, to put a stumbling-block in their way. It does not mean anything said in faithful love to their soul. People may take offence at this; but it is not what is spoken of here., It is what tends to shake the confidence of the little one in God Himself. “Whoso shall offend one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” These things are constantly occurring in the world. Therefore, says the Lord, “Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.” What is to be done? The Lord shows in two forms the way to guard against these stumbling-blocks. The first is this — I must begin with myself. This is the most important means of not stumbling another. “Wherefore, if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off and cast them from thee.” It may be in one’s service, or in one’s walk; but if thy hand or foot become the occasion of stumbling (something in which the enemy takes advantage against God), deal resolutely at once with the evil thing. “It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire” (vers. 6-8).

The Lord always puts the full result of evil before the soul. In speaking of the kingdom of heaven, He takes into account that there may be persons in it false as well

as true. He therefore speaks generally. He does not pronounce upon them; for some may be truly born of God and others not. The Lord solemnly puts before them that such as are indifferent about sin are not of God. It is impossible for a soul to be regenerate and habitually careless about that which grieves the Holy Ghost. Therefore He puts before them the certainty of such being cast into everlasting fire. Of no one who is born of God could this be said. But as there may be in the kingdom of heaven a false profession as well as a true, the believer is to look well to it, that he do not allow sin in any of his members. “And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell-fire.” It may cost ever so much, but God is not a hard Master; none is so tender and loving. And yet it is God giving us His mind by the Lord Jesus, showing us that this is the only way of dealing with that which may become an occasion of sin. (Compare Eph. 5:5, 6).

The first great source of offense to others, and which must be first removed, is that which is a stumbling-block to our own souls. We must begin with self-judgment. But there is also the despising the little ones that belong to God. “Take heed,” says our Lord, “that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven.12 For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost” (vers. 10, 11). A beautiful word, especially as it is so broadly stated by our Lord as to take in literally a little child as well as the little ones that believe in Him. I believe this chapter was meant to give encouragement touching little ones. The plea on

which our Lord goes is, not that they were innocent (which is the way in which they are so often spoken of among men), but that the Son of Man came to save that which was lost. It supposes the taint of sin, but that the Son of Man came to meet it: so that we are entitled to have confidence in the Lord, not for our own souls only, but for the little ones too.

But our Lord goes further. “How think ye? If a man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it; verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish” (vers. 12-14). No doubt we can embrace all those that are saved on the same principle. The Gospel of Luke shows us (Luke 15) this very parable applied to any sinner. But here the Lord is taking it up in connection with the foregoing, namely, right feelings for one who belongs to the kingdom of heaven. Starting from’ a little child whom He sets in the midst, He carries the thought of the little one all through this part of His discourse. And now He closes with the proof, in His own mission, of the interest which the Father takes in these little ones.

Then the Lord applies it to our practical conduct. Supposing your brother does you wrong; an evil word, perhaps, or an unkind action done against you — something that you feel deeply as a real personal trespass against you; it is a sin, of course. Nobody knows it, probably, but himself and you. What are you to do? At once this great principle is applied: When you

were ruined and far from God, what met your case? Did God wait till you put away your sin? He sent His own Son to seek you, to save you. “The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” This is the principle for you to act upon. You belong to God; you are a child of God. Your brother has wronged you? Go you to him, and seek to set him right., It is the activity of love which the Lord Jesus presses upon His disciples. We are to seek the deliverance, in the power of divine love, of those who have wandered from God. The flesh feels and resents wrong done against itself. But grace does not shroud itself up in its own dignity, waiting for the offender to come and humble himself and own his wrong. The Son of Man came to seek the lost. I want you, He says, to be walking after the same principle, to be vessels of the same love — to be characterized by grace, going out after that which has sinned against God. This is a great difficulty, unless the soul is fresh in the love of God, and enjoying what God is for him. How does God feel about the child that has done wrong? His loving desire is to have him right. When the child is near enough to know the Father’s heart he goes out to do the Father’s will. A wrong may have been done against him, but he does not think about that. It is his brother who has slipped into evil, and the desire of his heart is to have the brother righted who had gone astray — not to vindicate self, but that his soul may be restored to the Lord.

“Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone” (ver. 15). It is not here the case of a sin known to a great many, but some personal trespass only known to you two. Go, then, to him, and tell him his fault between you

and him alone. “If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” Love is bent on gaining the brother. So it is to him that understands and feels with Christ. It is not the offender, but thy brother that is the thought before the heart: “Thou hast gained thy brother.”13 “But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” Is it possible he may resist one or two who come to him, witnesses of the love of Christ? He has refused Christ pleading by one; can he refuse Christ now that He pleads by more? It may be, alas, that he will. “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church.” The Church means the assembly of God in the place to which these all belong. “If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church; but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican” (ver. 17). The assembly, then, is told of the guilty person’s fault. The thing has been investigated and pressed home. The Church warns and entreats this man, but he refuses to hear; and the consequence is — “Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.” A most solemn issue! A man who is called a brother in the verse before is to me as a heathen man and a publican now. We are not to suppose the man to be a drunkard or a thief; but showing the hardness of self-will and a spirit of self-justification. It may arise out of small circumstances; but this unbending pride about himself and his own fault is that on which he may, according to the Lord, be regarded as a heathen man and a publican — no more to acknowledge him in his impenitent state. And yet it may spring mainly from the spirit of justifying oneself. In the case of open sin or wickedness, the duty of the Church is clear: the person is put away. Nor would there be reason in such a case for going one at a time,

and then one or two more. But the Lord shows here how the end of this personal trespass might be that the Church has finally to hear it — and it may lead to something more.

“Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.” It is not a mere question of agreement, but of what is done in the name of the Lord. (See 1 Cor. 5:4.) “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, That if two of you shall agree on the earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there am I in the midst of them.” Whether for discipline or for making requests of God, the Lord lays down this great principle, that where two or three are gathered together unto His name, He is in the midst of them. Nothing could be more sweet and encouraging. And I am persuaded that the Lord had in view the present ruin of the Church, when there might be ever so few gathered aright, assembled in obedience to the word of God, and carrying it out according to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But a person may ask, Are any upon that ground? I can only say that the Christians who fall back on Scripture, owning the faithful presence of the Spirit in the assembly on earth, are taking an immense deal of trouble for a delusion if they are not. They are very foolish in acting as they do unless they are sure that it is according to the mind of God. Ought you to have more doubt how Christians should meet together for worship or mutual edification than about any other directions in the word of God? If we are not restrained by human

rules, if the word of God alone is followed, there is entire liberty to carry out its directions. But while speaking thus confidently, on the other hand ought we not to take a very low place? When members of Christ's body are scattered here and there, humiliation alone becomes us; not only because of others' ways, but our own. For what have we been to Christ and the Church? It would be very wrong to call ourselves the Church; but if we were only two or three meeting in the name of Christ, we should have the same sanction and Christ's presence as if we had the twelve apostles with us. If through unbelief and weakness the Church at large were broken up and scattered, and if, in all this confusion, there were only two or three who had faith to act upon the Lord's will, for them the word would still be true, "Where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there am I in the midst of them." It is the presence of Christ and obedience to Him that give sanction to their acts. If the Church has fallen into ruin, the business of those who feel this is to depart from known evil — "Cease to do evil; learn to do well." We always have to come back to first principles when things get astray. This is the obligation of a Christian man.

Peter then asks our Lord, "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" (ver. 21.) We had instruction how we were to act in the case of a personal trespass. But Peter raises another question. Supposing my brother sins against me over and over, how often am I to forgive him? The answer is, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven." In the kingdom of heaven — not under the law, but under the rule of the rejected Christ — forgiveness is unlimited. How wonderful — the deeper

holiness revealed in Christianity, is at the same time, that which feels with deepest love, and goes out with it to others! So we find here, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times,” which was Peter’s idea of the largest grace, “but, Until seventy times seven.” Our Lord insists that there really was no end to forgiveness. It is always to be in the heart of the Christian.

“Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king which would take account of his servants” (ver. 23). And then we have two servants brought before us. The king forgives one of them who had been very guilty (who owed him ten thousand talents — practically, a debt that never could be paid by a servant). On his entreaty, the king forgives him. The servant then goes out and meets a fellow-servant who owes him a hundred pence — a small sum indeed in comparison with that which had just been forgiven to himself. Yet he seizes his fellow-servant by the throat, saying, “Pay me that thou owest.” And the king hearing it summons the guilty man before him. What is taught by this? It is a comparison of the kingdom of heaven, and refers to a state of things established here below by God’s will. While we may, and must, take the principle to ourselves, much more is taught than this.14 Taken in the large way, the servant that owes the ten thousand talents represents the Jew, peculiarly favoured of God, who yet had contracted the enormous debt that he never could pay. When they had completed this debt by the death of their Messiah, a message of forgiveness was sent them — “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” They had only to do so, and their sins would be blotted out: God would send the Messiah again, and bring in the times of refreshing.

The Holy Ghost, answering the prayer of our Lord upon the cross, uses Peter to tell them, “I wot, brethren, that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.... Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out,” even as the Lord had said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Thus the servant had heard the sound of forgiveness to himself, yet with no real apprehension of it. He goes out and casts a fellow-servant into prison for a very small debt. This is the way in which the Jews acted toward the Gentiles. And thus all the debt that God had forgiven them became fastened upon them. The master says to the servant, “O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him” (vers. 32-34).

I do not doubt that you may apply this to an individual who has heard the gospel, and who does not act according to it. The principle of it is true now of any mere professor of the gospel in these days, who acts like a worldly man. But taking it on the broader scale, you must bring in the dealings of God with the Jews. The day is coming when the Lord will say that Jerusalem has received of His hand double for all her sins. He will apply to them the blood of Christ, which can outweigh the ten thousand talents, and more. But the unbelieving generation of Israel are cast into prison, and will never come out: the remnant will, by the grace of God; and the Lord will make of the remnant a strong nation.

Meanwhile, for us the great principle of forgiveness is what we have need to remember. We have specially to

remind our souls in the case of anything that is against ourselves. May we at once look steadfastly at what our God and Father has done for us! If we can, in the presence of such grace, be hard for some trifling thing done against ourselves, let us bethink ourselves how the Lord judges here.

May the Lord grant that His words may not be in vain for us, that we may seek to remember the exceeding grace that has abounded towards our souls, and what God looks for from us!

Matthew 19

We have had the announcement of the kingdom of heaven and then of the Church. We have seen them as distinct, though connected, in Matthew 16; then in Matthew 18, the practical ways which suit them. It was necessary also to bring out the relation of the kingdom to God's order in nature. The relationships which God has established in nature are entirely apart from the new creation, and are carried on when a soul enters the new creation. The believer is still a man here be low, although as a Christian he is called not to act on human principles, but to do the will of God. It was therefore of much importance to know if the new things affect the recognition of that which had been already set up in nature. Accordingly, this chapter largely reveals the mutual relations of what is of grace and what is in nature. I am, of course, using the word "nature," not in the sense of "the flesh," which expresses the principle and exercise of self-will, but of that which God ordained in this world before sin came in, and survives the ruin. It is only the man that understands grace that can enter into and thoroughly recognize the outward natural order

in the world. Grace never leads a person to slight anything God has introduced, it matters not what it might be. Take for example the law; what a profound error to suppose that the gospel weakens or annuls God's law! On the contrary, as the apostle Paul teaches in Romans 3, by faith "we establish the law." If I am on legal ground, there is terror, anxiety, darkness; the dread of meeting God as a judge: the law keeps up all these thoughts as long as I am here, and very properly. Hence, it is only the man who knows that he is saved by grace, lifted above the region to which the law applies its death-stroke, who can gravely, yet in peace, look at it and own its power, because he is in Christ, above all condemnation. A believer can do it, just because he is not under law; for, "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." If he were under the law even as to his own walk and communion, and not his standing before God, he must be miserable; the more so, in proportion as he is honest in regard to the law. The attempt to be happy under the law is a most painful struggle, with the danger too of deceiving ourselves and others. From all this grace delivers the soul, setting it on a new ground. But the believer can look with delight and see the wisdom and holiness of God that shine in His every arrangement and all His moral government. The law indeed is a testimony to what God forbids or wishes, but not the revelation of what He is. This you cannot find outside Christ. However, the law holds up the standard of that which God demands of man. It shows His intolerance of evil, and the necessary judgment of those who practise it. But we should be helplessly and hopelessly miserable if this were all; and it is only when the soul has laid hold of the grace of God that it can take pleasure in His ways.

This chapter, then, surveys the relationships of nature in the light of the kingdom. The first and most fundamental is that of marriage. “The Pharisees also came unto Him, tempting Him, and saying unto Him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?” (ver. 3). There you have the conduct of such as are on legal ground. There is really no respect for God, no genuine regard for His law. The Lord at once vindicates from Scripture the institution and the sanctity of marriage: “Have ye not read that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female?” (ver. 4). That is, He shows it is not a mere question of what came in by the law, but He goes to the sources. God had first established it; and, far from dissolving the tie as men list, He made a single pair, and therefore only to be the one for the other. All other relationships were light in comparison of this closest tie — even union. “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and cleave unto his wife; and the twain shall be one flesh.” Next to the relationship of marriage is the tie of a child to its parents. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of marriage as a natural institution. Who would talk of a child leaving his father and mother for any cause? The Pharisees even would not think of such a thing.,What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” They were ready with an answer: “Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?” (ver. 7). There was really no such command: a divorce was simply allowed.

Our Lord draws the distinction perfectly. Moses suffered certain things not according to the original archetypal intention of God. Nor should this be matter of wonder, for the law made nothing perfect. It was good in itself,

but it could not impart goodness. The law might be perfect for its own object, but it perfected nothing, nor was it ever the intention of God that it should. But more than this: there were certain concessions contained in the law which did not at all express the divine mind; for God therein was dealing with a people after the flesh. The law does not contemplate a man as born of God; Christianity does. Men of faith during the law were of course born of God. But the law itself drew no line between regenerate and unregenerate; it addressed all Israel, and not believers only; hence suffered certain things in view of the hardness of their hearts. So that our Lord, while intimating a certain consideration of Israel's condition in the flesh, at the same time vindicated God's law from the corrupt deductions of these selfish Pharisees. "From the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery. And whosoever marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery" (vers. 8, g). Our Lord adds here what was not in the law, and brings out the full mind of God touching this relationship. There is but one just cause for which it may be dissolved; or rather, marriage must be dissolved morally in order to terminate as a matter of fact. In case of fornication, the tie is all gone before God; and the putting away merely proclaims before man what has already taken place in God's sight. All is made perfectly clear. The righteousness of the law is established as far as it went, but it stops short of perfection by admitting in certain cases a less evil to avoid a greater. Our Lord supplies the needed truth — going up to the very beginning, and on to the end also.

Thus it is that Christ, the true light, alone and always introduces the perfect mind of God, supplying all deficiencies and making all perfect. This is the aim, work and effect of grace. Nevertheless, “His disciples say unto Him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry” (ver. 10). Alas! the selfishness of the heart even in disciples. It was so much the custom then to dismiss the wife because of petty dislike, etc., that it shocked them to hear the Lord insisting on the indissolubility of the marriage. tie.

But, says the Lord, “All men receive not this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs which were so born from their mother’s womb; and there are some eunuchs which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it” (vers. 11, 12). There, I apprehend that, while maintaining the institution of marriage naturally, the Lord shows there is a power of God that can raise people above it. The apostle Paul was acting in the spirit of this verse, when he gives us his own judgment as one that had “obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful” (1 Cor. 7:25). Doubtless he was called to a remarkable work, which would have made due attention to family relationship very difficult. His business lay and took him everywhere. Wherever there were churches to care for, wherever souls cried, Come over and help us — and far beyond the calls of saints or men, the Holy Ghost laid it on his devoted heart. With wife or family to care for, the work of the Lord could not have been so thoroughly done. Hence the wise and gracious judgment of the apostle, not given as a command, but left to weigh on the spiritual mind. The

last of the three classes in the verse is figuratively expressed: it means, plainly, living unmarried for God's glory. But mark, it is a gift, not a law, much less a caste. Only such receive it to whom it is given." It is put as a privilege. As the apostle presses the honourableness of marriage, he was the last to lay the smallest slur on such a tie; but he also knew of a higher and all-absorbing love, an entrance, in measure, into the affections of Christ for the Church. Still this is not an imposed obligation, but a special call and gift of grace in which he rejoiced to glorify his Master. The appreciation of the love of Christ to the Church had formed him in its own pattern. Observe here, it is "made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake" — that order of things which depends on Christ now in heaven. And hence, strong in the grace that shines in Him at the right hand of God, they to whom it is given walk above the natural ties of life — not despising them; but honouring them, while individually surrendering themselves to that goodly portion which shall not be taken from them.

And now children are brought unto Him — little ones, apt to be despised. What in this world so helpless and dependent as a babe? "Then were brought unto Him little children, that He should put His hands on them, and pray" (ver. 13). The disciples thought it an annoyance or a liberty, and "rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And He laid His hands on them, and departed thence" (vers. 13-15). So completely were all the demands of love met even where the desire seemed ever so unseasonable. For why should the Lord of heaven and earth occupy Himself with putting His hands upon little ones? But love is not

restrained by human reason, and the unworthy thoughts of the disciples were set aside, who thought babes unworthy of His notice. Ah! how little they knew Him, long as they had been with Him. Was it not worthy of Him so to bless the very least in man's eyes? How important a lesson for our souls is this? It need not be one connected with ourselves; it might be another's child. Do we claim the Lord for it? What is His feeling? He is great, He is mighty; but He despiseth not any.

Before His glory there is not so much difference between a world and a worm. The world is a mere cipher, if God measures by Himself. But then, the feeblest may be the object of His deepest love and care. Our Lord looked at these babes, oh, with what interest! They are the objects of the Father's love, for whom He gave His Son, and whom the Son came to save. Each had a soul: and what was its value? What to be a vessel of grace in this world, and of glory in the bright eternal day? The disciples did not enter in these thoughts; and how little our own souls enter into them. Jesus not only blessed the babes, but rebuked the disciples, who had misrepresented Him; and He says, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." A withering word for pride. Were the disciples "of such" at that moment, or at least in that act?

And now a young man "came and said unto Him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" He was evidently a lovely natural character; one who combined in his person every quality that was estimable; one who had not only all that men think productive of happiness in this world, but apparently sincere in desiring to know and do the will of

God. And, further, he was attracted by and came to Jesus. In another Gospel we read that “Jesus loved him;” not because he believed in and followed Jesus; for, alas, we know he did not. But there are various forms of divine love, besides that which embraces us as returned prodigals. While we have a special love for the children of God, and in the things of God ought to value only that which is of the Holy Ghost, it does not follow that we are not to admire a fine mind or a naturally beautiful character. If we do not, it only proves that we do not understand the mind of God as here manifested in Jesus. Even as to creation, am I to look coldly, or not at all, at rivers or mountains, the sea, the sky, valleys, forests, trees, flowers, that God has made? It is a total mistake that spirituality renders dull to His outward works. But am I to set my mind upon these sights? Are we to travel far and wide for the purpose of visiting what all the world counts worthy to be seen? If in my path of serving Christ a grand or beautiful prospect passes before me, I do not think that He whose handiwork it is calls me to close my eyes or mind. The Lord Himself draws attention to the lilies of the field brighter than Solomon in all his glory. Man admires that which enables him to indulge his self-love and ambition in this world. That is merely the flesh. But as to the beautiful, morally or in nature, grace, instead of despising, values all that is good in its own sphere, and does homage to the God who thus displayed His wisdom and power. Grace despises neither what is in creation nor what is in man. This young man the Lord “loved,” when certainly as yet there was no faith at all. He went away from Jesus in sorrow. But what believer ever did, since the world began? His sorrow was because he was not prepared for the path of faith. Jesus desired him to follow Him, but

not as a rich man. He would have been delighted to do "some great thing;" but the Lord laid bare self in his heart. He knew that (spite all that naturally, and even according to the law, was beautiful in him), there was self-importance at bottom — the flesh turning these very advantages into a reason for not following Jesus. But as nothing at all, he must follow Jesus. "Good Master," said he," what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" He had not learned the first lesson a Christian knows, what a convicted sinner is learning — that he is lost. The youth showed that he had never felt his own ruin. He assumed that he was capable of doing good; but the sinner is like the leper in Leviticus 13, who could not bring an offering to God, but only remain outside crying, "Unclean, unclean." The young man had no sense of sin. He regarded eternal life as the result of a man's doing good. He had been doing the law; and, as far as he knew, he never broke it.

Our Lord says to him, "Why callest thou Me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." He may take him up on that ground. This man had no idea that the one to whom he was speaking was God Himself. He merely went to Him as a good man. On this footing the Lord would not allow Himself to be called good. God alone is. The Lord at first simply deals with him on his own ground. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto Him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (vers. 17-19). The Lord quotes the commands that relate to human duties

— the second table of the law, as it is called. “All these,” says the young man, have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? But says the Lord, “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me,.” And what then? “When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.” He loved his possessions better than he loved Jesus. This gave our Lord an opportunity for unfolding another truth, and one most startling to a Jew, who regarded wealth as a sign of the blessing of God. It was in a similar spirit that the friends of job also acted, though they were Gentiles; for in truth it is the judgment of fleshly righteousness. They thought that God must be against job because he had got into unheard-of trial. The Lord brings out, in view of the kingdom of heaven, the solemn truth that the advantages of the flesh are positive hindrances to the Spirit.

“Then said Jesus unto His disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly” (that is, with difficulty; not, he cannot, but “shall hardly”) “enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Emphatically He repeats it, “Again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle” (beyond nature, of course) “than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When His disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?” The Lord faces their objection: “Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible (vers. 24-26).” If it was a question of man’s doing anything to get into the kingdom, riches are only so much hindrance. And so it is with all else counted desirable. Whatever I may have, and trust in,

whether it be moral ways, position, or what not — these are but impediments as far as concerns the kingdom, and make it impossible to man. But with God (and we may bless Him for it) all things are possible, no matter what the difficulty. Therefore God chooses in His grace to call all sorts and conditions of people. We read of a person called out of Herod's court; we read of saints in Caesar's household. A great company of the priests believed; so did Barnabas the Levite, with his houses and lands; nay, above all, Saul of Tarsus, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. All these difficulties only gave God the opportunity to overcome all obstacles by His own power and grace.

When Peter heard how hard it was for the rich to be saved, he thought it time for him to speak of what they had given up for the Lord's sake, and to learn what they should get for it.,Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?" How painfully natural was this! "Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit upon the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (vers. 28, 29). There is nothing the believer does or suffers but what will be remembered in the kingdom. While this is most blessed, it is also a very solemn thought. Our ways now, though they have nothing to do with the remission of our sins, are yet of all consequence as a testimony to Christ, and will bear very decidedly on our future place in the kingdom. We

must not use the doctrine of grace to deny that of rewards; but even so, Christ is the sole motive for the saint. We shall receive for the thing's done in the body according to that we have done, whether it be good or bad, as the Lord shows plainly here. The twelve had followed the rejected Lord, albeit His own grace had given them the power. It was not they who had chosen Him, but He had chosen them. They are now cheered by the assurance that in the blessed time of the regeneration, when the Lord will work a grand change in this world (for as He regenerates a sinner, so will He, as it were, regenerate the world), their work and suffering for His name will not be forgotten of Him.

Remember that what is spoken of here does not refer to heaven: there is still better work in heaven than judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Yet it is a glorious destiny reserved for the twelve apostles during the reign of Christ over the earth. A similar glory is designed for other saints of God, as we read in 1 Cor. 6:2: "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" There it is used to show the incongruity of a saint seeking the world's judgment in a matter between himself and another; for the Christian's portion and blessing are entirely apart from the world, and he should be true to the objects for which Christ has called him.

As to all the natural relationships and advantages of this life, if lost for His name's sake, the losers shall receive a hundredfold and inherit everlasting life. The Gospel of John speaks of everlasting life as a thing that we possess now: the others speak of it as future. We have it indeed now dwelling in us; we shall then enter its own dwelling-place, and shall have its fulness in glory by and by. "But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be

first.” What a hint to Peter — and to us all! A self-righteous claim is a ready snare, and soon finds its level. The leaving of all, if valued, has lost all its value. Thus many who began to run well turned aside from grace to law; and Peter himself was blamed by the last (but first) of the apostles, as we know from the Galatians.

The Lord make His grace the strength of our hearts; and if we have suffered the loss of any or of all things, may we still count them dung that we may win Him!

Matthew 20

The last chapter closed with the important doctrine that in the kingdom the Lord will remember all suffering and service here for His name’s sake. But it is evident that though this be an undoubted truth of Scripture, referred to in Paul’s epistles, and elsewhere in the New Testament, it is one which the heart would be ready to abuse to self -righteousness; and that a person forgetting that all is of grace might be disposed to make a claim upon God by reason of anything which He had enabled one to do. Hence a parable is added with a totally different principle, in which the prominent thought is the sovereignty of God, for the express purpose, I think, of guarding against such effects. For God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love which we may have shown toward His name: but there is a danger for us in it. It does not follow, because God will not forget what His people do for Him, that His people are to treasure it up themselves. We have but one thing to set our souls upon: it is Christ Himself; as the apostle said, “This one thing I do: forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those things that are before” — not forgetting what we have

done wrong: the very reverse of this will be even in glory. When there is not a vestige of humiliation left, we shall have a more lively sense than ever of our manifold failures; but not as producing one feeling of doubt, or fear, or unhappiness. Such thoughts would be contrary to the presence of God. It is a good thing for the believer, while holding fast his full blessing, to think of what he is — to humble himself day by day in the sight of God; always remembering that true humiliation is on the ground of our being children of God. A person who had some office about the Queen, and had proper respect for her, would be thinking of her, not of himself. How much more when we are in the presence of God! This ought to fill our souls with joy in the worship of the Lord. What is comely for the saint, what is most acceptable to God, is not the constant bringing in of ourselves in one way or another, right as this may be, in a certain sense, in our closet. But the praise of God for what He is — above all, in the knowledge of His Son and of His work — is the great end of all the dealings of God with His children. The consciousness of our nothingness really shows the deepest and most real humility. Where there is habitual carelessness and lack of dependence, with their sad results, there will not be a preparedness of heart for worship. The proper thought connected with the Lord’s table is that I am going to meet with Christ, to praise Him together with His saints; and this — the sense of being in His presence — keeps a check upon our spirits.

In order to keep us in this sense of grace, the Spirit of God recurs in this chapter to the sovereignty of God, the counteractive to the self-righteousness that is to be found even in the heart of a disciple. Peter said,’, We

have left all, and followed Thee," and the Lord assures him that it would not be forgotten; but He immediately adds the parable of the householder. Here we find, not the principle of rewards. or righteous recognition of the service done by His people, but God's own rights, His own sovereignty. Hence there are no differences here — no one specially remembered because he had won souls to Christ, or left all for Christ. The principle is, that while God will infallibly own every service and loss for the sake of Christ, yet He maintains His own title to do as He will. Some poor soul may be brought to the knowledge of Christ at the day of his death. God claims His own title to give what He pleases, to give to those who have not wrought anything at all — as we may think — just what is good in His own eyes. This is a very different principle from what we had in the last chapter, and exceedingly counter to the mind of man. "The kingdom of heaven is like to a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard" (vers. 1, 2).

The common application of this parable to the salvation of the soul is a mistake. For this is that which Christ wrought for, suffered for, and lives for, independently of man. The poor sinner has just to give himself up to be saved by Christ. When brought to an end of himself, acknowledging that he deserves nothing but hell, how sweet that God brings before such a soul that Jesus Christ (and this is a faithful saying) came into the world to save sinners! When content to be saved as nothing but a sinner, and by nothing but Christ, there and then only is true rest given of Him. Wherever one thinks to

contribute his part, it will be — only uncertainty, and doubts, and difficulties. Christ alone is our salvation. The man that is saved contributes nothing but his sins. But in this parable the question is not this; it is the work of each servant, as the Lord is pleased to call to labour in His vineyard. If He please, He' will put all upon an equal footing. He will reward the work that is done, but He will give as He will.

"When he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market-place; and said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way" (vers. 2-4). It is not grace in the sense of salvation here. Whatsoever is right I will give you." It is God that judges what is becoming. "Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise." And, singular to say, "about the eleventh hour he went out." What a heart this tells! What infinite goodness! that God, who recognizes every service and suffering done for Himself, yet keeps intact the prerogative of going out at the last moment to bring in souls, and occupy them with what might seem to be a little service! But He can give grace to do that little well. "About the eleventh hour he went out... and saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first" (vers. 6-8). "Beginning from the last." The last are always spoken of first in this parable. So the steward is told to begin from the last unto the first. And again, when the master of the vineyard has to speak

himself, it is the same thing: “The last shall be first, and the first last.” It is the sovereignty of grace in giving as He pleases; not alone in saving, but in rewarding in the time of glory; for this is what is spoken of.

Of course the last received their wages thankfully. But when the first heard about it, they began to think themselves entitled to more — they who had borne the burden and heat of the day. But the master reminds them that all was a settled thing before they entered on their work. In their selfishness, they forgot both the terms and the righteousness of him with whom they had to do. If, out of the liberality of his heart, he was pleased to give to the last even as to the first, what was that to them? God maintains His own rights. It is of greatest importance for our souls that we hold to the rights of God in everything. Persons will argue as to whether it is righteous for God to elect this person or that. But on the ground of righteousness all are lost, and for ever. Now, if God is pleased to use His mercy according to His wisdom, and for His glory, toward these poor lost ones, who is to dispute with Him? “Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?” God is entitled to act according to what is in His heart: and “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” Is He entitled to act from Himself? He cannot act from man on the grounds of righteousness.There is no foundation on which he can thus deal; it is entirely a question of His own good pleasure. And we must remember there is not a man that is lost but rejects the mercy of God, despises it, or uses it for his own selfish purposes in this world. The man that is saved is the only one that has a true sense of sin, that gives himself up as lost, and falls back upon God’s mercy in Christ to save a lost sinner.

To the complainant, the goodman of the house answered, “Friend, I do thee no wrong. Didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way; I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” (vers. 13-15). There comes out the whole secret. Man, yea, a professing disciple, a labourer in His vineyard, may be disputing because he thinks himself entitled to more than another who, in his opinion, has done little as compared with himself. The question of being a child of God does not enter in this parable; and, as to service, one may be a true servant or a mere hireling.

I would just ask, Why in the last chapter it was, “Many that are first shall be last, and the last first,” and here, “The last shall be first, and the first last?” In speaking about rewards, according to the work done, the failure of man is intimated; for indeed weakness soon shows itself — “The first shall be last.” But in this new parable it is the sovereignty of God that never fails; consequently here, “The last shall be first and the first last.” “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present evil world.” There was a first, we may say, who became last — a labourer for the Lord, who had not given up Christianity, but grown tired of the path of unremitting service for Christ. If, instead of honour now, the thousands of those who are engaged in the service of Christ were to receive scorn and persecution, there would be no slight thinning of their ranks. But shame and suffering must be looked for by him who intelligently seeks to serve faithfully the Lord in this world. Demas may have been a believer; but the trial and reproach, the love of ease and other things all came

strongly over his spirit, and he abandoned the service of the Lord. “All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ’s” is a similar principle.

And now the Lord is going up to Jerusalem, and prepares His disciples for still greater trouble. I ‘Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him: and the third day He shall rise again” (vers. 18, 19). Even after this, so selfish is the heart of man, the mother of Zebedee’s children comes to Him with her sons, who were among the apostles themselves; and, paying her worship to Him, she desires a certain thing of Him. “And He said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto Him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand and the other on the left, in Thy kingdom” (ver. 21). So perfect is the humiliation of Christ, such His self-abandonment (He, the only One who had perfect knowledge of, and right to everything by His personal glory), that He says, I have no place to give in My kingdom — it is not mine to give, save as My Father may desire. But I have something to give you now: it is suffering. Yes, suffering for and with Him is what Christ gives His servants now — a high privilege. When the apostle Paul was converted, he asked, “What wilt Thou have me to do?” The Lord tells him what great things he should suffer for His name’s sake. The highest honour we can have here is suffering with and for Christ. This our Lord lets the mother of Zebedee’s children know. “Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am

baptized with? They say unto Him, We are able" (ver. 22). He took in two different kinds of suffering: the cup, which is inward suffering; and the baptism, which expresses what we are immersed into outwardly. The two include every kind of trial, inward and outward. He is not here speaking about the cross in atonement, for there can be no fellowship in this. But there might be the cross in rejection, though not as atonement. There may be the sharing of what Christ suffered from man, but not of what He suffered from God. When He was suffering for sin on the cross, relationship is dropped, as He bows in infinite grace to the place of judgment. He is made sin. He realizes what it is to be forsaken of God, making Himself responsible for the sins of men. He says, therefore, in that terrible moment on the cross, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? In this we can have no part. God forsook Jesus that He might not forsake us. God never forsakes a Christian nor hides Himself from him.

When the Lord says, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto Him, We are able." They did not know what they said, any more than what they asked. For, when our Lord was only in danger of death, we find that they all forsook Him and fled. As for one of them, if he did venture into the hall of judgment, it was merely, as it were, under the high priest's robe; that is, on the plea of being known to him. When Peter followed on his own ground, it was only to show his utter weakness. In presence of such a cup as this, and such a baptism, the Lord says, "Ye shall indeed drink of My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with" (not, ye are able): "but to sit on My right hand and

on My left is not Mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of My Father" (ver. 23). I would just remark that the words which are put in italics (and inserted without warrant) mar the sense very much. Without them the sense is better. It was His to give to those only to whom the Father destined it. Christ is the administrator of the rewards of the kingdom. As He was the Servant in suffering, He also shall dispense the rewards and glories of the kingdom.

"And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren" (ver. 24). No doubt it seemed a very right thing to put down these two brethren who were so full of themselves. But why were they thus indignant? Their pride was wounded; they too were full of themselves. Christ was not filled with indignation — it was a sorrow to Him: but they were moved with hot feeling against the two brethren. We have to take care. Often where we seek to pull down those that seek to exalt themselves, there is self or! our part too. Suppose one of us has fallen into sin. There is often a good deal of strong feeling about it: but is this the best way of showing our sense of sin? Those who feel most for God, feel also the deepest for those who have slipped away from Him. "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. "

"But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them; and they that are great exercise authority upon them" (ver. 25). He put His finger upon that very love of greatness in themselves. They were loud in condemning it in James and John; but their feeling betrayed the same

thing in their own hearts. “It shall not be so among you,” says the Lord, “but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.” There is a difference between the two words. The word translated “minister “means a servant. But in verse 27 it is a bondman or slave. Do you want to be really great according to the principles of My kingdom? Go down as low as you can. Do you want to be the greatest? Go down the lowest of all. Whoever has least of self is greatest in the Lord’s eyes. For “the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many” (ver. 28). He took the lowest place of all, and gave His life a ransom for many. Blessed for ever be His name!

The last verses properly belong to the next chapter, which is the approach of our Lord to Jerusalem from the way of Jericho. And it is necessary to take the two chapters together, to have the proper connection of all that is given us here. But I cannot close this part of the subject without recalling attention to the principles of the kingdom of God as shown us by Christ Himself. What a call for self-renouncing service! What a joy to think that everything that now is a trial will be found as a joy in that kingdom! There are some who think they are favoured with few opportunities for serving the Lord — who are shut out from what their hearts would desire. Let us remember that He who knows everything has a right to give as He will to His own and of His own. He will do the very best according to His heart. Our one business now is to think of Him who came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a

ransom for many. That is our prime call and need — to be Christ's servants in serving each other.

In the transfiguration we had a picture of the coming kingdom; Christ, the Head and Centre, with representatives of its heavenly and earthly aspects; on the one side, Moses and Elias glorified; and on the other, the three disciples in their natural bodies. This was a turning point in the history of our Lord's course, which John passes by, but it is given fully in the other three Gospels. The Cross, because of sin, is the foundation of all glory. There could be nothing stable or holy without it. It is the sole channel through which flows all our blessings; and Christ's decease, we know from Luke, was the theme on the holy mount. But John gives us nothing of that scene; because he is occupied with Christ as the Son. In John we have, not the human side, but the deity of the Lord Jesus: His rejection by Israel, and Israel's consequent rejection by God, are assumed from the beginning of that Gospel: as we read, "He came to His own, and His own received Him not." Now the transfiguration does not bring out the deity of Christ, but His glory as exalted Son of Man, owned withal as Son of God. This was a sample of the glory of the Lord in His future kingdom; with the types of some risen and heavenly, and of others in their natural or earthly state. But John does not show us the kingdom, but the Father's house. The world may in some measure, see the glory, as fore shown on the mount, but this is not our best portion. While we look for "that blessed hope" and the appearing of the glory, our hope is to be with Christ in the many-mansioned house of the Father — a hope which is far beyond any blessing of the kingdom. Neither will it be displayed. The secrets of love and

communion of Christ with the Church are not for display before the world. Doubtless the glory and the place of power which the Church will possess in the coming kingdom will be displayed; for these form some of the chief features in the millennial reign. Thus the mount of transfiguration holds an important place in the three synoptic Gospels, as showing Christ in the capacity of Messiah, Servant, and Son of Man. As such, He will be displayed after the pattern in the mount, and accordingly, the three Evangelists, who present Christ in these three aspects, give us the transfiguration. The thought of present reception by the Jews, as we have seen, had been entirely given up, and the new thing coming in begins to be announced. Christ must suffer and die.

The end of our chapter, from Matthew 20:30, is a preface to Matthew 21, where we have the last formal presentation of the King — not with the thought of being received; but for the filling up of man's iniquity and the accomplishment of the counsels of God, He presents Himself as such. The Lord is on His way to Jerusalem, and two blind men cry unto Him, Have mercy on us, O Lord, Thou Son of David! If they knew nothing of the impending crisis, they notwithstanding were completely in the spirit of the scene. The Holy Ghost was acting upon them that they might bear testimony to Jesus, who was now for the last time to be publicly presented as Heir to the throne. What a picture! The seeing ones, in their blind hardness of heart, rejecting their own Messiah, though owned of Gentiles as the born King of the Jews; and the poor blind ones, through faith, loudly confessing Him the true King. Perhaps their principal, their one desire, may have been to be healed of their

blindness. Be it so; but God, at any rate, gave to their faith the proper object and the just confession for that moment, for He was guiding the scene. Whatever was the thought of the blind men in crying after the Lord, God's design was that there should be a suited testimony rendered to His King, the "Son of David." A Jew would well understand all that was implied in the title. What a condemnation of Pharisees and scribes who had rejected Christ! The highest point of view is not always the most proper. The circumstances vary. Thus the confession of Christ as "Son of David" was more in keeping here than if they had said, "Thou Son of God." We have only to weigh the various titles to see that in hailing Him according to His Jewish glory, they uttered that which was in unison with what God was then doing.

Let me ask, reverently, Why should the resurrection of Lazarus be omitted in the first three Gospels? Man, if these accounts had been his work, would not have omitted it, surely. It would have been thought far too important to be left out under any consideration. The omission of so stupendous a miracle, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, points out clearly that it is the Spirit of God who wrought sovereignty and writes by each with a special purpose. If so, that which men call inconsistencies and imperfections, are really perfections in God's word. It was a part of the purpose of God to omit the miracle in some, for He only presents those facts which suit His design in each Gospel. This miracle of raising Lazarus does not show us Christ as the Messiah, or the Servant, or the Son of Man, but as the Son of God, who gives life and raises the dead — a grand point of doctrine in John 5 — therefore it is given in John's Gospel alone. There were other miracles of

raising the dead in the other Gospels; but the truth of the Sonship and present glory of Jesus in communion with the Father is not in these others the prominent one. It is not, therefore, as Son of God that He appears in them. Take, for instance, the raising the widow's son at Nain. What are the circumstances brought into emphasis there? He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. Luke, or rather the Spirit, is careful to note this; for it is what gives point to the touching story. "He restored him to his mother." It is the Lord's human sympathy, the Lord as Son of Man, which is the object here. True, He must have been Son of God, or He could not have thus raised the dead. If the Godhead and relation to the Father, of Him who was made flesh, had been the only truth to show, the attendant circumstances need not have been narrated; the Gospel of John might have sufficed, as it does, to display eminently the Lord Jesus as the Son.

All this manifests the perfectness of the word of God. When the mind is subject to Him this is seen, and He teaches those who submit themselves and confide in Him. A blind man is healed in John 9, (not these near Jericho, who appeal to Jesus) but, as Jesus passed by, He saw a man blind from his birth. Rejected of men, Jesus was going about seeking for objects on whom to bestow His blessing; the Son who, unsought, saw the deep need, and dealt accordingly. It was an opportunity of working the works of God. He waits for nothing, goes to the man, and the work is done, though it was the sabbath-day. How could the Son of God rest in the presence of sin and wretchedness, whatever religious pride might feel? The Lord leaves him not until he can own Him "Son of God," and worship. Moreover, we may say, John never

mentions a miracle simply for the display of power, but to attest the divine glory of Christ. In Matthew it is the rejected Messiah. Here (in chap. 20), being despised by the nation, God makes two blind men bear testimony to Him as Son of David; which, when thus owned by the nation, will bring in Israel's restoration with triumphant power.

The place (near Jericho) was accursed. But if Jesus has come as Messiah, although the Jews reject Him, He shows Himself to be Jehovah — not only Messiah under the law, but Jehovah above it; and so He blesses them even at Jericho, and they followed Him. This was the place that Israel should have taken: they ought to have known their King. The two blind men were a witness for Him, and against them. There was a competent testimony — "In the mouth of two witnesses," etc. Mark and Luke, whose object was not to bring out testimony valid according to the law, mention only one.

12 What our Lord calls here "their angels" seem to be the spirits of children now in heaven — the spirit representing the person in the present state until the resurrection. Compare Acts 12:15; Heb. 12:23, and Rev. 1:20 — this last representing the assembly. A "guardian angel," of which some speak as the meaning here, does not seem to give a good reason for the Lord's warning; nor is it anywhere mentioned in Scripture. Ed.

13 Forgiveness is necessarily based on the "hearing," — "if he shall hear thee" — which shows the heart is not continuing in the wrong. Ed.

14 While forgiveness or retension of guilt governmentally is the subject of this kingdom parable, an unforgiving, relentless spirit would show a heart

untouched by God’s mercy, with eternal consequences attaching. — [Ed.

Matthew 21 - 24

Matthew 21

Jesus comes to the Mount of Olives. The Jews well knew what was prophesied concerning this mountain; they ought to have entered into the spirit of what the Lord was doing.

The sending for the colt shows the Lord as Jehovah, who has a perfect right to all. “The Lord (Jehovah) hath need of them.”15 What more thorough than His knowledge of circumstances in the womb of the future? How evident His control over the owner’s mind and feeling! Meek as He was, sitting upon an ass, the King of Zion according to the prophet, He was indeed as surely Jehovah as Messiah coming in His name — the “need of them” as amazing as the glory of His person.

The Lord goes onward to Jerusalem. And the multitude cry, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” They apply Psalm 118 to Messiah, and they were right. They might be very unintelligent, and some perhaps may have joined later in the fearful cry, “His blood be upon us;” but here the Lord guides the scene. He comes to the city; but He is unknown: His own know Him not. They ask, “Who is this?” So little understanding had the multitude, that they answer, “This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.” But though they only see Jesus of Galilee, yet He shows Himself as King, and takes a place of authority and power. He enters into the temple, and overthrows the tables of the money-changers, etc. This may certainly be looked at as a miraculous incident; for it was astonishing that He whom they knew only as the

prophet of Nazareth should so boldly enter their temple, and drive out all who were desecrating it. But they turn not upon Him. The power of the God of the temple was there, and they flee; their consciences doubtless echoing the Lord's words, that they had made His house a den of thieves. But here we see, not only the testimony of the crowd to the kingship of Jesus, but the response to it, as it were, in the act of Jesus. As if He had said, "You hail Me as King, and I will demonstrate that I am." Accordingly, He reigns, as it were, in righteousness, and cleanses the defiled temple. Into what a state had the Jews not fallen! 'My house... the house of prayer... but ye have made it a den of thieves! "

There were two cleansings — one before our Lord's public ministry, and the other at its close. John records the first; Matthew the last.

In our Gospel it is an act of Messianic power, where He cleanses His own house, or, at least, acts for God, as His King. In John it is rather zeal for the injured honour of His Father's house — "Make not My Father's house a house of merchandise." A collateral reason, why John tells us of the first cleansing in the beginning of his Gospel, is that he assumes the rejection of Israel at once. Hence their rejection by Christ, set forth in this act, was the inevitable consequence of their rejection of Him: and this is the point from which John sets out when he begins with the ways of the Lord before His ministry.

But now the blind and the lame come to Him to be healed. "He healed their diseases and forgave their iniquities." Both these classes were the hated of David's soul — the effect of the taunt upon David (2 Sam. 5:6-8). How blessed the contrast in the Son of David! He turns

out the selfish religionists from the temple, and receives there the poor, blind, and lame, and heals them — perfect righteousness and perfect grace.

On the one hand, there are the voices of the children crying, “Hosanna,” etc. — the ascription of praise to Him as King, the Son of David; on the other, there is the Lord acting as King, and doing that which the Jews well knew had been prophesied of their King. He was there the confessed King; yet not by the chief priests and scribes, who took umbrage, wilfully and knowingly rejecting Him — “We will not have this man to reign over us.” Naturally, therefore, they seek to stop the mouths of the children, and ask Jesus to rebuke them: “Hearest Thou what these say?” But the Lord sanctions their praises: “Have ye never heard, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise” (ver. 16). The power of Jehovah was there, and there was a mouth to own it, though only in babes and sucklings. So “He left them” — a significant and solemn act. They rejected Him, and He abandons them, turning His back upon the beloved city.

Returning to Jerusalem on the next day, the Lord is hungered, and seeks fruit from the fig-tree, but finds none. He then pronounces a curse upon it, and presently it withered away. The sentence on the fig-tree was an emblematic curse upon the people — Israel was the fig-tree. The Lord found nothing but leaves, and the word is that henceforth no fruit shall grow upon it for ever. The nation had failed in fruit to God, when they had every means and opportunity for glorifying and serving Him; and now all their advantages are taken away, and the old stock is given up — a dead tree.

Mark says that the time of figs was not yet. Many have been perplexed at this, as if the Lord sought figs at a time when there could be none. The meaning is, that the time for the gathering of figs was not come — the time of figs was not yet. There ought to have been a show of fruit, but there were only leaves — only outward profession. It was thoroughly barren. The disciples wondered; but the Lord says to them further, “If ye shall say to this mountain (symbolizing Israel’s place among the nations, as exalted among them), Be thou cast into the sea,” etc. This has been done. Not only is there no fruit borne for God, but Israel, as a nation, has been cast into the sea — as lost in the mass of people — trodden down and oppressed under the feet of the Gentiles.

The chief priests and the elders of Israel now come to attack the Lord: they demand of Him, “By what authority doest Thou these things?” — the driving out the traders from the temple precincts — “and who gave Thee this authority?” It was not given by them, indeed; and their eyes were closed as to His glory. Our Lord answers by asking what were their thoughts of John’s baptism. He appeals neither to miracles nor prophecy, but to conscience. How evident had been the accomplishment of the ancient oracles in His person, in His life and in His ministry! How full the testimony of signs and wonders wrought by Him! Yet their question proved how vain all had been, as His question proved either their dishonesty or their blindness. In either case, who were they to judge? Little did they think that as they sought to canvass the Lord of glory, they were in truth but discovering their own distance and alienation from God. So, indeed, it ever is. Our judgment, or refusal to judge, of what concerns Christ is an unfailing

gauge of our own condition. In this instance (vers. 23-27) the want of conscience was manifest — nowhere so fatal as in religious guides. “They reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; He will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people: for all hold John as a prophet.” God was not in their thoughts; and thus all was false and wrong. And if God be not the object, self is the idol. These chief priests were at bottom but slaves of the people over whose faith, or superstition, they had dominion. “We fear the people.” This at least was true. “And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell.” To what a miserable subterfuge they are driven — blind guides by their own acknowledgment! To such the Lord declines to give any account of His authority. Again and again they had seen the works of His gracious power, and their question furnished the proof that an answer was useless. They would not see if they could.

But our Lord does more. In the parable of the two sons He convicts these religious leaders of being farther away from God than the most despised classes in the land. “Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not,” etc. (ver. 32.) Decent lip-homage forms — “I go, sir; and went not” — such was the religion of those who stood highest in the world’s estimate of that day. Hypocrisy was there, to cover self-will and pride with the cloak of religiousness, which made them more obdurate than people who disgraced the decencies of society in riotous or otherwise disreputable ways. They were more accessible to the stirring appeals of John than these Pharisees. Deaf to

the call of righteousness, they were hardened as well against the operations of God's grace, even where it was most conspicuous. "And ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him." Repentance awakens the sense of relationship to God as the one sinned against. The resolutions of nature begin and end in "I go, sir." The Spirit of God produces the deep conviction of sin against Him, with neither room for nor desire of excuse. But it is lost for worldly religion, which, resisting alike God's testimony and the evidence of conversion in others, sinks into increasing darkness and hostility to God. The judge of all therefore pronounces these proud, self-complacent men worse than those they scorned. They were no judges now — they were judged.

Again, the Lord bids them hear another parable, setting forth not merely their conduct toward God, but God's dealing with them, in a twofold form: first, in view of human responsibility as under law; and, secondly, in view of God's grace under the kingdom of heaven. The former is developed in the parable of the householder (vers. 33-41); the latter, in the king's marriage-feast for his son (Matt. 22:1-14). Let us look at the first.

"Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a wine-press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it" (vers. 33, 34). It is a picture founded on and filling up the sketch of Isa. 5 — a picture of God's peculiar favours to Israel. "What could have been done more to My vineyard that I have not done in

it?" He had brought them out of Egypt, and settled them in a goodly land, with every advantage afforded by His goodness and power. There was definite arrangement, abundant blessing, ample protection. Then He looked for fruit, reminding them of His rights by the prophets. "And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another" (ver. 35). There was full patience too. "Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise." Was there a single possibility that remained? a hope, however forlorn? "Last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son." Alas, it was but the crowning of their iniquity, and the occasion of bringing out their guilt and hopeless ruin! For "when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him" (vers. 37-39). They recognized the Messiah then, but only so as to provoke their malice and worldly lusts. "Let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance." It was not only lack of fruit, persistent refusal of all the just claims of God and robbing Him of every due return, but the fullest outbreak of rebellious hatred, when tested by the presence of the Son of God in their midst. Probation is over; the question of man's state and of God's efforts to get fruit from His vineyard is at an end. The death of the rejected Messiah has closed this book. Man — the Jew — ought to have made a becoming answer to God for the benefits so lavishly showered on him; but his answer was — the cross. It is too late to talk of what men should be. Tried by God under the most favourable circumstances, they betrayed and shed the innocent blood; they killed the Heir to seize on His inheritance.

Hence judgment is now the only portion man under law has to expect. “When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?” Seared as the poor Jews were, they could not but confess the sad truth, “He, will miserably destroy those wicked men,” etc. (ver. 41). The wickedness of the husbandmen failed to achieve its own selfish end, as surely as it had never rendered fruits meet for Him whose provident care left men without excuse. But the rights of the householder were intact; and if there was still “the lord of the vineyard,” was He indifferent to the accumulated guilt of wronged servants and of His outraged Son? It could not be. He must, themselves being the witnesses, avenge the more summarily, because of His long patience and incomparable love so shamefully spurned and defied. Others would have the vineyard let, to them, who should render Him the fruits in their seasons.

Thus the death of Christ is viewed in this parable, not as in the counsels of God, but as the climax of man’s sin and the closing scene of his responsibility. Whether law or prophets or Christ sought fruit for God, all was vain, not because God’s claim was not righteous, but because man — aye, favoured man, with every conceivable help — was hopelessly evil. In this aspect the rejection of the Messiah had the most solemn meaning; for it demonstrated, beyond appeal, that man, the Jew, had no love for God, by whom he had been blessed. it was not only that he was evil and unrighteous, but he could not endure perfect love and goodness in the person of Christ. Had there been a single particle of divine light or love in men’s heart, they would have reverenced the Son; but now the full proof stood out, that the natural

man is hopelessly bad; and that the presence of a divine Person, who came in love and goodness, a Man among men, gave only the final opportunity to strike the most malicious and insulting blow at God Himself. In a word, man was now shown and pronounced to be LOST. “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 man did, they had not had sin. but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father.” Christ’s death was the grand turning-point in the ways of God; the moral history of man, in the most important sense, terminates there.

“Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The Stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?” (ver. 42). It was the conduct of those who took the lead in Israel, revealed in their own Scriptures. Marvellous doing On the Lord’s part! — in manifest reversal of such as set themselves up, and were accepted, as acting in His name: yet to be marvellous in Israel’s eyes, when the now hidden but exalted Saviour comes forth, the joy of a converted people, who shall then welcome and for ever bless their once-rejected King; for truly His mercy endures for ever. Meanwhile His lips utter the sentence of sure rejection from their high estate: “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom.of God [not of heaven, for this they had not] shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (ver. 43). Nor was this all: for “whosoever shall fall on this stone” (Himself in humiliation) ‘I shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall” (i.e., consequent on His

exaltation), “it will grind him to powder” (ver. 44). Thus, He sets forth the ensuing stumbles of unbelief; and further, the positive execution of destructive judgment, whether individual or national, Jewish or Gentile, at His appearing in glory. (Compare Daniel 2.)

It is in all respects a notable scene, and the Lord, now drawing to the conclusion of His testimony, speaks with piercing decision. So that, spiritually impotent and dull as the chief priests and Pharisees might be, and couched as His words were in parables, the drift and aim were distinctly felt. And yet, whatever their murderous will, they could do nothing till His hour was come; for the people in a measure bowed to His word, and took Him fora prophet. He brought God in presence of their conscience, and their awe feebly answered to His words of coming woe.

Matthew 22

We are not positively informed that the parable of the marriage feast was uttered at this time. It is introduced in so general a manner that one could well conceive it the same as that which Luke, with more definite marks of time, presents in the fourteenth chapter of his Gospel. However this may have been, nothing can exceed the beautiful propriety of its occurrence here, as the sequel to the latter part of the previous chapter. For, as the vineyard sets forth the Lord’s righteous claim from Israel, on the ground of what He had entrusted to them, so the wedding sets forth the new thing, and hence is a comparison of “the kingdom of heaven” — not now fruit sought as a debt due to God from man, but God displaying the resources of His own glory and love in honour of His Son, and man is invited to share. We have

nothing properly here of the Church or assembly, but the kingdom. Consequently, though the parable goes beyond the Jewish economy, so elaborately treated in the preceding portion, and Christ's own personal presence on earth, it does not take in corporate privilege, but individual conduct, as variously affected by God's astonishing mercy, and this in view of and flowing from the place of Christ as glorified on high. The characteristic point is that it is an exposition, not of Israel's ways toward the Lord, but of the King's ways who would magnify His Son; though here, as before, unbelief and rebellion never fail to meet their just recompense. It had been proved that God could not trust man: would man now trust God, and come at His word, and be a partaker of His delight in His Son?

It is manifest that here we are no longer on Old Testament ground with its solemn prophetic warnings. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding; and they would not come" (vers. 2, 3). Our Evangelist, true to the plan and design of the Holy Ghost, presents this striking picture after that of the Messiah's rejection. What would be the fresh intervention of God? and how received of man, especially of Israel? In Luke, I may mention by the way, the dispensational connection does not appear; but the Spirit gives rather a view of what God is to mankind generally, and even puts it as "a certain man" making a supper with unexampled generosity, not the "King" acting for the glory of "His Son." In both Gospels the parable represents, not righteous requirement as under the law, but the way in which grace goes out to the Jew first and also to the

Gentile. He “sent forth His servants to call them that were bidden [Israel], but they would not come.” The kingdom was not come, but announced, while the Lord was here below. “Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage” (ver. 4).

Mark the difference. On the first mission of the servants He did not say “All things are ready,” but only on the second, when Christ meanwhile had died and risen, and the kingdom was actually established on His ascension. It is the Gospel of the kingdom after His work, as compared with the Gospel before it. The two messages are thus distinguished; the rejection of Christ and His death being the turning-point. Matthew alone gives us this striking difference; Luke at once begins, with equal propriety for his task, with “Come: for all things are now ready,” dwelling, with details not found in Matthew, on the excuses made by the heart for despising the gospel.

The King was active, then, and His honour at stake in having a feast worthy of His Son. Not even the cross turned Him aside from His great purpose of having a people near Him and happy in honour of His Son. On the contrary, if grace works, as it does, the interrupted message is renewed with new and more urgent appeals to the invited; and now by other servants beyond the twelve and the seventy. So we have in the beginning of Acts (Acts 2 - 4) the special announcement to Israel as the children of the covenant — “To them that were bidden.” The first sending out, then, was during the life of the Messiah to call the privileged people; afterwards, there was the second and specific testimony of grace to

the same people when the work of redemption was done.

What was the effect? “They made light of it, and went their way, one to his farm, another to his merchandise.” God was not in their thoughts, but a man’s own field or his trade; and, alas, as God increases in the testimony of His grace, man grows bolder in his slight and opposition. “And the remnant took His servants and entreated them spitefully and slew them” (vers. 5, 6). This is what you find in measure in the Acts of the Apostles. The message is disregarded in the earlier chapters; in chapters 7 and 12, the servants are outraged and slain. The issue is then fore shown — judgment on the Jews and Jerusalem. “When the king heard thereof he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city” (ver. 7). Who does not see in this the fate of the Jewish nation and the destruction of their city? This is not found in Luke: how suitable to Matthew, I need not point out.

But God will have His house filled with guests; and if those peculiarly favoured would not come, and incurred wrath to the uttermost, divine grace will not be thwarted by human wilfulness — evil must be overcome of good. “Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready; but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage” (vers. 8, 9). Here is an indiscriminate call to every soul by the gospel. “So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was furnished with guests” (ver. 10). The gospel goes out to men as they are, and wherever

received produces, by grace, that which is according to God, instead of demanding it. Hence all are welcome, bad and good — a dying thief or a woman that was a sinner, a Lydia or a Cornelius. The question was not their character, but the feast for the King's Son; and to this they were freely called. Grace, far from asking, gives fitness to stand before Him in peace.

Yes, there is produced a necessary, indispensable fitness. A wedding garment is due to the wedding-feast. This the King, of His own magnificent bounty, provided, and it was for each guest to wear it: who that honoured the King and the occasion would not? The servants did not look for such garments outside: they were not worn on the highways, but within at the wedding. Nor was it the point for the guests to appear in their best. It was the King's affair to give. Come who might, there was enough and to spare; "all things were ready."

This is the great essential truth of the gospel. So far from looking for anything in man agreeable to God, the glad tidings come on His part on the express ground that all is ruined, wretched, guilty, on the sinner's part. "Let him that is athirst come; yea, whosoever will."

But where the heart is not right with God, it never submits to His righteousness; man, in this case, prefers to stand on his own foundation. Either he thinks he can raise a claim on God by being or doing something, or he ventures. within, careless both of himself and God. Such was the man whom the king finds without the wedding-garment. It was despising the holiness as well as the grace of God, and proved that he was utterly a stranger to the feast. What did he think of, or care for, the feelings of the King bent upon the glorifying of His Son?

For this is the true and real secret: God lavishes mercy on sinners for the sake of His Son. Opportunity is thus given to put honour on His name. Does my soul bow to it and Him? — it is salvation. The heart may go through much exercise, but the only key to His astonishing goodness to us is God's feeling toward His Son. If I may venture so to speak, the Lord Jesus has put the Father under obligation so to act. He has so lived and died to glorify God at all cost, that God (I say it reverently) is bound to show this grace, show what He is, on account of His Son. Hence that remarkable expression in Paul's epistles, "The righteousness of God." It is no longer man's righteousness sought by the law, but God righteous in justifying such as have faith in His Son, when man has been proved to have utterly and in every way failed. Because of the infinite value of the Cross, God loves to put honour on Christ; and if a soul but plead His name, it becomes a question of God's righteousness in justifying him freely, of His grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Strikingly is the truth shown by the King's dealing with the Christ-despising intruder! "And when the king came to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment" (ver. 11). This was the ground of immediate action. No question was started of what the man had been or done. The servants had been commissioned to bring in the bad as well as the good. "Such were some of you," says the apostle. Indeed, this man may have been the most correct, moral, and religious of the company, like the young ruler who left the Lord in sorrow. But, whether he were a degraded sinner or a self-righteous soul, one thing is certain — he had not on a wedding-garment. This at once arrested the

King’s eye. This man was setting at naught the King’s grace — it was openly dishonouring His Son.

The wedding-garment is Christ. This guest therefore came before the King without Christ. He had not put on Christ! Whatever the pretence, it was all and only himself, not Christ, and that is everlasting ruin and condemnation to a sinner. Whereas, the very chief of sinners that accepts Christ as his sole confidence to stand before God, thereby justifies and exalts Him and His grace. It is as a man broken down in thoughts of himself, looking up and saying, I cannot trust what I have been nor even what I desire to be, but I can trust what Thou art to me in the gift of Thy Son. And such confidence in God produces deep loathing of self, real uprightness of soul, as well as true desire to do the will of God. But this man knew not, believed not, that nothing from earth suits the divine presence — only what is purchased by the precious blood of Jesus. He had no sense of the grace which invited him, nor of the holiness that befits the presence of God. The King accordingly says to him, “Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless” (ver. 12). He was in spirit and before God entirely outside the feast; else he would have felt the absolute need of an array in keeping with the King’s joy and the Son’s bridals. And judgment cast him out of that scene for which he had no heart — cast him out where the unbelieving, in hopeless wretchedness and self-reproach, must honour the Son. It is not merely governmental vengeance, such as that which providentially slew the murderers and fired their city, but final judgment on him who spurned grace by presuming to draw near to God without putting on

Christ. “Then said the King to the servants (not the bondmen of verses 3, 4, etc.), Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into the outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Was this solemn sentence rare because one man only exemplifies it? Nay, verily; ‘for many are called, but few are chosen” (vers. 13, 14).

Thus terminated the double trial of the nation; first, on the ground of their responsibility as under the law, and next, as tested by the message of grace. The rest of the chapter judges in detail all ‘,he various classes in Israel who successively sought to judge and ensnare the Lord, bringing into relief their position, and winding up all with a question which they could not answer without understanding His position and withal His glorious Person.

“Then went the Pharisees and took counsel how they might entangle Him in His talk. And they sent out unto Him their disciples with the Herodians.” What an alliance! The Pharisees (partisans of strict Judaism and the law) and the Herodians (the political time-servers of that day, whom the former hated cordially), join in flattering Jesus to ensnare Him by the question of Jewish title against the Gentile. Would He, the Messiah, gainsay the hopes and exalted privileges of Israel as a nation? If not, how escape the charge of treason against Caesar? Diabolical craft was there, but divine wisdom brings in the just balance of truth as to God and human authority, and the difficulty vanishes. It was the rebellion of the Jews against Jehovah which gave occasion to His subjecting them to their heathen lords. Were they humbled because of it, and seeking the resources of God’s grace? Nay, but proud and boastful; and their

conflicting parties at this very time uniting in deadly opposition to God, plotting against their own, and His, Messiah. “Tell us, therefore: what thinkest Thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness and said, Why tempt ye Me, ye hypocrites? Show Me the tribute money” (vers. 17-19). They brought a denarius, and owned to Caesar’s image and superscription upon it, and heard the sentence of Wisdom: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.” Had the Jews honoured Him, they had never been in bondage to Gentile dominion; but now, being so through their own sin and folly, they were bound to accept their humiliation. Neither Pharisee nor Herodian felt the sin; and if one felt the shame which the other gloried in, the Lord, while forcing them to face the real position to which their iniquity had reduced them, pointed out that which, if they heeded it, would be the speedy harbinger of a divine deliverance.

“The same day came to Him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked Him, saying, Moses said,” etc. (vers. 23-33). Thus unbelief is as false and dishonest as pretended human righteousness. If the Pharisees could be in league with Herodians and affect loyalty to Caesar so could the sceptic Sadducees plead Moses, as if the inspired word had plenary authority over their conscience! But the Lord, as He laid bare the hypocrisy of those who stood high as religionists, equally detected what the sceptic never suspects, that their difficulties flow not only from overlooking the power of God, but from downright ignorance — whatever maybe their self-conceit. “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.” Faith, on

the contrary, sees clearly, just as it counts on God according to the revelation of Himself in the Word.

The Lord not only shows their sophism to be sheer misapprehension of the resurrection-state, but proves (and that from Moses too, without going further) that the resurrection of the dead is an essential part of God's purpose and truth. An additional statement is given in Luke as to the intermediate living of the separate spirit. But in our Gospel the one point is that the dead rise, because God declared Himself to be the God of the fathers even after their death; and confessedly He is not the God of the dead (the extinct, as the Sadducees thought), but of the living. If He were their God in their state when He spoke to Moses, He must be the God of the dead, which the Sadducees had been the first to deny. It was the more important so to reveal Himself to Moses, through whom the system of the law was given, and to which the Sadducees pretended to adhere.

But if the Pharisees retired with wonder, they were far from subdued; and, indeed, they bestir themselves afresh when their sceptical rivals were put to silence. They assemble together; then a lawyer "tempts" Him, only to elicit a perfect summary of practical righteousness. They talked and tempted: Jesus was the expression of all the perfectness of law and prophets; and far, far more — the image of God Himself in grace as well as righteousness here below: not as Adam, who rebelled against God — not as Cain, who loved not his neighbour, but slew his brother (vers. 34-40).

And now it belonged to the Lord to ask them the question of questions, not only for a Pharisee, but for any soul: "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?"

He was David's son — most true. But was this truth the whole truth? "How then does David in spirit call him Lord, saying, Jehovah said unto my Lord?" etc. How was He both David's Son and David's Lord? It was the key to all Scripture — the way, the truth, the life — the explanation of His position, the only hope for theirs. But they were dumb. They knew nothing, and could answer nothing. "Neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions."

Matthew 23

They were all silenced, those who pretended to most light! Not believing in Christ, they were destitute of the only key to Scripture; and Psalm 110, bright as its testimony is to their own Messiah, was a thick cloud, not only to Egyptians now as of old, but to Israel. They saw not His glory, and were therefore hopelessly puzzled how to understand that David, speaking by the Spirit, should call his son his Lord.

In this chapter the Lord pronounces the doom of the nation, and most of all — not those whom man would chiefly denounce; not the openly lawless, licentious, or violent; nor the ease-loving, sceptical Sadducees, but — of those who stood highest in general esteem for their religious knowledge and sanctity. Conscience, man, the very world, can with more or less exactness judge of immoral grossness. God sees and eschews what looks fair to human eyes and is withal false and unholy. And the word of God is explicit that so it is to be. The heaviest woes yet in store for this world are not for heathen darkness, but, as for rebellious Judaism, so for corrupt Christendom, where most truth is known and the highest privileges conferred, but, alas, where their

power is despised and denied..Not that, when God arises to judge, the pagan nations will go unpunished. They too shall drink of the cup. Yet, “Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” Even so with professing Christendom: the fuller the light bestowed, the richer the grace of God revealed in the gospel, so much the graver reasons for unsparing judgments on hypocritical profession, when the knell of divine vengeance tolls for those “who know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Lord sees not as man seeth, whether in grace or in judgment; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. Thus did Jesus speak in the scene before us.

It is remarkable, however, that in the first instance He spoke “to the multitudes and to His disciples.” They were yet to a great extent viewed together — this till the death and resurrection of Christ; and even then the Holy Ghost slowly breaks one old tie after another, and only utters His last word to the Jewish remnant (then Christian, of course) by more than one witness not long before the destruction of Jerusalem. But separation there was not, nor could be, till the cross.

It was, then, part of our Lord’s Jewish mission to say that “the scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do” (vers. 2, 3). But there was the careful warning against making the scribes and Pharisees in anywise personal standards of good and evil. “Do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not.” They were in

themselves beacons, patterns of wrong, not of right (vers. 3-7). Still, not only were the disciples classed with the multitude, but in the very strongest denunciations of these religious guides they were bound as yet by the Lord to acknowledge those who sat in Moses' seat. There they were in fact, and the Lord maintains, instead of dissolving, the obligation to own them and whatever they set forth, not of their own traditions, but from the law. This was to honour God Himself, spite of the hypocrites who only sought man's honour for themselves, and it affords no warrant for false apostles or their self-deceived successors now. For the apostles had no seats like that of Moses; and Christianity is not a system of ordinance or formal observance like the law, but, where real, is the fruit of the Spirit through life in Christ, which is formed and fed by the word of God.

It has been urged, confidently enough of late, and in quarters where one might have hoped for better things, that as the saints in Old Testament times looked for Christ, and eternal life was theirs by faith, though they were under the law, so we who now believe in Christ are nevertheless, and in the same sense, under the law like them, though, like them, we are justified by faith. Plausible, and even fair, as this may seem to some, I have no hesitation in pronouncing it extremely evil. It is a deliberate putting souls back into the condition from which the work of Christ has extricated us. The Jews of old were placed under the law for the wise purpose of God, till the promised Seed came to work a complete deliverance; and the saints in their midst, though they rose above that position by faith, were all their lifetime subject to bondage and the spirit of fear. Christ has set us free, by the great grace of God, through His own

death and resurrection; and we have thereon received the Spirit of sonship whereby we cry, Abba, Father. And yet, spite of the plainest testimony of God to the momentous change brought about by the coming of His Son, and the accomplishment of His work, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, it is openly, seriously proposed, as if it were part of the faith once delivered to the saints, that this wondrous working and display of divine grace should be set aside, with their results to the believer, and that the soul should be replaced under the old yoke and in the old condition! Doubtless ‘this is precisely what Satan aims at, an effort to blot out all that is distinctive of Christianity by a return to Judaism. Only one maybe amazed to find so barefaced an avowal of the matter in men professing evangelical light.

The true answer, then, to such misunderstandings of Matthew 23 and the misapplications of similar portions of Holy Writ, is that as yet our Lord was adhering (and so He did to the last moment) to His proper Messianic mission; and this supposed and maintained the nation and the remnant under the law, and not in the delivering power of His resurrection. Which of the disciples could yet say, “Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” Now, on the contrary, this is the normal language of the Christian. It is not a question of special attainment nor of extraordinary faith, but of simple present subjection to the full Christian testimony in the

New Testament. Even were we Jews, the old tie is dissolved by death, and we are married to another, even to Christ raised from the dead. Thus to have the law as well as Christ for our guide and rule is like having two husbands at one time, and is a sort of spiritual adultery.

Surely also we can and ought to take the moral profit of our Lord's censure of the scribes and Pharisees: for what is the heart! We have to beware of imposing on others that which we are remiss to observe ourselves. We have to watch against doing works to be seen of men. We have to pray against the allowance of the world's spirit — the love of pre-eminence, both within and without (vers. 4-7). Hence the word is, "Be not ye called Rabbi; for One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no one your father upon the earth; for One is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters; for One is your Master, even Christ." The question here is not of the various gifts which the Lord confers by the Holy Ghost on His members in His body the Church, but of religions authority in the world and a certain status and respect by virtue of ecclesiastical office or position. But the great moral principle of the kingdom (which is always true) is enforced here: "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (vers. 8-12). The cross and the heavenly glory would but deepen the value and significance of these words of the Saviour; but even before either, and independently of the new order of things in the Church, they bore His stamp and were current for the kingdom.

In marked contrast with this pattern of true service for the disciples were the scribes and Pharisees, on whom

the Lord next proceeds to pronounce eight solemn woes (vers. 13-33).16 What else could He say of men who not only entered not the kingdom of heaven, but hindered those disposed to enter? What else could be due to those who sought religious influence over the weak and defenceless for gain? Granted that their proselyting zeal was untiring, what was the fruit in souls before God? Were not the taught, as usual, the truest index of such teachers, as being more simple and unreserved as to their ways and aim and spirit? Then the Lord lays bare their hair-splitting distinctions, which really made void the authority of God, insisting, as they did, on the pettiest exactions to the neglect of the plainest everlasting moral truths. Next is detected the effort after external look, whatever might be the impurity within; and this both in their labour and in their lives and persons, which were full of guile and self-will, crowned by affected great veneration for the prophets and the righteous who had suffered of old, and no longer acted on the conscience. This last gave them the more credit. There is no cheaper nor more successful means of gaining a religious reputation than this show of honour for the righteous who are dead and gone, especially if they connect themselves with them in appearance, as being of the same association. The succession seems natural, and it sounds hard to charge those who honour the dead saints in this day with the same rebellious spirit which persecuted and slew them in their own day. But the Lord would put them to a speedy and decisive test, and prove the real bent and spirit of the world’s religion. ‘I Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute

them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar" (vers. 34, 35). It was morally the same race and character all through. In righteous judgment the Lord adds, "Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation." Thus should be judged in the full measure what was begun by their fathers and completed by themselves. Hypocrites and serpents, how could such escape the judgment of hell?

But, how touching! Here is the Lord's lament over the guilty city — His own city: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (vers. 37, 38). His glory shines out more than ever; the rejected Messiah is in truth Jehovah. He would have gathered (and how often 1) but they would not. It was no longer His house nor His Father's, but their's, and it is left unto them desolate. Nevertheless, if it he a most solemnly judicial word, there is hope in the end: "For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." Israel are yet to see their King, but not till a goodly remnant of them are converted to welcome Him in Jehovah's name.

Matthew 24

In this prophecy of our Lord on which we are now to enter, we see a confirmation of a great principle of God: that He never opens out the future of judgments on the

rebellious, and of deliverance for His own people, till sin has so developed itself as to manifest total ruin. Take the very first instances in the Bible. When was it said that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head? When the woman was beguiled, and man was in transgression through the wiles of the enemy; when sin had entered into the world, and death by sin. Again, the prophecy of Enoch, given us by Jude, was uttered when the term of God's patience with the then world was almost closed, and the flood was about to bear witness of His judgment on man's corruption and violence.

Thus, whether we look at the first prediction of Christ before the expulsion from Eden, or at the testimony of the Lord's coming to judge before the deluge, prophecy comes in when man has wholly broken down. So Noah, when failure in his own family, and in himself too, had come in, we see him led of the Holy Ghost into a prophetic summary of the whole world's history, beginning with the judgment of him who despised his father (even though it were to his own shame), and proceeding with the blessing of Shem and the portion of Japhet. So, later on, with the prophecies of Balaam and of Moses, "yea, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those that follow after;" for Samuel's is the striking epoch which the New Testament singles out as the commencement of the great line of the prophets. And why? It was the day when Israel openly abandoned God as their King, consummating the sin which their heart conceived in the desert, when they sought a captain in order to return into Egypt. It was a proud crisis in Israel, whose blessedness lay in being a people separated from all around by and to Jehovah their God, who would surely have provided them a king of His own

choice, had they waited for Him, instead of choosing for themselves, to God's dishonour and their own degradation and sorrow, in order to be like the nations.

The same principle conspicuously applies to the time when the great prophetic books were written — Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the rest. It was when all present hope had fled, and David's sons wrought no deliverance, but rather through their towering iniquity and profane insults of God, He was at last morally forced to pronounce the nation Lo-ammi" — not My people." Before, and during, and after the captivity, the Spirit of prophecy laid bare the sin of kings, and priests, and prophets (false ones), and people, but pointed to the coming Messiah and the new covenant. And Him we have seen in our Gospel actually come, but growingly and utterly rejected by Israel, and all their own promises and hopes in Him; and now in the near prospect of His own death at their hands, and by it their worst of deaths, the rejected Lord takes up this prophetic strain.

"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple." For what was it now? A corpse, and no more. "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."17 "And His disciples came to Him for to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down" (vers. 1, 2). The hearts of the disciples then, as too often now, were occupied with the present appearances, and the great show of grandeur in God's service; the halo of associations was bright before their eyes. But Jesus passes sentence on all that even they admired on earth. In truth, when He left the temple, all was gone which gave it value in the sight of God.

Outside Jesus, what is there in this world but vain show or worse? And how does the Lord deliver His own from the power of tradition and every other source of attraction for the heart? He opens out the communications of His own mind, and casts the light of the future on the present. How often worldliness unjudged in a Christian's heart betrays itself by want of relish for God's unfolding of what He is going to do! How can I enjoy the coming of the Lord if it is to throw down much that I am seeking to build up in the world? A man, for instance, may be trying to gain or keep a status by his ability, and hoping that his sons may outstrip himself by the superior advantages they enjoy. On some such idea is founded all human greatness; it is "the world," in fact. Christ's coming again is a truth which demolishes the whole fabric; because, if we really look for His coming as that which may be from day to day — if we realize that we are set like servants at the door with the handle in hand, waiting for Him to knock (we know not how soon), and desiring to open to Him immediately ("Blessed are those servants!") — if such is our attitude, how can we have time or heart for that which occupies the busy Christ-forgetting world? Moreover, we are.not of the world, even as Christ is not; and as for means and agents to carry on its plans, the world will never be in lack of men to do its work. But we have a higher business, and it is beneath us to seek the honours of the world that rejects our Lord. Let our outward position be ever so menial or trying, what so glorious as in it to serve our Lord Christ? And He is coming.

In the cross we see God humbling Himself — the only One of all greatness stooping low to save my soul — the

only One who commands all, becoming the Servant of all. A person cannot receive the truth of the Cross without having in measure his walk in accord with the spirit of it. Yet how much saints of God regard the cross, not so much as that by which the world is crucified unto them and they unto the world, but rather as the remedy by which they are set free from fear, to make themselves a comfortable place in the world! The Christian ought to be the happiest of men; but his happiness should consist in what he knows is his portion in and with Christ. Meanwhile, our service and obedience are to be formed according to the spirit of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Man's evil and God's grace thoroughly came out in the cross; all met there: and upon this great truth is founded what is said often in Scripture, "The end of all things is at hand;" because all has been brought out in moral ways and in dispensational dealings between God and man.

The Lord takes up the disciples where they were. They were believing godly Jews. Their associations connected Christ and the temple together. They knew that He was the Messiah of Israel, and they expected Him to judge the Romans and gather all the scattered ones of the seed of Abraham from the four winds of heaven. They looked for all the prophecies about the land and the city to be accomplished. There was no thought in the minds of the disciples at this time of Jesus going to heaven and staying there for a long time, nor of the scattering of Israel, and the Gentiles being brought in to the knowledge of Christ. Consequently this great prophecy on the mount of Olives starts with the disciples and with their condition. Their hearts were too much occupied with the buildings of the temple. But the Lord, now

rejected, announces that “there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.” This excited greatly the desire of the disciples to understand how such things were to come to pass. They were aware from the prophecies that there was a time of dismal sorrow for Israel, and they did not know how to put this together with their predicted blessing. They ask Him, therefore, “When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming and the end of the world (age)?” (vers. 2, 3).

“Thy coming” means “the Lord’s presence with them on earth;” and “the end of the age” is a totally different word from. that translated “world” elsewhere, it means here the end of the time during which our Lord should be absent from them. They wished to know the sign of His presence with them. They knew there could never be such desolation if their Messiah was reigning over them. They wished to know when the time of sorrow should come, and what should be the sign of His own presence that should close it and bring in unending joy.

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many” (vers. 4, 5). In the Epistles it is never exactly such a thought as warning persons against false Christs, for the Epistles are addressed to Christians; and a Christian could not be deceived by a man’s pretensions to be Christ. It is most appropriate here, because the disciples are viewed in this chapter, not as the representatives of us Christians now, but of future godly Jews. We, as Christians, have nothing to do with the destruction of the temple; it does not affect us in any way. These disciples were, as the godly remnant of the nation,

looking for the Messiah to bring in glory. The Lord, therefore, warns them that if any should arise among them, saying, I am Christ, they were not to believe them. The time was come when the true Messiah ought to appear. And He had appeared, but Israel had rejected Him, hardening themselves in the lie that our Lord could not be the promised One. But Israel had not given up the hope of the Messiah yet, and this exposes them to the delusion spoken of here (i.e., to persons saying, I am Christ). At any rate, the rejection of the true Christ lays them open to the reception of a false Christ. Our Lord had warned them of this. “I am come in My Father’s name, and ye receive Me not. If another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.” If a messiah were to come full of self and Satan, the nation should be given up to receive the false, as a just retribution for having rejected the True. The disciples were the representatives of godly Jews, and were warned of what should befall their nation. But take the epistle of John and what have you there? “Beloved, believe not every spirit.” Why? Because the great thing that the Church is distinguished by is the presence of the Holy Ghost; and the deceit which we have to watch against is false spirits, not false Christs, though there are many antichrists. The danger of Christians is grieving the Holy Ghost — nay, listening to false spirits. “Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” There are false prophets now, and evil spirits work in them. In these days, faith both in the Holy Ghost and in Satan’s power is very much weakened. People only look at the man; whereas Scripture makes a great deal of God and of Satan. What gives Satan power over a professor of the name of Christ is the allowance of sin.

Satan has not one atom of power against a child of God who is looking to Jesus; but where self is allowed, it is an opportunity for Satan to come in.

Here it is a question of false Christs, because our Lord was speaking to the disciples about Jewish circumstances and hopes, though he afterwards turns to Christian subjects. The prophecy consists of three great parts. The Jewish remnant have their history thoroughly described; then comes the portion of Christians, and afterwards that of the Gentiles. The prophecy divides itself into these three sections. The Jews are first brought forward, because the disciples were not yet taken out of their Jewish position: only when Christ was crucified was the wall of partition broken down. Our Lord's intention was to take up a Jewish remnant and show that there would be a company in the latter day on the same ground as these disciples — the Christian would come in between. This we have described in the latter part of the chapter, and in the greater part of Matthew 25. Then we have the Gentiles, "all nations," gathered before the Son of Man. Such is the thread of connection between the parts of this great discourse.

"Many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet" (vers. 5, 6). Observe, there are two great moral warnings given by our Lord. First, they were to beware of a true hope falsely applied. False Christs would take advantage of the fact that the Jews ought to be looking for Christ, and they would pretend to be Christ. Secondly, they might be terrified by the enemy who knows how to use such circumstances. Verse 6,

therefore, guards them against alarms: “Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars.” Clearly this is not for the Christian, for where does the Holy Ghost warn the Christian about trouble from wars and rumours of wars? We find nothing about it in the Epistles, where the Christian Church is properly brought out? Is this denying the importance of the Lord’s warning? God forbid!

But the portion we are looking at does not refer to Christians, but to the Jewish disciples as they then were, and as they will be. Our calling takes place after our Lord went to heaven and before He returns in glory, whereas the Jewish remnant will be found in the latter day on similar ground and with hopes like those the disciples had whom our Lord was here addressing. If we want to put things rightly together in the word of God, we must notice what and to whom He speaks. If I, a Gentile, take up the language of a Jew, a great mistake is made; or if a Christian adopt the language of either Jew or Gentile, there is again an equal mistake. Therefore it is that such stress is laid on “rightly dividing the word of truth.” We find various ways of God according to His sovereign will about those with whom He is dealing, and we must take care to apply His word aright. The disciples, as the Jewish remnant, having a peculiar calling in a particular land, the land of Judea, if they heard of wars and rumours of wars, they were not to be troubled: “For all these things must come to pass; but the end is not yet.” Do we ever find the apostles saying, The end is not yet, for us? On the contrary, it is said of us (1 Cor. 10), “Upon whom the ends of the world are come;” whereas, the Lord in addressing the Jewish remnant, says, “the end is not yet” — because many

things must yet be accomplished before the Jews can come into their blessing. But for Christians, all things even now are ours in Christ; the blessing is never put off, though we await the crown at His coming.

Practically, too, the difference is immensely important; for the Christian is not of the world, even as Christ is not, which could not be equally said of the Jewish body to be called in the latter day. For us “wars and rumours of wars” ought not to be a source of trouble, though surely they should be an occasion of holy concern and intercession in the spirit of grace, and this for all engaged. The Jewish remnant, on the contrary, will not be separated after this heavenly manner; and the earthly struggles which will then rage in and around the land cannot but affect them greatly: so that they will need especially to cherish confidence in the Saviour’s words, and not be troubled as if the issue were a doubtful one, or themselves forgotten in that dark day. They must wait patiently; “for nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.” It is evident that the language is only applicable in its full force to Jews — believing ones, no doubt, but still Jews in the midst of a nation judicially chastised for their apostasy from God and the rejection of their own Messiah.

The Lord therefore prepares the Jewish disciples or remnant for their special trials, partially true after His own departure till Jerusalem’s destruction, and to be more fully verified before Jerusalem is again owned, after the destruction of the Antichrist. “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all nations [or the Gentiles] for My

name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another" (vers. 9, 10). There should be false profession and hatred of the true, even among themselves — not only troubles without: "And many false prophets shall rise and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold; but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Thus there is a certain defined period of endurance — an end to come as truly as there was a beginning of sorrows. But what trial, and darkness, and suffering, and scandal before that end comes! When our Lord, in the Gospel of John, speaks of the Christian's lot, he never names either a beginning or an end, but rather implies that tribulation should be expected throughout his career: "In the world ye shall have tribulation." And such is the constant language and thought in the Epistles, where beyond question our calling is in view.

Then follows a final sign. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (ver. 14). The gospel of God's grace is not the same as the gospel of the kingdom. Both should be preached — that God is saving souls of His mere favour now through Christ; and that there is a kingdom which He is going to establish by His power shortly, which is to embrace all the earth. Before the end come, there will therefore be a special testimony of this coming of the Lord, as He here intimates. So in Revelation 14 an angel is seen by John in the prophetic vision, having the everlasting gospel to preach to the dwellers on earth and to every nation, and "saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come; and worship

Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." Now it cannot be said that the hour of His judgments is come; for it is, on the contrary and expressly, the day of His grace and salvation. Clearly, therefore, the inference is that, just before the close of this age, there will be a remarkable energy of the Spirit in the midst of the Jews; and from that very people who rejected Jesus of old, messengers of the kingdom shall go forth, touched by His grace, to announce the speedy fall of divine judgment and the establishment of the kingdom of the heavens in power and glory. Who, in God's mercy, so suited to proclaim the returning Messiah as some out of the very nation who of old had nailed Him to the cross — to proclaim Him now among all the proud Gentiles whose then representative had inscribed over His cross, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews "? The testimony shall go forth universally, then. How humbling for Christendom! with popery, with Mohammedanism, and paganism too, still prevalent over Asia and Africa — the great bulk of mankind. And yet Christian men close their eyes to the plainest and most solemn facts, and boast of the triumphs of the gospel! No: the Gentiles have been wise in their own conceits, though sovereign grace has wrought, spite of all; but it is reserved for other witnesses, when the "falling away" shall have been complete in Christendom and the man of sin revealed, to proclaim the coming kingdom in all the habitable earth.

In verse 15 the Lord shows us, not general tokens of the approaching end, or what should distinguish the end in general from the earlier throes of Israel, but points to circumstances of the most definite character, which may be applied perhaps partially to what occurred before the

fall of Jerusalem under Titus, but which can only be fulfilled in the future of Israel if we duly heed the peculiarity of the scene, the connection of the prophecy, and, above all, the consummation in which all is to terminate.

First, then, our Lord points to a Jewish prophet. “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand,)” etc. The parenthesis warns that the prediction might be misunderstood — at any rate, demanded attention. Two passages of the prophecy (Dan. 11:31 and Dan. 12:11) speak of this abomination; but I have no hesitation in saying that the former was a foreshadowing of the doings of Antiochus Epiphanes centuries before Christ, and that the latter is the one referred to here, and still unaccomplished. Entirely distinct from the epoch of Antiochus, Dan. 12 speaks of another idol which brings desolation in its train, and this expressly “at the time of the end.” “Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.” in this we have another link of connection with our Lord’s words — “whoso readeth, let him understand.” “And from the time that the daily [sacrifice] shall be taken away and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days.” Thus, besides the idolatrous evil imposed by the notorious king of the north, Antiochus, long before the Lord appeared, Daniel looks onward to a similar evil at the close of Israel’s sorrows, the destruction of which immediately precedes their final deliverance. “Blessed is he that waiteth.” As to this last,

our Lord cites the Jewish prophet, and casts further light on the selfsame time and circumstances.

The conclusion is clear and certain: in verse 15 of Matthew 24 our Lord alludes to that part of Daniel which is yet future, not to what was history when He spoke this on the mount of Olives. I am aware that some have confounded the matter with what we read in Dan. 8 and 9. But “the transgression of desolation” is not the same as “the abomination of desolation”; nor can we absolutely identify “the last end of the indignation” with “the time of the end.” (Compare Isa. 10.) The distinctions of Scripture are as much to be noted as the points of resemblance and of contact. The last verse of Dan. 9 might seem to have stronger claims. There we have a covenant confirmed for one week; and then, in the midst of the week, sacrifice and oblation are made to cease; after which, because of the protection given to abominations, or idols, there is a desolator “even until the consummation and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate” (i.e., Jerusalem). I have thus given what I conceive to be the true sense of this important passage, because, when it is stated with precision, the supposed resemblance to “the abomination of desolation” disappears. A desolator who comes because of the wing (i.e., protection) of abominations is very distinct from the abomination that makes desolate, or the idol which is yet to stand in the sanctuary. With the setting up of this abomination the date of one thousand two hundred and ninety days is connected. Even for those who interpret this as so many years, it is impossible to apply the prophecy to the destruction of Jerusalem or its temple by the Romans. Had it been so, the period of blessing must long ere this have arrived for

Israel. Has the prophecy then failed? No; but the readers have failed in understanding it. We must correct, not the language of Scripture, but our interpretations: we must go back to God's word again and again, and see whether we have not mistaken our bearings.

The truth is that the understanding of Dan. 12 is of all moment for reaping due profit from Matt. 24. In its first verse we have a plain landmark: "At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people." There can be no just doubt that Daniel's people means the Jews, and that a mighty intervention on their behalf is intimated; but, as usual, not without the severest trial of faith. For "there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time." This our Lord has unquestionably in view in verse 21: "Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." There cannot be two tribulations for the same people, each of which is greatest: both statements refer to the same trouble. Now Daniel is positive that "at that time thy people (the Jews) shall be delivered." Who can pretend that Michael stood up for Israel against Titus any more than against Nebuchadnezzar? Does not everybody know that at that time, far from being delivered, they were completely vanquished by the Romans,,and that those who escaped the sword were sold as slaves and scattered over the world? God was then against, not for, Israel; and, as the King in the parable, He was wroth, sent forth His armies, destroyed those murderers, and fired their city. Here, on the contrary, the unequalled hour of sorrow is

just before their deliverance on God's part, not before their captivity.

Carrying this back to our chapter, the sight of the desolating idol in the holy place is the signal for flight. "Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains" (ver. 16). There is no thought of a sign to Christians as such, but to Jewish disciples in the holy land; and this that they may instantly retire from the scene of danger. "Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days!" (vers. 17-19.) It has been tried to find in this the warning on which some fled to Pella in the interval after the Roman lieutenant surrounded the city, and before the final sack under the victorious commander. But this arises from confounding Luke 21:20-24 with Matt. 24:15-21; whereas they are demonstrably distinct, spite of a measure of analogy between them. It perfectly fell within the province given of the Spirit to the great Gentile Evangelist to notice the past Roman siege, as well as the present supremacy of the nations which tread down Jerusalem till their times are fulfilled. Matthew, however, had his own proper task in giving the grand future crisis, at least from verse 15. And it is evident that as the abomination in the holy place differs widely from armies compassing Jerusalem, so there was ample space for the most leisurely departure from the menaced city (yes, for the most impeded and infirm of either sex to go) after Cestius Gallus withdrew. I conclude, therefore, that by Matthew our Lord gives us what bears on the time of the end; by Luke, what refers to the past, and the present too,

cursorily, as well as the future. Matthew, for instance, could not speak, like Luke, of Jerusalem being trodden down of the Gentiles, because he is here occupied only with the horrors which immediately precede Israel's blessing and deliverance. Luke has both an earlier and a later time of trouble: Matthew, from verse 15, confines himself to this latter time.

"But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (vers. 20, 21). How considerate the Lord is! And how surely His disciples in that day may count on His care, that their petitions will be answered, so that, urgent as their flight must be, neither the inclement season nor the day of Jewish rest shall hinder! Here again is another proof that not Christians, but His Jewish followers, are here contemplated. Holy as is the Sabbath, I have no hesitation in saying that the Lord's day, with which the Church has to do, is founded on a deeper sanctity. The believer has now to beware, on the one hand of confounding the Sabbath with the Lord's day, and on the other of supposing that, because the Lord's day is not the Sabbath, it may therefore be turned to a selfish or worldly account. The Sabbath is the holy memorial of creation and of the law, as the Lord's day is of grace and of the new creation in the resurrection of the Saviour. As Christians we are neither of the old creation nor under the law, but stand on the totally different ground of Christ dead and risen. The Sabbath was for man and the Jew — the last day of the week, and one simply of rest, to be shared with the ox and the ass. This is not the Christian idea, which begins the week with the Lord,

gives the best to Him in worship, and is free to labour for Him to all lengths in the midst of the world's sin and misery.

Thus we have at every step a fresh testimony to the real bearing of the prophecy. For us the holy place is in heaven, not in Jerusalem; for us it is no question of escaping some unexampled tribulation, but of being prepared for suffering with and for Christ, and rejoicing in it always; for us, gathered out of all nations and tongues, the mountains round Judea are no suited hiding-place; nor could the winter or the Sabbath day be a just source of alarm. Every word is for us to ponder and profit by; but the evidence unmistakably points to a converted body of Jews in the latter day, not standing in Church light and privilege, but having Jewish hopes; and while awaiting the Messiah, warned how to escape the deceits and overwhelming trouble of that day. It is a question of flesh being saved (ver. 22), and not of fellowship with Christ's sufferings and conformity to His death, so as, whatever the cost, to have part in the resurrection from among the dead. Hence, too, there is no thought here of Christ's coming to receive us to Himself and to give us mansions where He is in the Father's house, but of His appearing in glory to destroy enemies, to judge what was dead and offensive to God, and to deliver the scattered elect of Israel. For their sake, those days of terror should be shortened. With this agree the warnings in verses 23-28: "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders," etc. (vers. 23, 24.) Could such a delusion be addressed even to the simplest Christian who waits for the Son of God

from heaven? Yet it is very intelligible if we think of these future Jewish disciples, who might expect something akin from a prediction such as Zech. 14, where we find that the mount of Olives is the appointed spot on which Jehovah-Messiah is yet to stand. We can well conceive rumours for such saints that Messiah was in the desert or in the secret chambers: they might deceive those who expected to meet the Lord on earth, not those who know that they are to join Him and the risen ones in the air (1 Thess. 4; 2 Thess. 2).

The manner of His presence for delivering the Jews is then made known as the guard against their deceits: “For as the lightning cometh,” etc. The figures (vers. 27, 28), which illustrate the presence of the Son of Man, convey the thought of sudden, terrible manifestation, and of rapid, inevitable judgment on what is then but a lifeless body before God, whatever may have been its pretensions. Nothing like this is spoken of, however, when Scripture describes the descent of the Lord to receive His risen saints. And what is the result of thus misapplying these verses? The revolting interpretation that “the carcass” means Christ, and “the eagles” the transfigured saints, or the converse, calls for censure, not comment. Nor is it needful to refute the claim set up for the Roman standards. Applied to Israel, all is simple. The carcass represents the apostate part of that nation; the eagles, or vultures, are the figure of the judgments that fall upon it. It is not only that there will be the lightning-like display of Christ in judgment, but the agents of His wrath shall know where and how to deal with that which is abominable in God’s sight. The allusion is to Job 39:30.

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened,” etc. (vers. 29-31). I can hardly be asked to notice the old effort to apply these verses to the Roman triumph over Jerusalem. On the face of it, could this be said to be “immediately after the tribulation?” or was it not rather the crowning of Jewish sorrow? — not the glorious reversal of their sufferings by a divine deliverance. Whatever prodigies Josephus reports, were rather during the tribulation he records; whereas the signs spoken of here, literal or figurative, are to follow “the tribulation of those days” (i.e., the future crisis of Jerusalem). No; One greater than Titus is here; and an event is announced in connection with that poor people, which will change the face and condition of all nations. “Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet; and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” The elect throughout are the chosen seed of Israel (vers. 22, 24, 31. Compare Isaiah 65.) Other elect there are, no doubt; but we, must ever interpret by the context; and this in the present case seems perfectly evident. The Son of Man in heaven, and seen there, is, I conceive, the sign to those on earth. This fills all the tribes with mourning; and Christ visibly comes to judgment. Other scriptures show that the heavenly saints have been already translated, and are then to accompany their Lord; but here nothing of this appears. It would have been premature. Besides, the object of this portion of the prophecy is to show His coming for the relief and ingathering of His elect out of Israel. Hence, it is as Son of Man (that is, judicially, see John 5:27) that He is present; and hence, too, He sends

His angels with loud trumpet-sound. “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem” (Isaiah 27:13). It is the proclamation, not alone of the acceptable year of the Lord, but of the day of God’s vengeance. “And ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel.” The four winds in connection with Israel are no difficulty, but rather the contrary. (See Zech. 2:6.) As the Lord had scattered and spread them abroad “as the four winds of the heaven,” so now are His chosen ones to be gathered in.

The general outline and the special view of the Jewish portion have been given thus far in chapter 24. This is next illustrated, both from nature (vers. 32, 33), and from Scripture (vers. 34, 35), and closed by a suitable application (vers. 42-44).

“From the fig-tree learn the [or, its] parable” (ver. 32). The fig-tree is the well-known symbol of Jewish nationality. We saw it, in Matthew 21, bearing nothing but leaves — that generation given up to the curse of perpetual fruitlessness, whatever grace may do for the generation to come. In Luke 21 the word is, “Behold the fig-tree and all the trees,” because the Holy Ghost all through, and notably in that chapter, introduces the Gentiles. Luke takes in a larger scope than Matthew, and expressly treats of Jerusalem’s sorrows in connection with “the times of the Gentiles.” Hence the difference even in the illustrative figures. Here it is the tree, with renewed signs of life — Jewish nationality revived: “When its branch has now become tender and the leaves are shooting, ye know that summer is nigh; so likewise

ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is nigh by the doors" (i.e., the end of this age, and the beginning of the next under Messiah and the new covenant). But solemnly the Saviour warns that "this generation," this Christ-rejecting race in Israel, shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled!

The notion that all was fulfilled in the past siege of Jerusalem, founded on a narrow and unscriptural sense of this passage, is from not hearing what the Lord says to the disciples. By the term "generation" in a genealogy (as Matt. 1), or where the context requires it (as Luke 1:50), a life-time no doubt is meant: but where is it so used in the prophetic Scriptures — the Psalms, etc.? The meaning herein is moral rather than chronological; as, for instance, in Psalm 12:7, "Thou shalt keep them, O Lord; Thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." The words "for ever" prove a prolonged force; and accordingly the passage intimates that Jehovah shall preserve the godly from their lawless oppressors, "from this generation for ever." It is a distinct and conclusive refutation of those who would limit the phrase to the short epoch of a man's lifetime. So, in Deuteronomy 32:5, 20, we find generation similarly used, not to convey a period, but to express the moral characteristics of Israel. Again, in the Psalms we have "the generation to come," which is not confined to a mere term of thirty or a hundred years. So also in Prov. 30:11-14: "There is a generation that curseth their father... There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes," etc., where the character of certain classes is considered; even plainer, if possible, is the usage in the synoptic Gospels. Thus, in Matthew 11:16, "Whereunto shall I liken this generation?" means such as then lived, characterized by

the moral capriciousness which set them in opposition to God's testimony, whatever it might be, in righteousness or in grace. But evidently, though people then alive are primarily in view, the moral identity of the same features might extend indefinitely, and so from age to age it would still be "this generation." Compare Matthew 12:39, 41, 42, 45, which last verse shows the unity of the "generation" in its final judgment (not yet exhausted) with that which emerged from the Babylonish captivity. Again, note chapter 23:36, "Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation" — a generation which would continue till all the predictions of judgment that Christ uttered shall be fulfilled (chap. 24:34). As it is plain from what has been already shown, that much remains to be accomplished, "this generation" still subsists, and will, till all is over. And how true it is! Here are the Jews — the wonder of every thoughtful mind — not merely a broken, scattered, and withal perpetuated race; not only distinct, spite of mighty effort from without to blot them out, and from within to amalgamate with others, but with the same unbelief, rejection and scorn of Jesus their Messiah as on the day He pronounced their sentence. All these things — speaking of their earlier and their latest sorrows — should come to pass before that wicked generation shall disappear. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." That which incredulity counts most stable, the scene of its idolatry or)f its self-exaltation, shall vanish; but the words of Christ, let them be about Israel or others, shall abide for ever.

But if all be thus sure and unfailing, the Father alone knows the day and hour (ver. 36). Ample and distinct

signs the Saviour had announced already, and the wise shall understand; “but the wicked shall do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand.” “But as the days of Noah, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not till the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be” (vers. 37-39). Here is another testimony that our Lord in this position speaks of the Jewish disciples of the latter day (represented by those who then surrounded Him), and not of the Church. For His illustration is taken from the preservation of Noah and his house through the waters of the deluge; whereas the Holy Ghost, through Paul, illustrates our hope according to the pattern of Enoch, caught up to heaven, entirely apart from the scenes and circumstances of judgment here below.

Moreover, when the Son of Man thus comes in judgment upon living men here below, it will not be, as when the Romans or others took Jerusalem, indiscriminate slaughter or captivity; but whether in the open country or the duties of home, whether men or women, there will be righteous discernment of individuals. “Then shall two be in the field, the one is taken and the other left; two women grinding at the mill, the one is taken and the other left” (vers. 40, 41). The meaning clearly is that one is taken away judicially, and the other left to enjoy the blessings of Christ’s reign, who shall judge God’s people with righteousness and His poor with judgment. It is the converse of our change, when the dead in Christ shall rise first, and we, the living who remain, shall be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air; for those who

are left, in our case, are left to be punished with everlasting destruction from His presence. But the Lord will also have an earthly people. He waits till the heavenly saints are gathered to Him above, and then begins to sow, if I may thus speak, for earthly blessing, in which case His coming as Son of Man will be for the removal of the wicked, leaving the righteous undisturbed in peace. “There shall be a handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon; and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure for ever: His name shall continue as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed. — Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen” (Ps. 72:16-19).

“Watch therefore, for ye know not at what hour (or day18) your Lord is coming.” The dealings with Israel, ending with the rescue of the just in their midst, involve the judgment of the self-secure and unconscious world. Accordingly, in these transitional verses (42-44) we have an allusion to a wider sphere than the Jews or their land, in which the godly remnant would be found — protected, but still there. God would know how to deliver the godly out of temptation. There they are, however, surrounded by snares and foes, but preserved: a totally different position from ours, who will previously be taken above, in the sovereign grace and wisdom of our Saviour. “But know this, that if the householder had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in an hour when ye think

not the Son of Man is coming." The object is evidently a practical warning to the godly on earth to be ready. They had been comforted in view of trouble and violence; they had been set on their guard against the religious deceits of the old serpent; they had been solemnly assured of the stability of the Lord's words in the very point where Gentile conceit has misled even true believers; they are now exhorted to vigilance and readiness for their coming Lord, that they might not only escape the fowlers, but stand before the Son of Man. For the world, it will be like the unexpected thief, breaking in upon them in their supposed security.

From verse 45 to Matthew 25:30, we enter on the parables which pertain to Christendom only, and not to the Jewish remnant. We may regard it as an appendix to the Jewish aspect of which the Lord had been speaking thus far. Hence here we have so distinct a portraiture of profession, true and false. Whenever we touch what is properly " Christian, God deals with the heart and conscience. He is calling out and forming those who are to be the companions of His Son in heavenly glory. Therefore nothing is passed by; all is judged of God in its real light. Hence, too, there is no limit here of either place or people. Christianity is above time, and of and for heaven, though it may be divulged in fact on earth during the gap in the dispensations of God made by the rejection of Israel for a season. Christianity is a revelation of grace flowing from Him who now speaks not from earth but from heaven. It is not, I need hardly insist, that evil is slighted. No mistake can be more profound or fatal than that grace implies levity about sin. On the contrary, grace is the very strongest condemnation of all evil, as it is indeed not the mere

claim of what man ought to be toward God, but the revelation of what God is toward man in the judgment of his sin in the cross of Christ. Therefore, it is the fullest display of divine hatred and judgment of evil; but this is in Christ, at the cost of His own beloved Son, so as to save the most guilty who believe. When dealing with His earthly people under the law, many things were allowed, for the hardness of their heart, which never had His sanction. But when the complete display of grace shines, as it does now, evil is not borne with but judged. Such is Christianity in principle and in fact. And hence it is that, for the true Christian, all the time for his earthly sojourn is a season of self-judgment; or if he fail in this, the assembly is bound to judge his ways; and if they fail, the Lord judges him and them, holily, but in grace, that they should not be condemned with the world. He may expose false profession here, and now, if He see fit, but the end of it we see in all these three parables. Grace never winks at evil; and if evil take advantage of grace for its own purposes, the issue is frightful, and it will be manifestly so at the coming of the Lord.

And this leads me to remark that the Lord's coming has a two-fold character. First of all, there is His coming in full grace, entirely apart from all question of our service, and consequently of special rewards in the kingdom in which we are to be manifested along with Christ. But we must bear in mind that this manifestation to the world in the future kingdom is far from being the highest part of His glory or even ours, as it does not elicit the deepest exercise of His grace. In receiving us to Himself, on the other hand, all is purely from Himself. It is His own love who would thus have us with and as Himself. It is thus we find John puts the coming of Christ in His Gospel

(Matthew 14); nor am I aware that it is ever treated otherwise there. In the Revelation we find both ways. In the first chapter the testimony is, “Behold, He cometh with the clouds,” etc. Plainly there is no trace of the saints caught up there, but “Every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him.” The Bride nowhere appears in that scene, but rather what is public and affects the world universally, and especially the blood-guilty Jews; and all are mourning. But the last chapter could not close without letting us know that there is, spite of all evil and woe and judgment, such an one as the Bride awaiting her heavenly Bridegroom. No sooner does He announce Himself the root and offspring of David, the bright and Morning Star, than the Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” Here we have the intimate intercourse of heart between the Lord and the Church. It is impossible for any one not born of God to say “Come,” though there may be those who are so born and yet ignorant of their full privilege of union with Christ. And for them, I doubt not, gracious provision is made in the word, “Let him that heareth say, Come.” But in no case can the world or an unforgiven soul take up such a call; to such it would indeed be the madness of presumption, for to them His coming must be sure and endless destruction. Again, it is not merely saving flesh, or deliverance out of misery and danger by the overthrow of their enemies: the Holy Ghost never puts the aspect of Christ’s coming for us in any such light. We shall have rest, and those who trouble us shall have tribulation in the day of His appearing; but we go to meet the Saviour, and to be with Him for ever; and meanwhile, it is our sweet earthly privilege to suffer for His sake now. We are left for a while in a world where

everything is against us because against Him, and we belong to Him. But we know that He waits to come for us, and we wait for Him from heaven; and while the waiting lasts, we are to expect, if faithful to the Lord, nothing but suffering from the world; yet happy in it, assured that glory in heaven and the cross on earth go together. The cup of trial, the reproach and scorn of men, maybe less at one time than another. This is for our Father to give as He sees fit. But if we look for aught else as our natural portion here as Christians, we are unfaithful to our calling. Rejection is ours because we are His: “Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew Him not.”

As the Bridegroom, then, the Lord has nothing but love in His heart to the Bride. Nor is there a question of any save His own. He has told them He is coming; and the greater the power of the Spirit in the soul, the more ardently does the Bride say, ‘Come.” In this heavenly meeting of the Lord with the Bride, how incongruous that other eyes should see, or that wailing throngs should intrude into or witness such a meeting! Scripture does not so speak.

The Jew, the world, which refused the true Christ, will receive the Antichrist. This is what men will fall into; and in the midst of their delusion and apparent triumph the Lord will come in judgment. But when He thus comes, it will not be alone. Others, His heavenly saints, appear along with Him in glory. This is what we see in Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 3:13, and with detail in Rev. 19. Not angels only, but His saints follow Him out of heaven, clothed in white linen, and on white horses, according to the striking figures of the Apocalypse. The saints had been in heaven before the day of the world’s judgment.

They must have been removed from earth to heaven before this, in order to follow Him out of heaven and be with Him when that day dawns; and this could only have been through His coming to receive them to Himself. Hence, again, it appears that His coming has a double character, according to the object of each of its steps or stages. He comes to gather to Himself all His saints, dead or living, and shall present them in the Father's house, that where He is, there they may be also. In due time afterwards He brings them with Him, judging the Beast and the false Prophet, the Jews, and the Gentiles, as well as every false professor of His name. This is still His coming, or state of presence: only now it is (what the former act, when He takes us to be with Him, is never called) His "appearing," the "shining forth of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8), His "revelation," and His "day."

With this second act of the Lord's coming, or His "day," is connected the appraisal of our service, and the assigning of reward for work that has been done. For all must be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ, and each must receive the things done in the body, whether good or bad. Some find a difficulty in bowing to both truths; but if subject to the Word, we shall overlook neither the common blessedness of the saints in the full grace of the Saviour at His coming, nor the recognition of individual faithfulness, or the lack of it, in the rewards of the kingdom. When we read of the many mansions, we are not to dream of one being more glorious than another. The truth conveyed is that we are to be as near and dear as sons can be in the Father's presence, through the perfect love and work of the Son. In this point of view I see no difference whatever. All are brought absolutely nigh, all loved with the love

wherewith Christ was loved, and having His portion, as far as can be for the creature. But am I therefore to deny that “every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour?” or that in some cases the work will abide, as in others it will be burnt? or that, as the parable teaches, one servant may receive ten cities, and another five?

It will be found accordingly, that there is a close connection in Scripture between Christ’s day, or appearing, and present exhortations to fidelity. Thus, Timothy is exhorted to keep the commandment without spot, unrebukable until the appearing of our Lord Jesus. So the apostle, in 2 Timothy 4, speaks of the “crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.” The results of faithfulness, or of unfaithfulness, are only manifested then. It is the day of display before the world; and “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory” (Col. 3:4). Hence it is as awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus that the apostle speaks of the Corinthian saints as coming short in no gift, and at once brings in the thoughts of His day. So Christ’s day is the blessed end and solemn test of all, in writing to the Philippians. Of the epistles to the Thessalonians I need say the less, as they present in the clearest way both these truths.

Returning now to the first of the three parables (ver. 45) which refer to the Christian profession, I would make the general remark, from what we have been examining, that while the words “appearing,” “day,” etc., are special (and never used, I think, except where responsibility is concerned) the word “coming” is general; and though

applicable, if the context so require it, to cases of responsibility, it is in itself of wider character and is used therefore to express our Lord's return in nothing but grace. In other words, the appearing, day, or revelation of Christ is still His coming or presence; but His coming does not necessarily mean His appearing, revelation, or day. He may come without appearing, and I believe that there is proof from Scripture that so it is when He receives us to Himself on high; but His "appearing" is that further stage of His coming again, when every eye shall see Him.

"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household to give them meat in due season?" It is not a question of evangelizing here, but of care for the household. The principle of trading outside with the Master's gifts will come by and by (Matt. 25:14, et seq.); but here the great thing is that, as the Lord loves His saints ("whose house are we") so He makes much of faithful or faithless service within that sphere. For I need not say that faithfulness to the Lord involves no denial of the ministry He provides. Ministry when real is of God; though the mode in which it is exercised is often wrong and unscriptural. Ministry is not Jewish, but characteristic of Christianity. But it is a thing very apt to lose its true character. Instead of being Christ's servants in His household, many sink into the agents of a particular body. In such a case it always flows from the church or denomination. Real ministry is from Christ and Him alone. Therefore the apostle says he was the servant or bondman of Jesus Christ, never deriving his mission from the Church or being responsible to it for his work. The gospel and the Church were the spheres of his service (Col. 1); but its giver and

his Lord was Christ Himself exclusively. It appears to me that this is necessary, in order that ministry should be recognized as divine; and nothing but divine Ministry is owned in Scripture, nor should be by God's people now. This, then, is the first thing our Lord insists on, that the faithful and wise servant whom the Lord makes ruler over His household be found doing His work, caring for what is so near to Christ. It is a most painful proof of the low state of the Church in these days that such service is regarded as "waste" of precious ointment. So completely have even God's children fallen from the thought of true ministry that they think it idleness or proselytism to attend to those that are within. Why not preach to those without, say they, and seek to bring such to the knowledge of Christ? But this is not the first thing our Lord presses. The "faithful and wise servant" had to do with those within: his object was to give them their meat in due season; and the Lord pronounces that servant blessed., "Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." Others might raise questions as to the servant's title; but He simply says, If I find you "so doing," blessed are you. The great point is to be doing His will. It is not title or position, but doing the work which the Lord wishes to be done.

But now comes the other side of the picture. "But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants and to eat and drink with the drunken" (vers. 48, 49). There you have the great danger of the professed servants of Christ in this world. First, wronging the fellow-servants by assuming an arbitrary place. Authority is right where it is exercised under obedience to Christ. No change of circumstances or condition

alters the truth that the Lord remains head of the Church, and raises up servants at all times to carry out His wishes with authority. But here it is man's will, where the servant takes the place of the Master, and begins to smite his fellow-servants. Secondly, along with that, there is evil communication with the world. It is not said that he is himself drunken; but there is association with the world. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." Where the thought of the Lord is gone, ministry loses its true character. There will be oppression towards those within, and evil commerce with those without. "The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vers. 50, 51), It supposes that the servant still pursues the same course, and is found there when the Lord comes — his heart thoroughly with the world. He began by saying in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming. This is far more than wrong thoughts about the coming of the Lord, which some saints might hold without this Scripture applying to them. If there were, on the other hand, persons professing to look for the Lord's coming and acting as if they did not believe it, they are much more like the servant saying in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming. What the Lord judges is not a mere mistake or doctrinal blunder; but it is the state of the heart — content that Christ should stay away. If we are desiring something great and of esteem among men, how can we say, "Come?" His coming would spoil all our schemes. We may talk about the Lord's coming and be learned about prophecy; but the Lord looks at the heart and not at the appearance. Let the profession be ever so loud or

high, He see where souls cleave to the world and do not want Him.

15 Matthew alone mentions “an ass tied, and a colt with her,” according to Zech. 9:9. “They brought the ass and the colt, and put their garments upon them, and He sat upon them” (vers. 2, 7). The three other Gospels mention the colt only. Here, in Matthew, the old Israel and the renewed nation are thus connected. The Lord’s entry in Jerusalem is upon the “colt, the foal of an ass” — the new Israel will bring Him in with Hosannas! The dispensational view in Matthew is thus again set before us. The ass was, according to the law, “unclean”; but its foal might be redeemed. See Job 11:12; Ex. 13:13; Ex. 34:20, etc. Ed.

16 Verse 14 is generally omitted by the editor’s as having no sufficient MSS. authority here, though found in Mark and Luke. The “woes” here pronounced upon the scribes and Pharisees therefore are seven, not eight. — [Ed.

17 The Lord of the temple was rejected; the house of Israel was given up; the Glory was returning to heaven. (Compare Ezek. 10:2-4, 18, 19, and Ezek. 11:22, 23.) When the judgments upon Israel have turned them back to the Lord, the Glory returns the same way it had departed. Compare Ezek. 43:1-4, and Zech. 14:1-9. Ed.

18 Ἥμέρα, day (instead of the common reading

ὥρα, “hour,”) has excellent authority.

Matthew 25 -28

Matthew 25

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins.” We have here the general aspect of those who bear the name of Christ. The kingdom of heaven here implies a certain economy at a given point of time. “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom” (ver. 1). “Their lamps” set forth the light of profession. They were witnesses for the Lord, and their calling was to meet the Saviour. That was to be the attitude of the Christian from the first, going forth to meet the Bridegroom. Christianity does not mean that its professors remain where they are, and so look for Christ, but that they leave everything in order to go out and meet the Bridegroom. Some of the early believers were Jews, and some were Gentiles; but they abandoned for Christ their previous connections, their position in the world, and all that they hitherto valued. They had a new object; they knew that the only blessed one in the sight of God was the Saviour; they were waiting for Him, who is in heaven, and they go out to meet Him who has promised to come again. This is the true expectation of the Christian. There ought to be no fixing of dates, but the certain hope that the Lord is coming — we know not when. The stronger such a hope is in our hearts, the more completely separated shall we be from the plans and projects of this world.

“And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.” The kingdom of heaven becomes a thing of profession. As in the case of the servants there was an evil as well as a

faithful servant, so here we have five wise and five foolish virgins. “They that were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them.” They were persons who had the lamp of profession but no oil. Some have thought that they were Christians who failed in looking for the Lord to come. But I believe this to be false, because the foolish proved their folly in this — that they took no oil in their lamps. What does this imply? Oil is the type of the Holy Ghost. We read in 1 John 2 of an “unction from the Holy One.” Will anyone maintain that there are real Christians who have not this “unction “? The wise virgins set forth true believers, the foolish ones mere professors; these took the name of Christ, but there was nothing that could fit them for the presence of Christ. Our power of enjoying Christ is entirely by the Holy Ghost. The natural man may admire Christ, but only at a distance, and without an awakened or a purged conscience. There is no living link of relationship between the heart of the natural man and Christ; and therefore man crucified Him. These foolish virgins, having no oil in their lamps, showed that they possessed nothing that could enable them to welcome Christ. The Holy Ghost alone can fit men to stand in the confession of His name to do His work. The oil was that which fed the lamp, and these foolish virgins had none. “But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept” (vers. 4, 5). They all dropped practically the hope of Christ’s coming: there was no difference in that. There were true Christians and false, but all were in this respect asleep. Thus, while the original calling of Christians was to wait for Christ’s return, being united to Him by the Holy Ghost, yet was there to be a universal slumber as to expecting Christ. But the Lord adds, “At midnight there

was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (ver. 6). Plainly, that cry was the movement of the Holy Ghost Himself. It was the power and grace of God which sent it out by the means that He saw fitting. We are not told how, but it plainly reveals a general movement among Christian professors — a revival of the truth of the coming of the Lord. "Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps" (ver. 7). The cry affected even those who had not the Holy Ghost dwelling in them.

But now comes out the solemn difference. "The foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out," or rather, "are going out." They had lit their wicks, but there was no oil. The light of mere nature burns soon and rapidly, but there is nothing that implies the Spirit of God — they had never had oil. "But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." I need not say that the terms on which God sells and man buys the Holy Ghost are, "without money and without price "; but the great point is that every soul must have to do with God. The believer listens, and bows to God in this world; the unbeliever will quail before God in the next world. Grace compels souls to come in and to have to do with Him now, in this world; but if I refuse to face God about my sins here below, I shall find myself lost forever. Now is the day of salvation; and it is only a delusion of the devil to persuade the heart to defer it to a more convenient season. If I go to God about my sins, and because I believe that Jesus is a Saviour, I shall find, not merely Jesus the Son of God but the Holy Ghost given, by whom I shall be able to enjoy the Saviour. The wise had this oil,

and they could await the coming of the Lord in peace. But the foolish ones are unacquainted with His grace. And to whom do they go? Not to those who sell without money and without price. “While they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.” Afterward, as we see in the painful picture of the foolish virgins, they come, saying, “Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour.”19 When the Lord is set forth as coming in the way of judgment, He is spoken of as Son of Man. Here He is represented as the Bridegroom; and if the words “Son of Man” were really to be read here, it would be hard indeed to account for them. How plain that you cannot add anything to Scripture without spoiling it! Our Lord here appears in an aspect of grace toward His saints; and this is one reason why you have no description of the judgment about to fall upon the foolish virgins. The displayed execution of divine vengeance would be incongruous with His title of Bridegroom. No doubt even here the door is shut; and our Lord tells the foolish virgins, when they appeal to Him to open, “I know you not”; but He thereon immediately turns the fact to the spiritual profit of His disciples: “Watch therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour” (ver. 13).

Then comes another parable. “For the kingdom of heaven is [or, literally, “It is] as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his

journey" (vers. 14, 15). There our Lord is represented as leaving this world and going to a far country. This is a remarkable way in which our Lord is presented here. In Matthew His home is supposed to be on the earth, because He is the Messiah who came to His own, even if His own received Him not. As the rejected Messiah He leaves His home, and goes, the suffering but glorified Son of Man, to the far country, which is clearly heaven. And while He is gone there He has His servants to whom He has committed certain of His goods; and with these they are to labour "Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents" (ver. 16). Here we have another kind of ministry. It is not serving the household, and giving them meat in due season, as in Matt. 24:45. It is trading, or going out to others. This is a characteristic of Christianity. In Judaism there was no such thing as the Lord sending His servants here and there to gain souls; but when the Lord Jesus left this world and went up to heaven, He thus sent them out. He left them means to trade withal. It is the activity of grace that goes out to seek sinners, as well as spread the testimony of the truth of God among saints.

If the Lord calls to service He also gives according to our several ability. The character of the gift put at our disposal is suited, in the Giver's wisdom, both to the object and the vessel. There is sovereignty, and all is wisely ordered., How could it be otherwise, seeing that it is the Lord who calls? It is here too that Christendom has so largely failed. Were a man now to begin to preach and teach without some human sanction, many would regard it as a piece of assumption, if not presumption; whereas, in truth, if I look for authority from the

churches to preach or serve the Lord, I shall be sinning against Christ. Any appointment by men for such a purpose is unauthorized by and opposed to the mind of Christ; and those whom they would consider acting irregularly are in reality in the lowly path of obedience, and will find their vindication in the great day. It is entirely a question between Christ and His own servants. He gives one to be a prophet, another an evangelist, another a pastor and teacher (Eph. 4). But there are two things in the servant — both of them of importance. He gave them gifts, but it was according to their several ability. The Lord does not call any one to special service who has not an ability for the trust committed to him. The servant must have certain natural and acquired qualifications, besides the power of the Spirit of God. He gave them talents — to one five, to another two, and to another one. Here you have the energy of the Holy Ghost — the power that the Lord gives from on high, over and above His choice of each man "according to his several ability."

It is plain from this that there are certain qualities in the servant independent of the gift that the Lord puts into him. His natural powers are the vessel that contains the gift, and wherein the gift is to be exercised. If the Lord calls a man to be a preacher, there is supposed a natural aptitude for it. Again, the gift may be increased. First, there is the ability of the man before and when he is converted; next, the Lord gives him a gift that he never possessed before; thirdly, if. he does not stir up his gift, there may be a weakening, if not loss. He may become unfaithful, and may lose power. But if a man waits upon the Lord, there may, on the contrary, be increased power given to him. Many think that the one qualification of

the servant of God is that of the. Spirit. This is, of course, essential, and most blessed; but it is not all. The truth is that Christ gives gifts; but He gives them "according to the ability" of the individual. The union of the two facts, the ability of the servant and the sovereignly-bestowed gift given him to trade with, is of all-importance to keep distinctly in view.

But to proceed: "After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained besides them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (vers. 19-21). In chapter 24 it was the "faithful and wise" servant, because, where it is a question of the household, wisdom is needed. But here it is "thou good and faithful servant." Both are called "faithful"; but, in the exercise of the gifts which the Lord send,; out to the world with the message of grace, the goodness of God is characteristic. What is the source of all grace in the servant of the Lord? It is the appreciation of God's goodness. This comes out by contrast in the case of the slothful servant. An unconverted man might have a gift from the Lord. The slothful servant was clearly one that never had the knowledge of God: proved in that he did not believe in the goodness of the Lord: he had no confidence in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. In this the evil servant showed what he was. He says, "I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strewed. And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto

him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strewed" (vers. 24-26). His lord takes him upon his own ground. If the servant judges him to be hard, On your own ground, he says, "Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury." According to his self-defence, he had utterly failed: and so it is always. The man who talks about the justice of God cannot for an instant stand before it; while he who casts himself humbly upon the grace of God will be found to walk soberly, righteously, godly, in this present evil world. The denier of the goodness of God is invariably a bad man himself.

So in the matter of our service: whether we have two talents or five, and use them for Him, the Lord will return it to our souls again, and in the day that is coming give us to hear those blessed words, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

We now come to a subject viewed, I apprehend, with much prejudice by many. It has been perverted, I grieve to say, even by those who love the Saviour and own both the general blessedness of those that belong to Him and the sure doom of those that despise Him. But though all Christians must be in the main agreed on these fundamental truths, when we come to inquire what the Lord intended us to gather from His taking His seat upon the throne of His glory; when we would ascertain who the parties are that the Lord has before Him in this scene, and what the special destiny of the blessed is, we meet with the most various opinions. The root of the

difficulty may be traced generally to one thought — the anxiety, even of Christians, to find that which bears upon their own lot. Not being thoroughly at rest touching their acceptance with God, there is ordinarily a disposition to warp Scripture, partly to escape what they dread, and partly to gather comfort for their troubled souls. The greater part of God's children are, more or less, in spirit under the law; and wherever such are honest in this condition, they must be miserable. Comparatively few know the fulness of deliverance in Christ; few know what it is to be dead to the law and married to another, even to Him who is risen from the dead. They may hear and repeat the words of Scripture, thinking they mean something good; but the real meaning and blessing of being dead to the law and united to a risen Saviour very few appreciate. This is the reason why so many are not in a state to understand the word of God. Not enjoying in peace their own position in Christ, they seize upon every promise, with small regard to the objects God had in view. Thus seeking assurance for their own souls, when the Lord speaks of certain Gentiles as "sheep," they think it means us, because we are so called elsewhere, as in John 10. They find these are blessed of the Father, and thence conclude that it can be no other than our hope. Again, certain are here spoken of as "brethren" of the King; and they take it for granted it means ourselves — Christians. In this superficial way Scripture is misunderstood, and the very comfort that souls are grasping after as surely eludes them. Wherever we turn aside the edge of the word of God, and appropriate indiscriminately what is said of persons in a wholly different position, there is loss. God has so arranged everything that the best portion for us is what God has given. We cannot mend the counsels of

God, nor add to the riches of His grace. If we know the love that God has to us in Christ, we know the best thing that we can find in earth or heaven. The moment we lay hold of this, and see how greatly we are blest, we cease from the anxiety that each good word of God should converge on ourselves; we see His infinitely greater object, even Christ, and we can delight in others being blest even in what we have not. This is most important practically — that we should be so satisfied with God's love to us, and the portion He has given us in Christ as to rejoice in all that He is pleased to give to others. Are we not sure our Father withholds from us nothing but what would interfere with our blessing? So reading this parable, or prophetic description, we are under no constraint. We can examine it with other scriptures, and see whom the. Lord has in view, and inquire what their portion is to be.

"When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations" (vers. 31, 32). Here are proofs enough of what the time and circumstances are of which our Lord speaks. He is taking His seat upon His own throne as the Son of Man. He is gathering before Him all the nations. When will this be? Here, at least, it will not be contended that something past is in question. The Lord Jesus is not even yet seated upon His own throne. When on earth He had no throne; when He went to heaven, He sat down on His Father's throne, as says Rev. 3:21: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." According to this promise, when it shall be fulfilled, He must have left His Father's

throne and sat down on His own throne. It is a future thing. Every scripture that touches on our Lord's actual place shows that He is now seated on the Father's throne. But Scripture also shows that He is to sit on His own throne; and this is what we have here. All things in heaven and in earth shall be put under the government of the Lord Jesus. He will be the head of all glory, heavenly and earthly. Of which does this portion speak? Are there any circumstances with which our Lord surrounds His throne that make the answer plain? "Before Him shall be gathered all nations." Are nations in heaven? Clearly not. Who can imagine so gross a thing? When the boundary is crossed that separates the things seen from the unseen, no such earthly sight lowers or distracts the worship above. When men are risen from the dead, they will no longer be known as English or French: these national distinctions, for them, terminate. Their future lot is decided according to their reception or rejection of Jesus in the present life. This future throne of the Son of Man is accordingly connected with a time-state on the earth. The more every word is weighed, the more this will be evident to the unbiased.

If we compare it, in the next place, with a resurrection scene, their distinctiveness will be apparent. In Rev. 20:11, "I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them." There can be no question about this throne. It can have nothing to do with the earth, because the text itself tells us that the earth and heaven fled away. I learn at once the positive contrast between Matthew and Revelation. In the latter only do we hear a word about heaven and earth fleeing

away; in the former only we have very plain indications that the Lord is taking His throne in the government of the earth and of men living on it — not judging the dead when the kingdom is about to be given up. Those gathered before Him here are “all the nations” — a term never used about the dead or the risen, but only applied to men here below, and indeed applied only to the Gentiles as distinct from the Jews. For we have already had the Jews in Matthew 24, and now we see the Gentiles; between these two are the parables applying to the Christian profession.

Thus nothing can be more orderly than the whole connection of this prophecy on the mount. The Jews came first, as indeed the disciples themselves still were such; then the parables of the house servant, the virgins, and the talents, which describe the Christian position, soon to be developed, when the Jews should reject the Holy Ghost’s testimony. Lastly, another section closes all: neither Jews nor Christians, but “all the nations,” or Gentiles, to whom the testimony of the kingdom is to be sent out,20 and among whom the Holy Ghost will work (Satan working too, lest they should be brought out of darkness into God’s marvellous light). In Rev. 20 We find a great white throne. “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand…” Thus you see the character of this throne at once. Not a living man is there in natural life, but the dead now raised are summoned for judgment before the great white throne. In Matt. 25 not a single dead man is spoken of; in Rev. 20 not a single living man. In Matthew the persons called before the throne are “all the Gentiles,” or nations; in Revelation, none but “the dead.” “And the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were

judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." When we come to look closely into Matt. 25, the principle of judgment is not according to works generally, but only a particular test is pressed upon them — faithful or unfaithful treatment of the king's brethren. "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works." There is not a word about this in Matt. 25; and, indeed, the expression of "nations" involves, without a question, the inference that they were not risen from the dead. It is the judgment of those commonly called "the quick" — those living upon the earth at that time — and they are dealt with according to their behaviour to the messengers of the gospel of the kingdom. This will show it is a great error to suppose that all the judgments in the word of God mean one and the same thing. We must leave room for differences here as elsewhere. God indeed is able to meet every difficulty, and to bring out His own perfections in dealing with all that comes before Him.

Gathering up the contrast of Rev. 20, let us turn to the closing scene in Matt. 25. The title "Son of Man" at once prepares you for a judgment connected with the earth and with persons living there. No doubt the Son of Man comes in the clouds of heaven, but He comes to judge the world and the people on it. It may be even said of churches or assemblies, as in Rev. 1; but whatever the object of the judgment, it is the Lord judging persons still alive upon the earth, and not the dead.

"And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." It is a careful and

divine discrimination — not a mere act of vengeance which deals with masses, in which all might be overwhelmed in common ruin. He separates them one from another. At the great white throne, where the dead stand to be judged, there is no need of separating them there. But here there is a mingled company. Such a mixture is never found in heaven or hell, but only on the earth. Thus every clause gives proof that our Lord speaks of a judgment of the living on the earth. He separates them "as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." It follows that the persons meant by "the sheep" and "the goats" are respectively the righteous and the ungodly among the nations then living on the earth, when our Lord comes to judge in His quality of Son of Man. It is not now what we have seen in Matthew 24, where He shines suddenly like lightning. Here it is the calm, but most solemn judgment, with everlasting results, according to the discrimination which the Lord makes between individuals. When the judgment of the dead takes place before the great white throne, the heavens and earth are fled away; so that the Lord must have come before then, or there would be no earth as it is now to come to, as we all confess He shall come.

Our Lord, then, is here separating the godly from among the ungodly in those living nations. He disposes of them thus: "Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (ver. 34). However blessed they are, He does not describe them as children of their Father. I do not deny that they are children of God; but He says, "children of My Father." No doubt the words said to them are very precious; but do they reach up to the height of the

blessing the grace of God has given us in Christ now? There is nothing here about “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” They are called to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. When God laid the foundations of the earth, He was looking onward to this blessed time. Satan’s getting power over man was only a fearful interruption, but not one whose consequences the Lord could not overmaster and purge out: He means to do it; and to have this world the scene of incomparably greater blessedness than its present misery is through Satan’s work. God means to give the kingdom of this world to His Son — yea, He will have the whole universe put under Christ. Our Lord had a right in His own glory to everything; but He humbled Himself, and laid down His life to deliver us and creation out of Satan’s hand, and establish a new and righteous title over all, and bring it back to God.

Again, let it be noted that there is not a word about His bride here. He speaks as “the King,” and He is never spoken of as such in His relation to the Church. In Revelation 15 the expression “King of saints” should be “King of nations,” quoted from the words of Jeremiah. It is a title we can rejoice in, but it is not His relationship to us. We are called by grace to be members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. Here, in His capacity of King, the Lord severs the righteous Gentiles from their unrighteous fellows — “Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Ephesians 1 speaks of our being “chosen in Him before the foundation of the world;” it is a choice independent of the scene of creation, in connection with which these blessed

Gentiles have their portion. Our place may be rather said to be with Him who created all. The world may disappear; but our blessing is identified with Himself. The thief on the cross asked, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom.” But our Lord says, “Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” To be with Christ is better than the kingdom — which we also shall inherit. Christ Himself is far beyond all the glory displayed in and to the world. His love ever goes beyond our faith, giving more than we ask of Him.

The blessing given to these godly ones from among the Gentiles, is the inheritance of the kingdom prepared for them by the Father from the foundation of the world. It showed they were possessors of eternal life: “I was a hungered, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me” (vers. 35, 36). Observe what they answer: “Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord. when saw we Thee a hungered, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink?” Could a Christian say such a thing in heaven, where we shall know even as we are known? But these godly Gentiles are evidently in their natural bodies still. And the Lord is instructing them even after He appears in glory. However blessed this scene may be, still it is the Lord as Son of Man judging all nations and blessing the righteous from among them, who, up to that moment, were ignorant that in showing acts of love and kindness towards Christ’s messengers, it was so much done towards Christ Himself. Their last lesson was the first that Paul learned on the road to Damascus — the truth that startled his soul: “I am Jesus whom thou

persecutest.” Paul was taught of the Lord that to persecute the saints living on the earth was to persecute Christ in heaven: they and Christ are one. It is evident that these Gentile sheep set forth men still in the condition that requires and receives instruction from Christ.

“And the king shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me” (ver. 40). Who are “these my brethren?” We have had the sheep and goats — the righteous and the unrighteous Gentiles; but who are the King’s brethren? Those whom the Lord will send out before He comes in the glory of the kingdom; men sent to announce that He is coming in His kingdom. The sheep showed them love — care — sympathy in their sorrows. So that these brethren of the King must have been exposed to tribulation before the King appears. The conclusion is obvious that, in that day, the ground on which He will deal with the nations will be this, -”How did you behave to My messengers?” The King’s messengers, immediately before He appears in glory, will go forth preaching the gospel of the kingdom everywhere; and when the King takes His throne, those that received the gospel of the kingdom among the nations are recognized as “sheep,” and the despisers perish as “goats.” Those that honour the message treat the messengers well — caring for them, and identifying themselves with them — “companions of them that were so used.” The Lord remembers this, and counts what was done to His messengers as done to Himself. It will be as truly the work of the Holy Spirit as our entrance into the far fuller testimony of His love now. Their astonishment before

His throne at having done anything to Him in the person of His brethren, proves that they were not in the Christian position, though truly believers.

But who were these “brethren?” From general principles of Scripture and the special teaching of this prophetical discourse, there call be little doubt that the King’s brethren will be godly Israelites, employed by the Lord, after the Church has been caught up to heaven, to be the heralds of the coming King and kingdom. We know that the Church is to be taken away before the time of the last great tribulation. “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth.” But here there are saints found on the earth — not kept from the hour of temptation, but living on the earth during it, and preaching this gospel of the kingdom. And according to the way in which they are received, the nations will be cursed or blessed. There was no gospel of the kingdom preached before or after the flood, and it is the gospel of the grace of God that is being preached now. The gospel of the kingdom is often confounded with this. I have no doubt, therefore, that the King’s brethren are a class, godly Israelites, whom Christ will own as His brethren. There are some blessings the Jewish saints will have that neither you nor I will possess; there are others we shall have that they will not enjoy.

But there is a very solemn back-ground to the blessed entrance into the kingdom: “Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (ver. 41). Observe, He does not say, Cursed of My Father, answering to “Blessed of My Father.” God

hates putting away. So when the awful moment comes for the curse to be pronounced on these wicked Gentiles, it is “Depart from Me, ye cursed.” I believe it is the deepest sorrow to God, and throws all the onus of destruction on those whose own sin it was, who rejected His love and holiness and glory in rejecting His Son. “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” In the other case the kingdom was said to be “prepared for you:” not so when speaking about the curse. Hell was not prepared for poor guilty man. He deserves it; but it was prepared for the devil and his angels. Where the souls rejected the testimony, he does pronounce them cursed. He is the King, the judge. But whether it be the great white throne, or this earthly throne, it is “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” There was no hope of deliverance for these fallen angels — no redemption for them. They wilfully and without a tempter departed from God. Man was tempted by an enemy; and God feels for guilty man, drawn away by a mightier, if not more guilty, rebel than himself. How solemn to think that it was prepared for others, and that men share it with these rebellious spirits? It was not in the heart of God to make a hell for miserable man: it was prepared for the devil and his angels. But there were those who preferred the devil to God; and to such He says, “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” The same test is applied to them as to the godly before — the treatment of the King and of His messengers, or rather of Him in them.

To us, although the same principle is involved, yet, in one way, what is yet deeper comes in. All turns upon —

What think ye of Christ? Do you believe on the Son of God? “He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5). The sinner is obliged to face the person of the Son of God, and it becomes an urgent, all-absorbing, eternal question that must be decided by the soul — Do I prefer Christ to the world? Do I prefer Christ or self? The Lord grant that we may be wise, and know how to find in Christ both the salvation and the power of God. For the same blessed One who gave us life gives us power for every practical difficulty. “This the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

Matthew 26

The Lord had rendered His testimony, as the Faithful Witness, in deeds as well as words. He had finished all the sayings which proclaimed Him to be the Prophet like unto Moses, as prophesied by him (Deut. 18:15), but incomparably greater withal, and who was henceforth to be heard on peril of eternal ruin. And now the hour approached, the solemn hour of His sufferings; and Jesus passes into it in spirit, with the calm dignity suited to Himself alone.

The religious guides were resolved on His death. The chief priests, the scribes, the elders, all of one mind in this, assembled at the high priest’s palace. They consulted, they plotted; but after all, if they consummated their infamy, they unwittingly accomplished the words of Christ to His disciples, rather than their own plan of wickedness. They said to each other, “Not on the feast-day, lest there be an uproar among the people” (ver. 5); but He said to His disciples, “Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover,

and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified" (ver. 2). Did they wish to kill Him? They must do it then. Man has his wickedness, and God has His way. But little did either the friends or the foes of Jesus know how the determinate counsel of God was to be brought to pass. A traitor from within the innermost circle, fit instrument for Satan's scheming malice, must lift up his heel against the Saviour, the leader of that adulterous and now apostate generation into the pit of perdition. The enemy degrades morally his victims — ever the consequence of evil — and the beautiful offering of love (fruit of the Holy Ghost in her who poured the very precious ointment from the alabaster box on the head of Jesus) gave occasion to the basest motives in Judas, and the final success of the tempter over a soul, spite of the constant seeing and hearing of Christ, long inured to secret guilt (vers. 6-16).

I am compelled through circumstances to glance but cursorily at these final and affecting scenes. Yet let us not fail to observe, first for our warning, how easy it is for eleven good men to be led astray by the fair pretences of one bad man, who was influenced by evil feelings unknown to them. Alas! the flesh, even in the regenerate, remains ever the same hateful thing, and there is no good for the believer save where Christ is the object and controls the heart. Next, for our joy, how sweet to find that love to Christ is surely vindicated of Him and has the Spirit's guidance in the weakest one, spite of the murmurs of those who seem ever so high and strong! Thirdly, if a saint manifested her estimate of Jesus — so lavishly in the judgment of utilitarian unbelief — what was His value in the eyes of the bribing priests and of the betrayer? "And they covenanted with

him for thirty pieces of silver" (ver. is). A slave's price was enough for the despised Lord of all! (Compare Ex. 21:32; Zech. 11:12, 13.)

Still, in the face of all, the Lord pursues His path of love and holy calm; and when the disciples inquire His pleasure as to the place for eating the paschal feast, He speaks as the conscious Messiah, let Him be ever so rejected: "Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with My disciples" (ver. 18). As the twelve were eating, He tells out the grief of His heart: "Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me" (ver. 21) — which fails not to elicit the reality of their affections and their deep grief. If Judas imitated their inquiry of innocence, fearful that his own silence would detect him, and, it may be, counting on ignorance because of the Lord's generality of expression ("one of you"), he only thereby hears his doom brought personally home. Prophecy was accomplished, "but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed."

Nothing, however, arrests the flow of Christ's love. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (vers. 26-28). The bread, but especially the cup, set forth the Messiah, not alive on earth, but rejected and slain. The broad truth is given here, as by Mark, in "This is My body," without dwelling on the grace which gave it; it is the truth in itself without accessories seen elsewhere. Stress is laid on "My blood of the new covenant which is shed for many,"

because the refusal of the Messiah by Israel, and His death, opened the way for others outside — for Gentiles; and it was important for our Evangelist to note this. Luke has it, “shed for you” (i.e., for the believers in Jesus); Matthew adds, “for the remission of sins,” in contrast with the blood of the old covenant, which held forth its penal sanction: for the blood in Ex. 24 sealed on the people their promise of obedience to the law under menace of death: here, in the Saviour’s blood, they drink the witness of their sins blotted out and gone. “But,” adds He, “I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom” (ver. 29). He is henceforth separated from joy with them till the Father’s kingdom come: then He will resume His association with delight in His people here below., The godly drink His blood with thankful praise now: by and by He will drink the wine of joy new with us in the Father’s kingdom. Till then He is the heavenly Nazarite; and so, consequently, should we be in spirit.

After the supper they sang a hymn — how blessed at such a time! — and repaired to Olivet (ver. 30). With ineffable grace the Lord lets them know the trial which should befall and shake them all that very night, and this according to the written Word, even as that which He had shown concerning Himself. (Compare vers. 24 and 31.) The flesh had proved itself and its worth in the “goodly price” it set on Jesus; it was also to prove the value of its self-confidence and of its boasted courage on His behalf — “All ye shall be offended because of Me,” etc. Peter, who most trusted His own love for the Saviour, proved it bitterly for himself and glaringly to others (vers. 32-35). Thus the end of the trials would be

to confirm their faith and deepen their distrust of self, making Christ their all in everything; and He, risen, would go before them into Galilee, resuming in resurrection-power the relationship which He had with them there in the days of His flesh.

The next scene, in the garden, equally perfect in its display of Jesus, and most humbling in its exhibition of the choicest of the apostles, shows us the picture, not of holy calm in the full knowledge of all that awaited Himself and His disciples, but of anguish to the uttermost, and of death realized in all its horrors as before God (vers. 36-46). What an insight Gethsemane gives us of Him, Jehovah-Messiah though He was, as the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief! Who ever saw affliction as He? Not only had Jesus to know the depths of the cross in atonement as none other could; bow His head under the full, unsparing judgment of God when made sin for us; but He underwent beyond all others the anticipative pressure of death on His soul as the power of Satan, feeling it perfectly, and the more deeply by taking it from His Father's and not from the enemy's hand. It was the "strong crying and tears" to His Father now, as afterward to God as such when it was a question of actual sin-bearing on the tree. "And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with Me" (vers. 37, 38). When the cross came, there was no such call to disciples to watch with Him. He was alone, absolutely, essentially, for us — that is, for our sins — with none of men or angels in any way or measure near Him (morally speaking) — alone, when God forsook and hid His face

from Him on whose head met all our iniquities. Here, in Gethsemane, it was pleading as a Son with His Father, when “He went a little farther, and fell on His face [prostrate in His earnestness], and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (ver. 39). He watched, and prayed, and entered not into temptation, though tempted to the uttermost. But He finds the disciples asleep: they could not watch with Him one hour. “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”; and so it was again and again with them, till He bade them sleep, but warned them that the hour was at hand, as the traitor drew near.

But the same flesh which drags down to sleep when the Lord called to watch and pray is zealous enough with carnal weapons when Judas came with his deceitful kiss and a multitude following (vers. 47, etc,), though it preserved not from, but rather led into, either forsaking the Master or denying Him. Jesus, past the conflict at Gethsemane, in all dignity and peace before man, goes forward to meet God’s will at their wicked hands; in meekest words (vers. 50-54) laying bare the base evil of Judas, the rash weakness of His inconsiderate defender, and points to His approaching death, spite of His title to command legions of angels in His behalf — who withal speaks worlds into existence and annuls the wicked by His word. But He was a prisoner for the will of God, not of man’s power.

Before Caiaphas (vers. 57-68) He is counted guilty of death — not because the falsehood of the witnesses succeeded, but because of His own confession of the truth. He, the Son of God, come in fulness of grace and truth as He was, they should henceforth see Him, the

Son of Man, sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven — His present position and His manifestation when He comes in power and glory.

Yet, in the midst of His rejection and contumely at the hands of high and low among His own outward people, Jesus causes His mighty word to be remembered by poor Peter, bold now in denying Him with cursing and swearing (vers. 69-75). “And he went out and wept bitterly.” Oh, what a servant! what a Lord!

Matthew 27

All through this Gospel the Holy Ghost bears in mind very particularly our Lord’s relations with Israel. Hence, in the preceding chapters, where we had the destruction of Jerusalem foretold, care was taken to bring out also the preservation of a godly remnant of Israel — a fact which would be of special comfort to His own people. And, just as we have seen in that prophetic testimony, so in the narrative of the crucifixion, what comes out peculiarly in Matthew’s Gospel is the part which Israel took in that solemn act, in their accomplishment of what was written in the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets, touching their rejection of their own Messiah. Our Evangelist wrote with express view to the Jews, and hence it was of the greatest importance to convince them that God had accomplished the promises in the sending of the Messiah, whom Israel’s unbelief had refused and crucified by Gentile hands on the tree. What would be the special value of quoting from the Law and the Prophets to Gentiles? The Old Testament Scriptures formed a book of which the heathen had the scantiest knowledge. We do find references to these Scriptures in

Luke, just enough to give a link, but that is all. But Matthew, while written for all surely, has Israel especially in view. Hence it is that the Lord is so distinctly and care fully presented as Messiah in this Gospel; but from the first enough is intimated to show His rejection. In the subsequent details we see not only broad predictions accomplished, but the progress and development of that enmity. The guilt of the religious leaders is prominent, and their religious evil works, which are especially offensive to God; the devil bringing in the name of God to give effect to and to sanction what is done by man.

Hence the activity of evil here is by the priests. “When the morning was come” — they rise early to accomplish their design. And mark, it is said, “all the chief priests,” etc. This shows the utter ruin and blindness of the nation. It was a most startling fact, and a capital one for a Jew to understand (for a Jew knew that the priesthood was instituted and ordered of God), that those who ought to have been the sure guides of the people were their misleaders in the greatest of all sins. Were not the sons of Aaron divinely chosen? Were not these their successors? Were not the Jews a people called out from the rest of the world to own the true God and His law? All most true surely; but what were they and their leaders now about? Taking counsel and planning to destroy their Messiah! And these were the men who had the best light of any nation! All the use man made of the light possessed was to become more hardened and bitter in rejecting the Son of God! “And when they had bound Him, they led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor” (ver. 2). Whatever part the Gentiles take in it, God takes care to point out that the

Jews were not only the instigators but the open prosecutors in the awful deed.

“Then Judas, which had betrayed Him, repented himself.... saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood” (vers. 3, 4). Awful picture of what Satan brings about in a wretched human heart! Only the farther from Jesus morally because he was the nearer externally. Most of all guilty are those who have the greatest outward privileges while the truth of God does not govern the soul. We see, too, the mockery of Satan — the way in which he cheats his victims. Manifestly Judas did not expect such an end for Jesus. He had known the Lord in imminent peril before; he had seen Him, when the people took up stones to cast at Him, hiding Himself, going through the midst of them, and passing on His way. He knew how Jesus could walk on the sea — how He could conquer all the obstacles of nature; and why not the raging storm of human passion and violence? But Judas was deceived, whatever his calculations may have been; he yielded to covetousness; he bargained for the blood of Jesus. To his horror, he found it but too true. And Satan, who had led him on by his love of money, leaves him without hope — in black despair. He goes to the priests, who heartlessly turn away from a miserable, despairing soul. Alas, confession of sin without confidence in God for His grace, is worthless — fruitless of any good. Cleave to God, my soul! and give Him credit for what He is in Christ. But there is no faith where Jesus is not loved; and Judas had neither. All the outward nearness he had enjoyed before was only a greater weight upon his lost soul now. What a thing is the end of sin even in this world, sin against Jesus!

Judas brings the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders with the confession, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” They could not deny the truth of this; but with utter heartlessness, more hardened if possible than Judas’ own heart, they say, “What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself” (vers. 4, 5). Many a one sells Jesus virtually, if not literally. Let every soul look to it that his sin be not in some way akin to that of Judas. If God is calling sinners to a knowledge of His Son, and of His grace by Him, it is an awful thing to reject Him; it is selling Jesus for some object in this world which either we seek to attain or love too well to part with. In Judas this came out in its worst form; but perdition is not confined to him who is the son of perdition.

“And the chief priests took the silver pieces,” etc. Conscience would have told them that theirs was the guilt of bribing Judas to betray Jesus, but it had long been seared as with a hot iron, and now was utterly dead toward God, as it shows itself heartlessly cruel toward Judas. Religion without Christ only serves as the means to cheat the soul. They said, “It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.” Here was religion; but where was conscience in giving the money for Jesus? “And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day” (vers. 7, 8). The memory of their guilt is thus perpetuated to their own condemnation. And this is a picture of what the people had become — the chief priests as the pattern of what the nation was. A field of blood that land remains to this day; a field “to bury

strangers in." Israel being cast out of their own land, it is left to others, if only to be buried there.21 But it is not the chief priests and elders, nor the wretched condition of Judas, nor the perpetuation of Israel's wickedness, foretold by the prophet, that occupies us now. It is our Lord Himself, standing before the governor. He acknowledges the power of the world when Pilate asks Him, "Art Thou the King of the Jews?" To the chief priests and elders He answers nothing. Pilate, struck by the silence and moral dignity of his prisoner, desires His release, sees through the malice of the people, and proposes to them a choice, such as was the governor's custom: "Whom will ye that I release unto you?" But he had to find out the hatred with which men regarded Jesus: there is no person or thing the malice of man does not prefer to Him. God takes care, too, that there should be a home testimony to the conscience of the governor. His wife sent a message, saying, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him" (ver. 19). This, which is recorded only in Matthew, disturbed Pilate the more. All of it God ordered that man's iniquity in rejecting Jesus should be evident and without excuse. Then observe the solemn lesson: "The chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus" (ver. 20). The greater the moral advantages, where there is not simple faith in God, the greater the hatred of Jesus. The reception or rejection of Jesus now is the same thing in principle, though, no doubt, the circumstances of the world are changed.

Persons may know just enough of Jesus for their souls' salvation, and experience little of the world's rejection;

but if I really cling to a crucified and now glorified Christ, I must know what it is to have the scorn and ill-will of the world. If the world rejected Him, I must be prepared for the same thing. We cannot make both heaven and earth our object any more than we can serve God and mammon. The cross and the glory go together. The Lord presented hopes of blessing on the earth to Israel if they had received Him; but they refused, and this brought in the cross of Jesus. God knew it was inevitable, because of man's wickedness; it was the occasion of bringing in His purpose as to the Church and heavenly glory; but we must prepare for as much as man chooses to do in the present state of society. It is a lie of Satan that man is altered for the better during the last eighteen hundred years; the natural man's heart is always the same, though there may be times when it comes to a crisis. The very people, who "wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth," the same day sought to cast Jesus down headlong. And what was it that brought out their enmity? The assertion of man's evil and God's true grace. Man cannot endure the thought that his salvation depends upon God's mercy, and is for the worst of sinners, as for any other. "Is it possible," he says, "that I, who have tried to serve God for so many years, should be treated like a drunkard, a swindler, or a harlot?" He turns round on God, and becomes His open enemy. But, after all, it is not a question of justice to man in the salvation of a sinner. It must be grace, if God saves any; and this He delights to show. Nor is it a partial remedy, for there is no case so desperate that His grace cannot reach.

"Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ? They all say unto Him, Let Him be

crucified." Here we see the bitter unrighteousness of these religious men; and if Pilate seemed too sensible at first to act thus, we shall also see what his righteousness amounts to. He asks, "Why, what evil hath He done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let Him be crucified. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water," etc. (vers. 23, 24). This is what the world's righteousness amounts to, whether in the chief priests or in the Roman. True righteousness is only found where God governs. One alone in this scene is found in the patience, goodness, wisdom of God — perfect in every way. When it was the time to speak, His word is spoken; when it was the time to be silent, He holds His peace. He was God upon earth, and all His ways perfect. But this is not the great point here. As John's Gospel specially develops the deity of our Lord, and Luke His humanity, in Matthew we see Him as Messiah; therefore Pilate asks Him here, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" When Pilate had "washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it" (as if that could relieve him of the fearful crime he was perpetrating), all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us, and on our children" and there the dark, fatal stain abides to this day. "When he (Pilate) had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified." And this is the righteousness of the judge! This was he who had just before called Jesus a just man. Then come the soldiers. They too, and all, are proved guilty. Not a class or condition of man but evinces its hatred of God in the person of His Son — shown, too, in that which was their pride. For what base cowardice is that which tramples down one who suffers unresistingly! "And they stripped Him, and put on Him a scarlet robe. And when they had

plaited a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head;… and they spat upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head," etc. (vers. 28-30). The soldiers' tyranny comes out in this connection: they compel one in nowise implicated to do a service which they would not do — "As they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear His cross."

At the cross "they gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall" (ver. 34). We must not confound this circumstance with that mentioned in John where the Lord says, "I thirst." In Matthew's narrative it was the stupefying draft administered to prisoners before they suffered; and this the Lord would not drink. Whereas in John, the Lord, while on the cross, fulfils a scripture. In John He is regarded, not as One who did not suffer, but withal as the absolute Master over all circumstances. Alive therefore to the honour of Scripture, and in fulfilment of a word which had not as yet received its accomplishment, He says, "I thirst." "And they filled a sponge with vinegar.… and put it to His mouth." He did drink the vinegar then. But here in Matthew, on the contrary, "when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink" (ver. 34) — He wished for no alleviation from man. "And they crucified Him, and parted His garments, casting lots."

The superscription differs in the various Gospels. We must remember that Pilate wrote it in three different languages, and it may not, therefore, have been exactly the same in each. One Gospel (Mark) does not profess to give anything but the substance of what was written, the accusation, or charge, against Him; in the others the Holy Ghost gives the words. And what appropriateness is here! "This is Jesus the King of the Jews" (ver. 37).

The great thing for the Jew is the identifying of their Messiah and King with Jesus. In Luke the word “Jesus” ought to be omitted, as in the best authorities. It is really, “The King of the Jews, this!” and means, “this fellow” — a term of contempt. The object there is to show that “He is despised and rejected of men “: here, “He came to His own, and His own received Him not because, though the Gentile shares the guilt, it is the Jew who leads Pilate to condemn Him to death. In John we have, characteristically, the fullest form of all — “Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.” The reason is, it unites two things in our Lord not anywhere else so brought into juxtaposition — the most complete humiliation and the highest glory. He by whom all things were made, God Himself, was a man of “Nazareth.” The beauty of this must appear to any spiritual mind. Throughout John’s Gospel the Lord is both higher and lower than anywhere else.

“The thieves also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth” (ver. 44). They found time to revile Jesus too, venting their bodily anguish in mockery of the Son of God. Oh, beloved friends, was there ever such a scene?

We have briefly looked at man’s part, but what was God doing there? “About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (ver. 46.) We have full evidence that this was not the exhaustion of nature. And “when He had cried again with a loud voice, He yielded up the ghost” (ver. 50). Our Lord died a willing victim. Man might will His death, and be the instrument of it. A man He became, that as a man He might die: but in every circumstance it is so marked

as to show that He was there who could as easily have swept away a world as of old He laid the foundations of heaven and earth by His word. He “yielded up the ghost; and, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent” (vers. 50, 51). Nature was made to yield its testimony above and below; and the darkness over the land was no mere eclipse. The Jewish system, too, yielded its solemn witness in the rent veil — the shadows were passing away: the fulfilment of them, the great Reality, had come. Unrent, it had been the symbol that man could not draw near to God. Under the law it could never be. God dwelt then in the thick darkness. But in the death of Jesus fulness of grace has come. God and man may now meet face to face. The blood is sprinkled upon and before the mercy-seat, and man is invited to draw near with holy boldness. It is due to that precious blood. God in Him had come down from heaven to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. For every soul that believes, it is done. The Jewish system might linger on, like a corpse waiting so many days for burial; but the rending of the veil was the soul severed from the body. Thus there was witness on every hand — from the earth, the heaven, the law, and the unseen world. Jesus has the keys of hades and of death. The very graves were unlocked when Jesus died, if the bodies of the saints did not rise till after the resurrection. He was Himself the first-fruits, and the power of life was brought in through His resurrection. What testimony could be more complete? The centurion set for the watch, heathen as he was, no doubt, “feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.”

“And many women were there beholding afar off.” But where were the disciples? Oh, what withering condemnation of all boasted courage! They had forsaken Jesus and fled; but here were these women, contrary to their natural timidity, “out of weakness made strong,” beholding, even though afar off. In Joseph of Arimathea we see a man who had a great deal to lose: a rich man and a counselor, and withal a secret disciple of Jesus. Now God brings him to a point when you might least expect it. With the death of Jesus on the cross — “numbered with the transgressors” — he goes to Pilate, begs His body, and having laid it in his own new tomb, rolls a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, unwittingly fulfilling Isa. 53:9 — “with the rich in His death.” If apostles and disciples fled, God can, and does, raise up testimony for His name’s sake.

We have traced the history of self in this chapter. If we had all the riches, the learning, the power, of this world, none, nor all, of these could make us happy. Jesus can, and does. But let us remember that we are in the enemy’s country, which has shown its treachery to our Master. If we do not feel that we are passing through the camp of those who crucified Jesus, we are in danger of falling into some ambuscade of the enemy. The Lord grant us that calmness of faith which is not occupied with self, but with Him who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree!

Matthew 28

The special purpose of this Gospel appears in the account of the Lord’s death and resurrection as plainly as elsewhere. Hardly any portion, indeed, more strikingly illustrates it than the chapter before us. Thus

we have no mention of our Lord's ascension. If we had only Matt. 28, we should not have known as a fact that the Lord went up to heaven at all. It is impossible without a special purpose that the apostle could have omitted an event so glorious and interesting. Not that this omission is a defect in Matthew's narrative; on the contrary, it is a part and proof of its perfection, when the scope is understood. Were the ascension scene introduced here, it would be out of keeping with the history that closes in our chapter. Yet even now it is one of the points that learned men stumble over. Neglecting the evidence of design, they reason a priori, and consequently cannot understand why such an event should be left out by our Evangelist. Evidently they do not believe, in any full sense, that God wrote these Gospels; else they would conclude that the fault lay in their ignorance and misreasoning. A simple-hearted believer, though he may not understand why, rests satisfied that the omission in Matthew is as perfect as the insertion of it in Luke; everything is as it should be in the word of God, as He wrote it. And the notion that something is now wanting, which Matthew once wrote as a conclusion, is contrary to all evidence, external and internal.

Before closing, I shall endeavour to show how its presence here would be incongruous and detract from the beauty of the picture God was supplying: on the other hand, its presence where it does occur elsewhere is, I need hardly add, equally beautiful and necessary. Events are selected in connection with the immediate subject. Taking the chapter as it comes, we see that the Holy Ghost here confines Himself to a Messiah risen from the dead, who meets His disciples in Galilee,

outside the rebellious city. In other parts of this Gospel the ascension is implied or assumed, as in Matthew 13:41; Matthew 16:27, 28; Matthew 22:44; Matthew 24; Matthew 25; and, above all, Matthew 26:64. It was therefore not omitted ignorantly, nor has any accident robbed us of it in the original. I only say this as entirely refuting the foolish and irreverent reasoning of men, chiefly moderns.

“In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn, etc. (ver. 1) This was not the morning of the resurrection-day, but the evening previous to it. We, with our western reckonings of time, might think only of the early twilight; but it means simply that the week was drawing to its close. We must remember that to a Jewish mind evening twilight commenced the new day.22 An exactly similar phrase occurs in Luke 23:54, where the Jewish sense cannot be doubted. The Holy Ghost does not continue the description of this visit of the women to the sepulchre. There is no real ground for connecting the circumstances of the first three verses of this chapter.23 The first merely presents the devotedness of these holy women. When the disciples had gone to their own homes, these women, spite of natural fears at such a place and time, could not stay away. They had prepared spices for embalming the body, but rested the sabbath-day (as we read in Luke), according to the commandment. “It was just getting dusk” is the true thought here. It was the twilight after the sabbath. Their hearts took them to the grave, being bound up with Jesus, as soon as the sabbath-law permitted.

“And, behold, there was a great earthquake,” etc. This was an after-occurrence; how long after is not said. We have simply a narrative of events one after another, in

these early verses, without defining the intervals of time. We rnust not confound the visit of the women here (in verse 1) with their visit on the morning of the first day mentioned by Mark and in our verse 5, etc. The Lord was not on this last occasion in the sepulchre, and the angel, descending and rolling away the stone, had nothing directly to do with the Lord's rising. No such interposition was in any way necessary to Him. God raised Him, and He Himself rose — taking up His life as He had laid it down. Such is the scriptural doctrine of the resurrection. This angelic action was, I suppose, to call the attention of men to the Divine act in the resurrection of Jesus, and the more fully to set aside the deceits or the reasonings of enemies.24 So the angel's word is, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

One remarkable consequence of the resurrection is always pressed: the angel says, "Fear not ye." That mighty act of God is intended forever to dispel the alarm of those who believe in Jesus, by giving them the certainty of His intervention on their behalf. Up to the advent and resurrection of Jesus there was a measure of darkness and uncertainty, however great the kindness and mercy shown by the Lord. The resurrection left all the world apparently undisturbed; but what was the great resulting truth and blessing for the people of God? To faith it is the triumph of God over the last efforts of sin and the power of Satan. No doubt death is still in the world, pursuing its ravages. And what is the resurrection to you? says the caviller. Everything, if Christ is my life. I am entitled to have the comfort of it; my soul is welcome to drink into the joy of it, though my body does not yet share the deliverance. God has shown me in the cross of Christ the perfect witness of suffering

for sin. Man believes not that He is the Son.. and cannot understand how God could allow His best-beloved to suffer. Others too had cried to God; and, spite of all their faults, they had been heard; yet, in the extremity of Christ's sufferings, and spite of His grace and glory, and of the Father's love to Him, He cried and was not heard! For truly, in all His life He was the beloved One over whom the heavens opened with delight. But upon the cross the crisis is come, and all js changed. It might have seemed to the world that all was over with the claims of Jesus. He had died on the cross, and by His own confession was forsaken of God. Was all now as man or the devil desired? On the third day God interferes: Jesus rose from the dead, and all the power of earth and hell was shaken to its. centre. Resurrection settled everything in peace for the believer. Every cause for fear and unbelieving sorrow was buried in the grave of Christ. Every blessing overflows in Him risen. How much is made of this in the Epistles! Nothing is more fundamental or more insisted on. Vague thoughts of God's goodness, love, etc., would not be enough for the solid comfort of God's people. Full, settled peace is founded on the solid basis to which God points — the death and resurrection of Jesus. If His death meets all my evil, His resurrection is the spring and pattern of the new life and acceptance — beyond sin, and death, and judgment. Our life, our peace, our new place before God, are now to be associated with Jesus risen.

The course of the world was not interrupted by the Lord's resurrection. Men slept as usual, and rose as if nothing had happened. Yet was it the greatest work of power that God had ever wrought; yea (founded on the deepest suffering that ever was endured), it was the

greatest work He ever will do; and I say this looking on to the day when everything shall be made new according to His glory. These are the consequences of Christ's resurrection, the applications of the power put forth therein. But if the world was indifferent to it, what should it be to us? Say not it is a little thing because it is as yet a matter of faith. Into the midst of this scene of weakness and death the mighty power of God has entered, and has been put forth here in the resurrection of Christ. No more could God do, nor needs to do, to blot out sin: it has been put away by the sacrifice of Christ. Jesus was treated as if He were covered with it, as if it were all His own. If it was to be removed, He must bear it thoroughly: He did so, and now it is gone; and we rest upon what God tells us of Him and it. This is what tests the soul's confidence in God. Am I willing to trust God, when I cannot trust myself? Sin brought in distrust of God; but the gift, death and resurrection of Christ more than restore what was lost, and establish the soul in such a knowledge of God as no angel ever did or can possess. What my soul wants is, not that God should be so merciful as not to destroy me because of my sins, but a full deliverance with a full judgment of sin (Rom. 8:1, 3). We can not have fellowship with God except on the ground of sin being taken away righteously. Jesus crucified has abolished sin before God for those who believe. To believe God about the death of His Son because of our sin is to take God's part against ourselves. Before Him to acknowledge ourselves lost sinners is repentance toward God, and inseparable from faith.

Perfect love is in God, and comes out of the depth of His own holy being. God became a man that He might go

through the whole moral question of sin: that done in Christ is the triumph of grace. No wonder then that the angel could say, “Fear not ye.” The resurrection shows every hindrance gone. The angel acknowledges Him as Lord (“Come and see the place where the Lord lay”); but what a blessing to be able to say our Lord! What a joy thus to own that risen One who was crucified as entitled in everything to command! No doubt, what made His work of value was that He was God Himself — One who, while He was a man, was infinitely above man — a daysman — One who could lay His hand upon both. The angel intimates this, that in the presence of a risen Saviour there was nothing for the most timid believer to fear. On the other hand, Acts 17:31 says: “He [God] hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead.” If I do not trust to a risen Saviour for the deliverance of my soul, I participate in the guilt of His death. If I have not fled for refuge to Him, I belong to the same firm, as it were, that crucified Him. But by faith in Him I am washed from this guilt by His blood. How just that the provision of grace which signs the believer’s deliverance should, if despised, become the dead weight that sinks the world! If I believe Him, I know it was man that crucified Jesus; and not merely profane man; for the guilt pervades all. And there is one only door of deliverance for any, and this is Jesus crucified. “Fear not ye.” There is no need of alarm, for He is risen. “I know that ye seek Jesus,” etc. It was the heart set upon Jesus that was valued. It had ever been in the mind of God to blot out sin; but now it was all gone; and God was waiting for this to declare the glad tidings. He who was full of holy love in giving Jesus

to die, now raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God. If my faith and hope are in God, my delight is in Christ; if in myself, Christ becomes to me a cipher, and I justly perish forever. If I have not Christ for my rest and delight, for my Saviour and Lord, here, I must by and by quail before Him as my judge.

And now, returning to the women, they were to go and tell His disciples that Jesus was risen from the dead, and was going before them into Galilee. In Luke there is no notice of Galilee, but there He joins the two disciples going to Emmaus; and when they returned to Jerusalem the same evening, they “found the eleven gathered together.... saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon.” Jesus Himself appears in their midst. All circumstances there have Jerusalem as their centre. In Matthew the great point pressed is the meeting-place assigned in Galilee. And why? Is it not remarkable on the face of it that one should give the meeting of Jesus with His disciples in Jerusalem, the other in Galilee? Has not God some truth to teach me hereby,? We are apt to measure the importance of a truth by its results to ourselves; but the true standard is its bearing on the glory of God. The way in which God gives us His truth, after all, is also the best for us. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew Jesus is found in Galilee. Jerusalem refuses Him, was troubled at His birth, and cast Him out unto death, even the death of the cross. “We did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted,” exactly describes their feeling. They looked in the Messiah for something suited to their earthly idea; they vented their disappointment in the rejection of the Son of God. In accordance with this,

then, Matthew records that the scene of His living labours, as also where He manifested Himself as risen after the house of Israel rejected Him, was Galilee — the place of Jewish scorn. He shows Himself anew in despised Galilee of the Gentiles, when all power is given to Him in heaven and earth; and there He gives the godly remnant from His ancient people their great commission.

“And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them,” etc. In John, where Mary recovers her beloved Lord, as she thinks, He says, “Touch Me not.” How comes it that here, when the women came and held Him by the feet, our Lord does not forbid it? A totally different truth is thus set forth by these acts. The great hope of Israel was to have Christ in their midst. But to us the absence of Christ on high, while we go through our time of trial, is just as characteristic as His presence will be to them. John speaks fully of our Lord’s going away: another scene of glory entirely distinct from this world is brought out there. Hence the teaching implied is, as it were, You may have been looking as Jews for a scene where I shall be personally present; but instead of this, I tell you of My present place on high, and the many mansions that I go to prepare for you in My Father’s house. He reveals to them a heavenly hope totally distinct from His reigning over His people in this world: therefore in John the Lord says to Mary, “Touch Me not, for... I ascend,” etc. But in Matthew we are shown Jesus rejected by Jerusalem, yet found in Galilee, even after His resurrection. Whatever His power and glory now, and the comfort and blessing to His own, He is still, as regards the Jews and Jerusalem, the rejected and despised Messiah. Hence it is that on this occasion

He confirms the message of the angel, saying to the women, “Be not afraid: go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me” (ver. 10).

The governor wielded the power of the Roman kingdom; but who were they that secretly instigated him? The false religionists of their day — the priests, utterly blinded of the devil. Always without simplicity of heart, they assembled together with the elders and took counsel; and those who bribed a treacherous disciple with “thirty pieces of silver” to put Christ to death, gave “large money” now to deny the truth of His resurrection. Such is man, such is the world; and, solemn to say, such is its highest and proudest phase. Such it was then: is the moral complexion altered now? If we read the Bible aright, we shall find in it not only the record of the past, but the divine lesson-book of the present and the future. May we read it for our own souls! Certain it is that the Jews, and especially the religious chiefs, took the lead in evil and in opposition to God before Christ’s death (Matt. 26, 27), while He lay in the grave (Matt. 27:62-66), and after He rose again (Matt. 28:11-15). But unbelief is after all as weak against God as faith is mighty with and by Him. Their own guard became the clearest, most unwitting and least suspected witness of the resurrection. What a testimony was the alarm of the soldiers, added to the doubts of His own disciples! It became more than unbelief now; it was a deliberate, wilful lie; and there are the Jews “until this day.” Their fears were, without their meaning it, a sure testimony to Jesus; but their enmity leads them on now to reject What they knew was the truth, even if they perished everlastingly.

“Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted” (vers. 16, 17). “Some doubted” — and these were disciples. How good is God! how above the thoughts of man! Man would have held back the fact. Why say that some of His disciples doubted? Would it not stumble others? but it is profitable to know the depth of our unbelieving hearts — to see that even in the presence of a risen Jesus “some doubted.” No matter what His love to His children, God never hides their sins, nor makes light of them.

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.... And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Now it appears to me that with such a word as this the ascension scene would be incongruous. He had said, “Lo, I am with you alway”; and there the curtain drops — the unbroken blessedness of this promise rings on the heart! Thus the keeping out of view His departure seems to me to crown the beauty of the parting promise, and of the whole Gospel.

And why not here “repentance and remission of sins”? why not “preach the gospel to every creature “? What is the peculiar fitness of this conclusion of Matthew? The Lord, rejected as the Jewish Messiah, opens out fresh dealings of God with men. Before, they were not to go even to Samaritans; but here an entirely new sphere is opened. It is no longer God having His peculiar dwelling-place in one nation; it is now this larger thought — “Go ye therefore, and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (ver. 19).25 Baptism is here in contrast with

circumcision, and the fuller revelation of the Godhead is contrasted with the name Jehovah by which God was known to Israel. “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” This falls in with the sermon on the mount, where the Lord says, in contrast with them of old time, “But I say unto you.” He was the Prophet like unto Moses whom God had promised to raise up, and to whom they were bound to harken. What special guidance was this for Jewish disciples! They were to teach all things that Jesus had commanded. He was the beloved Son of God who now was to be heard pre-eminently. It was not a question of putting the Gentiles under the law — which has been the ruin of Christendom, the denial of Christianity, and the deep dishonour of Christ Himself.

And here all closes. The disciples were about to enter on a troubled scene; but, “Lo, I [Jesus] am with you all the days, unto the consummation of the age.” And this was and is enough for faith. The Lord grant that we may confide our souls, both for this age and forever, to that Word which shall stand when heaven and earth pass away!

19 The words “wherein the Son of Man cometh” have no substantial manuscript authority in this verse. This is no particular view of mine, but it is the judgment of every competent person who has examined the original testimonies.

20 This also corresponds with the last three parables of the 13th chapter, as we saw. — [Ed.

21 This rather applies to the Jews themselves. Cast out of their own land on account of the blood of the Just One, of which they maid, “His blood be on us, and on

our children," they have been "strangers" among all nations in the world since — where they have their graves, but not their home. — [Ed.

22 This is according to Gen. 1:5: "And the evening and the morning were the first day." So vers. 8, 13, etc.: to this the Jewish reckoning conformed. If we believe that Gen. 1 has also a symbolical application, as others have clearly shown, the omission of "evening and morning" on the seventh day very significantly points to God's rest (and ours with Him) in new creation, where sin shall not enter, and His rest shall not be broken. — [Ed.

23 This is quite in keeping with what we have found in Matthew elsewhere. The reader can compare καὶ ἰδ ού ("and behold") in Matthew 8:2 with the same in Matthew 28:2. The true connection is in the object of the narrator, not in mere time, There is no ground to suppose the women witnessed the earthquake: the soldiers, I believe, alone did.

24 Perhaps more especially for the comfort and assurance of the sorrowing disciples, as well as the announcement to them of the resurrection of Jesus. Ed.

25 It is still "the kingdom," but no longer confined to Israel. — [Ed.