

Acts - Commentaries by Walter Thomas Prideaux Wolston

Young Men of Scripture, Young Man Named Saul, A (9:1-21)

We have here the historical account of the conversion of this remarkable man. A more remarkable conversion, I suppose, there never was, because, at the moment when the grace of God met him, he was doing all he possibly could to blot out the name of the Lord Jesus Christ from the earth; and that is the reason why he says, and says with truth: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, OF WHOM I AM CHIEF" (1 Tim. 1:15). Now, was he a scandalous sinner? No! Was he openly immoral? No! Was he a gross liver? No! Was he a man who set at defiance the laws of man and of God? No! And yet he says he was the chief of sinners. Now, it is very important to notice this, because Paul was in reality a most religious man; but it was religion without Christ. Nay, more, it was religion opposed to Christ. Of course, he was a Jew. He had been born, bred, and brought up in the faith of the Jew as to the unity of Jehovah. Consequently he denied the divinity of Jesus, when He, as Son of God, appeared on earth.

The Jews regarded Jesus as a blasphemous impostor, claiming to be equal with God. Hence they rejected Him, crowned Him with thorns, and slew Him; but God raised Him from the dead. After He had been seen of witnesses for forty days, He ascended, going as Man into the glory of God. The Saviour being seated at the right hand of God, the Holy Spirit came down, and the testimony to a glorified Christ was commenced on earth, and continued from the second chapter of Acts to the seventh, a little of which I read to you. There Stephen, a remarkable man, quiet, devoted, earnest, but a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, gives a magnificent witness to the nation of Israel as to Christ, winding up his address by the statement, "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye." The guilt of the nation was complete. They had broken the law, persecuted the prophets, slain the forerunners of Jesus, betrayed and murdered Him, and now resisted the Holy Spirit. At this they gnashed on him with their teeth; but Stephen, "being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." What a wonderful thing for a man on earth to say!

At this point his listeners stopped their ears, ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city to slay him. They stoned him, and the witnesses, who said he was blaspheming, took off their garments, the more to free their arms to cast these stones at Stephen. They did not want their garments kicked about, however, so they laid them down "at a young man's feet whose name was Saul." He did not rush into the crowd to fling stones, but he consented to the deed. He said tacitly, "Let that man die, for he has said he has seen Jesus the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God, which is an utter impossibility: I consent to his death." Stephen, stoned thus brutally, dies like his Master, praying for his murderers. His Master had said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"; and the servant, in the moment of his death, prays, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." He could not add, "for they know not what they do," for too much had come out about Christ at this time.

There follows on this a terrible persecution against the Church, and Saul not only consents to it, but from that moment becomes the active embodiment of Jewish hatred, and determination to blot out the name of Jesus. When telling the story of his conversion at a later date to Agrippa, he says, "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). This doubtless he did with all good conscience. But mark! conscience is no guide to a man. Conscience is like the helm of a ship, and if you have a correct chart, and a good steersman, the helm is useful in guiding the course of a ship; but if you leave the helm to be tossed about by wind and wave, the ship will go on the rocks. We hear nowadays that if a man walks according to his conscience, all will be well for time and eternity. That doctrine is not divine, and will not do. Conscience, I repeat, is no guide. Here Saul was "in all good conscience" doing everything he could against the name of Jesus. He becomes the missionary of the hatred of the Jews against the name of Jesus; and not content with ravaging the assembly in Jerusalem, he must needs go to foreign cities.

In the ninth of Acts we find him setting out for Damascus, where he learns there are a few Christians—a few believers in the Lord Jesus—a few who love the heavenly Saviour. This young man, full of Jewish fire and zeal, is seen "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." Ere starting on his strange missionary enterprise he goes to the high priest and asks credentials. He "desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring bound unto Jerusalem" (vs. 2). What a task! What a business! To bring men and women, who loved Jesus, bound to Jerusalem, and compel them to blaspheme His holy name or die (Acts 26:9-11).

I wonder if some hater of Jesus, legally authorized to bind and deliver to prison all that love Jesus in Edinburgh, were to appear here this night, what would you and I say? Would you confess or deny Him? Would you say, I do love that blessed Saviour, I really love His name. If not yet on the Lord's side, I pray you, as this year dies away tonight, let your heart be Christ's henceforth. I do not say you are pursuing the same mad course that the zealot Paul was pursuing here. You see what he did. He took a missionary tour to bring people to prison and death who loved the name of the Lord Jesus, and that is why he speaks of himself as "the chief of sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). He knew that he was persecuting Christ in the persons of His people. This made him "the chief of sinners," but it was this same act that made him the chief of legalists, for, in another part of his writings, he says, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: ... as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil. 2:4-6). Paul touches, if I may so say, the two poles of human experience. He reaches the top of the tree of human righteousness, and goes to the lowest depth of human guilt by the same act—persecuting the saints. What was the summit of the tree of human righteousness? As a Jew, thinking he was doing God service by slaying those who loved Jesus. As to legal human righteousness, the finishing touch was the persecuting of the Church. How was he the chief of sinners? Because persecuting the Church! Look, he has got to the top and to the bottom of the ladder of human righteousness. Hence he can say to the legalist, I have gone further than you, but I have given up all and taken my place as lost, and Jesus has saved me. To the man who is writhing under a sense of his sin and guilt Paul says, I am a greater sinner than you

are, and yet Christ saved me.

Now let us see the remarkable way in which the Lord meets him. It is a most charming history. He goes on his way to Damascus, and all of a sudden, as he nears the town, he is challenged. "Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven" (vs. 3) "above the brightness of the sun" (Acts 26:13). What was that light? It was the light that shone from the face of the Son of Man in glory. Wonderful light, indeed, was it; brighter than the sun at noonday. Think of that! You know what the sun is at noonday, and in an Eastern climate too. It was at noonday when the sun was shining in all its meridian splendor that the light of the sun was put out by a brighter light. Well might Paul say, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). It was the glory of God in the face of Jesus shining on him; and what was the effect? That wonderful light blinded him for the time being, and "he fell to the earth." The Lord had met him. The history of his self-will, of his sin, and of his wickedness, under the garb of religion, was over.

What grace, that Christ should pick up this man who had been His most bitter opponent on earth, and make him a vessel of grace to others. What a marvelous thing also is it that the grace of Christ should take up a man like you or me, who has been bitterly opposed to Him and turn us, from being the servants of sin and the devil, to be His servants. That grace met Paul. It has met me; may it meet you tonight. If you are unsaved, unconverted, may the grace that saved Saul, and saved me, save you now!

Overwhelmed by the light, "he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" (vs. 4). What a moment in his history! when he hears that all-commanding voice—a voice absolutely human, but intensely divine—the voice of a man, but which he felt was the voice of God—the voice of a human Being speaking to him in his mother-tongue (Hebrew) from glory. Nevertheless, it was the voice of the eternal God to that man's soul and conscience. He who spoke was Jesus. The exalted Man was God's eternal Son, who had veiled His essential glory—His Godhead glory—in human form. He now speaks from heaven to Paul and to us, and it is of vital importance not to despise His sayings. "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven" (Heb. 12:25).

Whence did Jesus speak to Saul? From heaven! and, young man, on the road to hell, a voice from heaven speaks to you, and I ask you, Have you heard and obeyed that voice? "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" No doubt Saul was amazed. How could he be persecuting Jesus? It was a wonderful question. Could you persecute Jesus? I believe you could. Perhaps you have done so. If your history were published, it might come out that you had been persecuting Jesus. Did you not laugh at that man who works in the same building with you, for his being converted? Have you not jeered at your own brother who was converted, and was seeking to serve the Lord? Have you not ridiculed the sister who sought to speak for Jesus, and to live for Him? Why persecutest thou Me? says Christ. In that moment Saul learned that the saint upon earth and the Saviour in glory were really one. He, the Head of the body, in heavenly glory; and they, the members of it, here on earth. He learned the identity of the people of Christ on earth with the blessed Saviour in heaven. What a revulsion took place! The time of his self-will is forever over, the man is humbled in the dust; and not only does he fall down in the dust materially, but he gets down morally, by the side of Job, in dust and ashes. "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). Yes, that man is down in dust and ashes before God. He has seen Christ. He has seen the heavenly Saviour. Have you seen Him? Has your eye ever seen Him? Oh! if never before, let the eye of faith turn to the Saviour in glory this night.

Saul turns at once to the Lord. He is humbled, broken right down in the dust. Now observe his changed attitude. "And he said, Who art thou, Lord?" He does not say, Who art thou? He says, "Who art thou, Lord?" He knows Him. That voice had done its work. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). He heard that voice, and lived. He was a quickened soul from that moment. He had the sense that he was in the presence of One who knew all about him. Were you ever brought into the presence of the Lord really, and got an answer as he got it? "And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Has He to say to you tonight, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest"? If you have never loved Him, followed Him, or got to know Him, or serve Him, His voice speaks to you from glory tonight, and He says, Do you want to know Me, and to do My will? Then, as He reveals Himself as Jesus to your soul, you will understand the wonderful revulsion of feeling that passed over that stricken man's soul, as he learned that the One who had arrested him, the One whose light blinded him, was the Jesus whom he had been persecuting. He had looked upon Jesus as an impostor, and thought that he was doing God service in getting His name wiped off the earth. And while he was busily bent on his murderous tour, he was arrested by God's glory shining from the face of that same Jesus. I say again, What a revulsion of feeling took place in his soul. He saw in a moment what he had been doing during the whole of his life. He saw the criminality of his conduct, the fullness of his sin, the terribleness of his guilt, and I have no doubt he felt what would be the consequences of his folly and sin. Have you not sinned precisely in the same way? I believe we all have. We all have been opposed to Christ more or less, though our opposition may not have taken the fiery demonstration of a Saul.

There will be a mighty revulsion of feeling when you are truly converted. I don't believe in the conversion that does not change a man, and if you really turn to the Lord there will be a downright change in your life. If there is not, you may seriously doubt whether you have been converted or not. Was not Paul changed? Look at him! "And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (vs. 6). He is at once obedient. You have immediately dependence and obedience, the characteristic features of the new life that was started in his soul. Quickened by the life-giving voice of the Son of God, risen from the dead, the existence of that new life in his soul was demonstrated by the question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" I have done my own will till now, but from this time forth I am Thine.

The Lord Christ says, "Rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles," who did not care for the Gospel, "unto whom I now send thee." And what was he to do? "To open their eyes," be got his mission, "and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith, that is in Me" (Acts 26:16-18). Prostrate on the ground and blinded, he asks, "What wilt thou have me to do?" Go to the Gentiles, says Jesus, and "open their eyes."

That is what a man wants first of all. Have your eyes been opened to the fact that you are a man on the road to an eternal hell? It is a great thing when a man gets his eyes opened. He sees his danger. Are your eyes opened to see your need of Christ, and to see your danger? May God open them tonight, and turn you from the power of Satan to God! What is the state of the man who is not converted? His eyes are shut, and he is under the power of Satan.

I do not wonder at a gentleman's gardener being a little upset when he came back from doing what his master had bidden him. His master's favorite dog had a litter of whelps. Pups, as you know, are born blind, but usually open their eyes about the ninth day. The ninth day passed, and the fifteenth, and twentieth, but never a pup opened an eye. The master at length said to his man, "They are no use, they are all blind; drown the whole lot of them." The gardener obeyed his master, and casting them into a pond, drowned the whelps. After a few minutes his master met him, looking awfully upset. "Did you do what I told you?" he asked. "I did, sir," replied the man, "but I did not like the job." "But they were all blind, and no use." "Yes," said the man, "but every one of them opened their eyes just as they went down." Little good it will do you, my friend, to open your eyes just as you pass into eternity; and it is just when you go into hell unconverted that your eyes will be opened, depend upon it. The eyes are opened too late when there. May God show you now your ruin, and your need, and the danger in which you are! In one of his epistles, Paul says: "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

Paul knew full well the terrible power that had blinded him, till this heavenly light illuminated him, and he got his mission, to go to the Gentiles "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light"—thank God for that!—"and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sin, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me." Hearing these words, he rises and goes forth with a mission to carry the most lovely news that ever mortal man could bear. What news? That there is a Saviour in glory, who has power and grace to save the worst man in the world; and there is a Saviour in glory for the most godless young man in this hall. If you turn to Him, and have faith in Him, I will tell you what you get—"the forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith." And who are they? They are called saints frequently in the New Testament. There are two classes in this world—tonight—the saints and the sinners. And who are the saints? Those who are in heaven, you reply. Thank God, there are some there, but there are many still on earth, and I would like to see you among them.

Up to this point Saul had been persecuting them. "How much evil he hath done to Thy saints," says Ananias to the Lord about him. But who are the saints? Those who belong to Jesus! You would not perhaps like to be called, or to take the ground of being, a saint. I will tell you why. If you call yourself a saint, those round about you will look to see whether your walk and conversation is like that of a saint, i.e., saintly, suited to God. Quite right. I think it is perfectly fair. Observe!

I am either a sinner on my road to eternal judgment, or a saint on my way to glory. Every man in this hall tonight is either a hell-bound sinner, or a glory-bound saint. Which are you? That is a terribly sharp line to draw, you say. Yes, I admit it, but so long as it defines the road you are on, it suffices. I say again, every young man in this audience is either a hell-bound sinner, in his sins, or a glory-bound saint through faith in the blood of Christ. Which are you? I am not hell-bound; through grace I am heaven-bound. Go with me to glory! I won't go with you to hell. Come with me to Christ: I won't go with you to judgment. It is far better to heed the message this man got, as he rose up out of the dust, than to disregard it.

I don't think Saul was in the full liberty of the Gospel at that moment. That came three days after. Observe now—"The men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no man." "They heard not the voice of Him that spake to me," Paul says (Acts 22:9). When Christ meets a man, in saving grace, He speaks directly to him. I was preaching the Gospel in a hall in this city not long ago, and at the close of the meeting a poor troubled woman came to me and said, "Somebody has been telling you all my history during the past week." "No," I replied, "I had no information about you from anybody." "But it must be," she said; "you have been telling me my life, and the history of my sins during the past week." "I knew nothing, but God knew all, and He has sent a message of mercy and pardon to you," was all I could reply. It is a great thing when a man hears the voice of the Son of God. Have you heard it? Saul heard it, and, thank God! I have heard it.

The Lord then said to him, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.... And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened he saw no man." Man is out of sight. But "they led him by the hand, and brought him unto Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink" (vss. 8-9). Fancy, he was in such deep exercise that he could neither eat, drink, nor, I should suppose, sleep for three days and three nights. I would be deeply thankful if I heard you were so anxious about your soul. There is no sleep in hell. There is no food in hell, and there is no drink in hell, and there is no getting out of it. The men who go into it will never get out, "and they have no rest day nor night" (Rev. 14:11). That is a solemn word, and an awful outlook for eternity surely. Three days and three nights without sleep is a terrible thing, but what will an eternity of that nature be? Unsaved young man, you are journeying into it.

Think not lightly of this abstinence in Paul's case. He was in the deepest exercise, as he reviewed the past, his awful opposition to Christ, his torture of His people, his utter blindness under Satan's power. He passed through deep exercise of mind, heart, and conscience, and profound tumult of soul. That is what it was. I don't think that a man, when he is first converted, gets into the joy of the Gospel immediately. The deeper the exercise of conscience the more lasting and real will the work be in the soul, and the more steady and firm will the walk be. But see the way the Lord meets him. There was in Damascus a man named Ananias. The Lord has always got servants to do His work, blessed be His name! Ananias was free to serve the Lord. What a happy thing it is to be a servant of the Lord. "And to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord" (vs. 10). He was ready to do anything the Lord wanted. What a blessed thing to be permitted to serve the Lord. "And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go unto the street which is called Straight." Ah, He knew the street where Saul lived, and He knows the street where you live. "Go unto the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus; for, behold, he prayeth" (vs. 11). These days and nights he had spent in prayer, looking to God for mercy, for grace, for deliverance, for salvation. Light, I believe, he had; but he had not got salvation, in the full sense of the word. He was not fully delivered, and he spent his time praying.

And don't you think God delights to answer such prayer? It is His joy to do so. If this is like your case, go on praying, the answer will come some day, as it came to the telegraph-clerk. He was very anxious about his soul, but got no peace, comfort, or rest, although one Sunday he

heard three preachers. He went home to his lodgings very anxious. How could he be saved? He knew his sins were unforgiven, and he got little sleep. Monday morning he went to his work in a telegraph box on a railway line. Shortly after he arrived there came the signal that told him his station was called. As the message was received, he wrote down the name of the sender and the addressee. Then came the message—“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” He dropped his pencil, and looked at the telegram. Though designed for an anxious servant girl, who also got peace through its words, it was God’s message to him. He said afterward—“That ‘LAMB OF GOD,’ that ‘REDEMPTION,’ that ‘BLOOD,’ those ‘RICHES OF HIS GRACE’ went right into my poor heart, and no one in the whole world could have had greater joy than I had that Monday morning.”

Ananias hesitates to go, for he could scarcely credit that a man like Saul, who had been a persecutor, could be anxious. But before he arrives, he is seen by Saul, in a heavenly vision, to be on the road. He “hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in. and putting his hand on him, that he may receive his sight” (vs. 12). Beautiful grace of Christ! He prepares Saul for what would take place, thus confirming his faith. “And Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to Thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name” (vss. 13-14). Is it not lovely to note the freedom of intimacy, and the way the servant can speak to his Lord and Master? There is perfect freedom of intercourse between the Master and the servant, and the Lord, in no way offended, says: “Go thy way; for he is A CHOSEN VESSEL unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name’s sake. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house” (vss. 15-16). Of course, Saul is ready for him, for, in a vision, he has seen Ananias coming; and I have no doubt as Ananias asked for Saul, and was shown into the room where he was, Saul would say, I was waiting for him Ananias lays his hand upon him, saying, “Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (vs. 17). What a thrill of joy would pass through that man’s soul as Ananias called him “Brother Saul”! Could you be truthfully called, “Brother”? Further, would you glory in being a brother? I glory in that beautiful name. It is the name of the family of God.

I will tell you what took place in my own history. I was converted in London on Lord’s Day the 16th December, 1860, and I went the next Saturday into Somersetshire, and on Sunday came across a little company of believers. They had heard of my conversion, and they also knew what a thoroughly worldly man I had been before that. Well, they were going to take the Lord’s Supper together, and they asked me if I would like to break bread with them. “What,” said I, “I break bread? I have only been converted a week. It is far too serious a matter for me to think of sitting down at the Lord’s Table.” So I refused my privilege at the time, but I could not tell you the joy that filled my soul—like Saul’s when he heard himself called “Brother Saul”—when I learned that these dear children of God would take me into their company.

There is nothing more blessed than to be numbered among the people of God. Oh, what joy if only I were assured that I could address you as “Brother.” Deep must have been Saul’s joy to hear Ananias say, “Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.” What happened to Saul was very remarkable. “And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith, and arose and was baptized” (vs. 18). He confessed Christ. He publicly, openly, and honestly confessed the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour. He says elsewhere, “O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19). And we read here, “And straightway he preached Jesus in the synagogues that he is the Son of God” (vss. 20). He went and told others of Jesus. If you have been converted to God, your joy and privilege is to tell others of the blessed Saviour who has saved you.

And now, if you have never yielded your heart to the Lord, as I this evening close this series of addresses to you dear young fellows, I pray you turn to the Lord now. I charge you by the love of God, by the reality of the sufferings of Christ, those sufferings which He endured to redeem you—I charge you by the joys of heaven, and the sorrows of hell—by the blessedness of heaven’s rest, and by the solemnity of coming Judgment—by the light that shines from the face of a glorified Saviour, and by the blackness and darkness that await the impenitent soul—I charge you by all these to yield your heart to the Lord tonight, if you have never done it before. Could you possibly have a better time, a better moment, for doing so than this, when the old year—spent in the service of sin and of Satan — is just passing away? Let it not rise in the judgment-day as a witness against you. I implore you, make up your minds, decide for glory this night, receive the Saviour now, believe on Him now, and go hence upon the Lord’s side, a witness to His grace and looking for His coming. You may never, no, never, get another opportunity to decide for Christ. Let it be tonight; and tomorrow rise, and begin a new year, a new life, a new history! Serve the Lord, and the Lord only. Oh, how blessed it is to be on the Lord’s side!

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Seekers for Light, Chancellor of the Exchequer's Dilemma or the Value of Scripture, A (8:26-40)

(Acts 8:26-40)

There is a peculiar charm about the story of this eunuch, and for this reason. The most cursory glance will give every person to understand how particularly deep is the interest of God in the man thus seeking light. Now, there is not the shadow of a doubt about it, that the man who is to be the subject of the remarks I have to make this evening, was a man in downright, deep-seated earnestness in his desire to get what he felt he needed. He had not the knowledge of God. No man would journey a thousand miles under a burning sun for a mere foible, and this man had certainly taken a journey of that length — if not greater. He was returning, not, however, having found what he wanted.

I believe, without any doubt whatever, that the eunuch was an anxious, awakened, inquiring soul, seeking light, and when he returned from Jerusalem, whither he had gone up “to worship,” clearly he had not got it. And, further, I am certain, that the man was in a great dilemma. “I thought,” we can hear him saying, “that when I went to Jerusalem, I should find the light as to the true and living God. I have been there, and yet I have not got it.” Somehow he had possessed himself of a copy of the Scriptures. Happy man! And he read them. Wise man! I wonder if you, my friend, have a copy of the Scriptures. Yes, oh, yes! Then do you read them? It is an immense thing to read the Scriptures.

I frequently come across people who have difficulties about the Scriptures, but these people are generally those, I find, who do not read them. I tell you that, because there are many such young men here, tonight. Nowadays, the learned and critical would-be friend of the young man says, The Bible is not for you to read, young man; there are so many difficulties in it, so many inconsistencies, so many flaws, and so many mistakes. Indeed Well, I have been reading the Scriptures now for longer than many of you here have years. For seven-and-thirty years I have been studying them, and I have not found any of the discrepancies that the learned man has found out. But I found out, when I began to read the Scriptures, that I was a great blockhead at understanding them. I was little able to understand them, for I was rather like the man in this incident, I could not understand them till a teacher came along. But, as I have gone on reverently reading, I will tell you what has happened. I have found that God has given me what He gave that man. He gave light, and the Scriptures were made plain. What used to be difficulties to me, I find now, to be exceedingly important, and exceedingly instructive; and that, what were apparently inconsistencies, really constituted some of the brightest gems of revelation that lie scattered, from the first of Genesis, to the last of Revelation, all along the page of inspiration.

No, depend upon this, God loves us a great deal too well to put into our hands a book that cannot be trusted. I say this soberly, and seriously, and I have no hesitation in saying — spite of the infidelity of the day — that I believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God, from cover to cover. And, in spite of all that is said against it, the more I study the Bible, the more do I find out its unity, its completeness, its reliability, its absolute impregnability against all the attacks of the enemy; and that it is the revelation of God to my soul. I have found light, and always increasing light, through the Scriptures. And to you I commend them most earnestly and fervently.

One reason, why I am pretty sure that this man was marked for blessing, is that he had got hold of a copy of the Scriptures, and though he did not get much light from them, he was reading them most attentively. We have the Scripture in our day, but shall I be charging you wrongly if I were to say to you, that you do not read them much? Now, you just learn a lesson from this man, I pray you.

One great charm of the passage before us is this — I see that God has His eye upon an anxious man; and He will, in a certain sense, interrupt the blessed work of His grace elsewhere — at least through a special channel — in order to meet that anxious man. My friend, you do not know how God loves you; it is not till your heart is awakened that you really know the deep interest that God has in the salvation of man. What could be more lovely than God's interest in this anxious soul. See what He does; He calls Philip away from his remarkable evangelistic work in Samaria, and sends him down into the desert to meet this man. That is God; it is not the only time He has done so. He has repeated this over and over again, but this is just a sample of the deep delight which God shows when He bends His eye upon the earth and sees the sinner groping after light, the sinner who will put himself to great labor and cost to obtain the light.

Let us look for a moment at Philip, and see what he was about at this time. Our narrative occurs just after the tremendous persecution, following upon the death of Stephen, who was rejected, and sent to heaven with a message from the Jewish nation to their King. Without doubt Stephen was the messenger who carried up that remarkable message of which the Lord speaks in the nineteenth of Luke. "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return ... but his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:12-14). Jesus had come to His own (the Jews) full of grace, but they refused Him, and cast Him out. Not content with that, when the Holy Spirit came down, they refused the further message of grace, which was unfolded in Acts 2-3 by Peter, and afterward referred to by Stephen, in chapters 6-7, where he narrates the guilt of the nation, and charges them with their sin. While "they gnashed on him with their teeth," he lifted up his eyes, saw the heavens opened, and "the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." In plain language, he beheld the glory-crowned Saviour. The Man whom they refused, and put to death, he saw crowned in glory, at the right hand of God. When he said that, they could stand it no longer. "They cast him out of the city, and stoned him" (Acts 7:58). They sent him after the Saviour, whom they had crucified, with the message, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

That was the end of the dispensation of God to the Jews. Though guilty of the murder of their Messiah, grace yet lingered over them, till Stephen's death completed the breach between the nation and God. You will remember that our Lord Jesus Christ, after He rose from the dead, commanded His apostles "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Further, He said, "And ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). But why begin at Jerusalem first? Because God always begins with the worst spot, and the worst man in this hall tonight will, most likely, be the one who will be saved tonight. Jesus said to them, Begin at the spot where My blood was shed; where they clamored for My death: preach forgiveness there, and then go to Samaria, and after that to the uttermost parts of the earth.

In fulfillment of this command, then, we find that Philip has gone down to Samaria. The gospel began to be preached in Jerusalem; but the Jew would not have it. The Holy Spirit's testimony was refused, and Stephen was sent up with the message, We do not want Jesus at all. Then the Spirit of God works in the widening circle, and down goes Philip to Samaria. He is elsewhere called "Philip the evangelist" (Acts 21:8), but he was not an evangelist to begin with. His was a case of a man faithful to his trust, and then developing the gift God gave him. Philip was one of seven men set apart to look after the treasury and the poor (see Acts 6:1-6). That is what you would call a deacon. He was appointed to look after the money, and to see to the poor; but after Stephen's death "there was a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem: and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles ... Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:1-4).

Philip finding himself at Samaria, sees he has nothing to do as a deacon, and thinks, I can tell the people about Jesus; and we read of him that he "preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5). Mark that! It is very instructive. It was not the first time Samaria had heard the gospel. You remember, that one day the blessed Lord sat by the well of Sychar, weary, and out came a wretched sinner, a woman, with an empty heart, and an empty water jug — figurative of her condition. She met Jesus, and He began to speak to her, in the fullness of His grace, about "the gift of God," "living water," and "eternal life" (see John 4:1-42). At length, in the conversation, He touched her conscience, as He said, "Go, call thy husband, and come hither." Come back to Me. She answered, "I have no husband." Oh! no, said the Lord, I know it, you are living in open sin. "Thou hast well said, I have no husband: for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband." Go, and call your husband, and come back to Me; come back to the Light. Light was beginning to work in her soul.

A little more conversation followed, and then you recollect she took refuge in ignorance, and that is what many a soul delights to do today. "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things" (John 4:25). "Jesus saith unto her, I that speak

unto thee, am he" (John 4:26). It is very noticeable that there are only two people to whom the Lord in His travels through this earthly scene made a revelation — a positive declaration of Himself. One was this outcast sinner of John 4, the other the outcast saint of the ninth of John. The blind man is cast out, and Jesus asks him, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered, and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee." It is not a bad thing to be an outcast: that is my experience. I know something about it. And what do you find when outcast? That you are in Christ's company, and cannot get along without Him.

The Lord reveals Himself to this woman, and she at once goes into the city and says to the people, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29) She was not afraid of Him. No, His grace won her heart. And was not she a sinner? I do not think there is one here worse morally than that woman. There is perhaps no person here tonight but fancies she was infinitely worse than they are, and yet this woman trusted Christ, and she went and said to everybody who knew her, "Come, see a man, that told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" And the Samaritans came out of the city, and got the Lord to go into it, and abide for two days. And then, you remember, they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the "Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). There was a good deal of work done in Samaria then, and it did not stop when Jesus left. It went on, and in Acts 8, I find the illustration of the words used by the Saviour in John 4, "One soweth, and another reapeth" (John 4:37). Philip, coming down into Samaria with the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ, reaps, for we read, "And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake" (Acts 8:6). There must have been a marvelous work. People nowadays do not believe in conversion; but when I come to Scripture I find a whole city moved. And Samaria was no small city, though not perhaps as large as the town you and I dwell in.

Well, the evangelist came down and preached Christ. Why Christ? for you will see presently that he preached Jesus to the eunuch. Why Christ? Because He was the ascended One. The Samaritans were to know that the One whom the Jew had refused — the Jesus whom they had once had in their midst — was now the exalted One at the right hand of God. Philip preached Christ, and what was the result? "There was great joy in that city" (Acts 8:8). It was a charming scene. I do not know what you feel, but if there be a place you can point out to me as the spot where God is blessing the preaching of His Word to the saving of souls — that place has a great attraction for me. Here, then, you see the work of God going on. Philip, used of God, preaches Christ, and Christ is being believed on, with the result that there is "great joy" in the city. I will ask you, my friend, have you found great joy from the preaching of Christ? I do not say, Have you ever heard the gospel? as who has not heard the gospel over and over again; but I will ask you, Has it produced great joy in your heart? May it do so tonight, if never before, as it did in the city of Samaria, with its populous multitudes, and in the solitary desert with its single anxious soul. Whether it be Christ proclaimed, or Jesus unfolded, the result of the tale, in either case, was joy.

And now, we read, "And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert" (Acts 8:26). Observe that it was the angel of the Lord. Presently when he comes within sight of the eunuch the Spirit speaks. The reason is this — the angel, in Scripture, is often used in the way of providence to direct people to the light, whereas the Spirit deals always with the soul. I will quote a scripture to you on this point. Perhaps you do not believe in the ministry of angels. Do you not? I do. "But to which of the angels said He at any time, Sit on My right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:13-14.)

I think the angel who was sent forth to minister to this eunuch would indeed be a happy angel, because he was sent forth to be a ministering spirit to an heir of salvation. That angel had the sense that he had a most important commission, as he came to Philip and bade him take that journey, and carry to that man the news that he was one of the "heirs of salvation." Are you, my friend, an heir of salvation? You say, How can I tell? I think if you were in earnest you could tell. Am I an heir of salvation? I would not dream of speaking to you tonight if I were not sure I was an heir of salvation.

The angel of the Lord tells the evangelist to leave his blessed work in Samaria and "go toward the south, unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert" (Acts 8:26). The journey was between fifty and sixty miles, and Philip might naturally think that nobody would be there. There were two roads he might have gone by, but Philip took the right road. When God sends a messenger to meet an anxious soul you may depend upon it He will see to it that His servant takes the right road. Here I see Philip took the right road. Perhaps you do not believe in the guidance of God in these minutiae. Well, you have only to read Scripture, and you will see how He leads His servants to meet an anxious soul. Let us follow this obedient servant.

"And he arose and went" (Acts 8:27). That is a lesson for every Christian. There is no hesitation in Philip's mind. The only business of the servant is to obey. When I have been preaching the Word in a certain town, people have often said, "You will come again?" "I do not know." "But surely you will come again?" "I do not know." "Why?" "I will wait till the bell rings," said I. "What do you mean?" A true servant does not move of his own free will, so to speak, he waits till the bell rings. The bell rings here, and the man of God, the servant who is called, is ready. The command is, You leave all this wonderful preaching and conversion in the city of Samaria, and go down to the desert. The desert! Reason may have said, Why, there is nobody to preach to there; there is nothing to be seen in the desert. What does Philip do? "He arose and went." He obeyed. That is the point He was a good servant, an obedient servant, and thus was fitted to meet His Master's mind. God had His eye upon an anxious, light-seeking man, and He had an obedient servant ready to carry the light to him.

"And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet" (Acts 8:27-28).

Some people would tell me he was not her Chancellor of the Exchequer. Well, I am not very careful about the label put upon him, but here I read, he "had the charge of all her treasure." He was a man thoroughly trusted, with an immense amount of money going through his hands. He had evidently a high place in the confidence of his royal mistress; but, notwithstanding all that, there was a want in his heart. This man, we find, had gone up to Jerusalem to worship. No doubt he was a Jewish proselyte. That is to say, he had heard of Judaism, had heard of the law, and that the land of Israel was the spot where God was to be worshipped. Seeking after God, he had taken this thousand-mile journey from beyond the southernmost confines of Egypt — how long he took the scripture does not tell us — but he reached Jerusalem. There was

where he expected to find light, and to find God. What did he find? What many people find in Christendom today — ritualism, formalism, sacramentalism, but not the light of God. No, he did not get that I do not doubt he found the temple full, and the priests sacrificing. But what had taken place? Why, the One who was Himself the antitype of every sacrifice had been there, but had been rejected! The temple was turned into a den of thieves, and the very house of the Lord had become a house of merchandise. The Lord Himself had been rejected; and I think I can see that Ethiopian looking for the manifestation of the presence of God, but seeing nothing but plenty of form, and plenty of ceremony. Of life — life according to God — he saw nothing. There was moral and spiritual death everywhere.

After a little he turned to go down to his house-disappointed — yes, I am free to say, in a perfect dilemma. “What shall I do now?” he thinks. “I have left the land of heathen darkness, to go to a place where I expected there would have been light, but there is none.” What had taken place? He, who was the light, was rejected. You recollect Jesus said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). He also said, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5). When the eunuch reached Jerusalem, the light of the world was not there; He had been transferred to heavenly glory. There was no light in Jerusalem. There was plenty of form, plenty of ceremony, plenty of ritual; but the whole thing was empty profession; and this poor man, disappointed, and in a deep dilemma as to where the truth and the light of God were to be found, turned his steps homewards, not having gained one single bit by going to Jerusalem! Dear man what he really wanted, was not Jerusalem, but Jesus. That is what you want too, my anxious friend. What does Jerusalem represent? What I find people in great numbers believe in today — religious forms, and observances. Stop a bit, though. Have you Jesus? Do you know Jesus? The eunuch knew not where to find Him. He may possibly have heard of the death of the Lord. He may have heard how He was refused by the people. He may also have heard of Stephen’s death. These things I cannot say. He makes himself, however, the possessor of a portion of Scripture, and with this priceless treasure in his possession, though he did not yet know its value, he takes his way home.

We find him in his chariot, reading the prophet Esaias; and, depend upon it, now as then, if you can only find a man that has got hold of the Scriptures, and is reading them, you will notice that God will send some Philip to that man’s side, sooner or later. Yes, if you are in downright earnest to get the truth, you will get it. This man was in earnest in seeking for light, and the knowledge of God. God saw this, and prepared the way for his receiving what he sought. Do you say this is a strange case? I could tell you of numberless cases such as that. Let me tell you one.

Not very long ago, one Monday morning, there was a telegraphist at work in the west of England. The young man was in very deep anxiety about his soul. He had been awakened by God’s Spirit, and he was an anxious, troubled man. He knew he was not right. He longed to have Christ. On the Lord’s day previous he had gone to three separate places of worship, in deep desire that he might get something for his troubled soul. He got nothing. Monday morning came, after he had spent a sleepless night in anxiety about his soul, and he went to his duties.

Feeling that he would go mad if he did not get relief and forgiveness, he was in the act of prayer to God when he heard the peculiar tick-tick that let him know his station was called for. He went to his instrument, took out his pencil, and wrote down the name and address of the sender of the message, and then the name and address of the addressee. Then came the message, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7). Repeating the message, he cried, “Thank God, I am saved: I have got it: I see it!” And he said, telling a friend of mine afterward, “That ‘LAMB OF GOD,’ that ‘REDEMPTION,’ that ‘BLOOD,’ that ‘RICHES OF HIS GRACE,’ went right down into my poor heart, and no one in the whole world could have had greater joy than I had that Monday morning.”

God caused that telegram to be the means of bringing peace to that young man. What did he do then? He wanted to see to whom the telegram was sent, and so, instead of giving it to the telegraph boy to deliver, he went himself with it, so that he might see who was the recipient of the message. He carried the telegram to a house not far off, and to the young girl who opened the door he said he had a telegram for So-and-so. “Ah! that’s for me,” said the girl. She read it, and she found peace also. Asked the meaning of the telegram, she said that she had been anxious about her soul for a fortnight. Her master was not a Christian, but his brother, who was a decided Christian, had been staying at the house for some time. Through his reading of the Scriptures with the family in the mornings and evenings, the servant girl became quite anxious. In her distress of soul on Sunday afternoon, she made bold to write to her master’s brother, telling him that she was very anxious about her soul, and begging him to kindly write, and tell her what to do to be saved. The Christian man sent the telegram instead of writing. Why? Because God wanted to give the young man peace. God is good; God is love; God is light; and God loves to bless you. He delights in blessing. That was a strange case, you say; I do not think it was any stranger than the eunuch’s.

“Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot” (Acts 8:29). It is a very nice thing when the Spirit guides you to the right person. He always does direct us to the right person, if only we are subject, and ready, like Philip, to go at the Lord’s bidding. Well, he goes near, and as he runs along by the side of the chariot he heard the traveler read. “Go near.” God does not say, Go into the chariot Oh, no! God says, “Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.” I see the evangelist; he runs along, and gets up to the chariot. The man in the chariot is deeply interested, and as Philip is running along he hears him reading. What was he reading? “The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not his mouth: in His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth” (Acts 8:32-33; Isa. 53:7-8). As he reads, all of a sudden he is startled by a voice, which he had never heard before, asking, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” (Acts 8:30). His answer was very simple, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” He owns his ignorance, and then he does another thing, “He desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him” (vs. 31). I should like if you would invite me to come that I might speak to you; do not you do it, if you do not mean it. If you do not want Christ, do not ask me; nothing gives me greater pleasure than to get a letter saying, “May I have half an hour with you? May I see you?”

But this man “desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.” He was in earnest. If he had not been in earnest, do you know what he would have said? He would have replied, “What business have you got to put such questions to me?” That is the sort of answer you get from careless people, when you ask them about Christ. They say, “What right have you got to speak to me about these matters? I keep these things to myself.” I will tell you why, my friend. Because you have not got very much to keep. I find that the people who, as soon as you draw near them, button up their coats tight, so to speak, do so because there is not very much inside. If there was much inside, it would burst out.

You will always find, in the person who has received the truth of the grace of the Lord, that his heart expands to others. That was just so in the instance of the telegraph clerk; the man got blessing himself as the telegram passed his way, and he wished to communicate it to others.

I do not ask you to request me to have a talk with you; but take this advice from a saved man: If you are not saved, let me implore you, get a downright, red-hot Christian, that is the kind of Christian to get, and set him down beside you. Will you do it? Oh! you say, I do not think I would like that. Ah! then you are not very keen. Take a lesson from the keenness of this man; he takes a thousand miles' journey to get the truth, and is willing to take up beside him this unknown man, if only he be able to open the Scriptures to him.

Well, Philip, I read, goes up, takes his place by his side, and then the passage of Scripture was discussed. It was a remarkable one, in the fifty-third of Isaiah, a part of Scripture which describes the terrible rejection of Jesus by the Jew. "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not his mouth." You have only to go back to the gospel history to see the fulfillment of the prophecy. When Jesus was taken before Pilate, He answered nothing before His judges. "In His humiliation His judgment was taken away." He was dealt with most unrighteously. "And who shall declare His generation?" Everybody refused him. "For His life is taken from the earth."

The eunuch does not understand the scripture, and now he says, "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself; or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." It was a lovely start he got — I mean, a beautiful starting-point for the evangelist. The scripture points to the very moment when the Lord, dying on the cross, was bearing the curse and sin of man upon Him. Beginning at that scripture, he "preached unto him Jesus." I have no doubt he carried on the story down through other scriptures; for I am sure of this, there is nothing helps a man to understand Scripture like other scriptures. It is all the Word of God, and you cannot give too much value to the Word. It is all sacred, and if you have to deal with doubting souls, let them have nothing but Scripture, and plenty of it.

He "began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." Why Jesus? Why not Christ? He brings before him all the personal grace of Him who bears that name. Jesus means, Jehovah the Saviour; and what a wonderful awakening it was for that heathen proselyte. He had gone to Jerusalem to find light, and the knowledge of God, but he found nothing there but formalism and ritualism. They had not satisfied his heart. But now Philip tells him of Jesus, the Son of God, who came to earth to suffer and die for sinners, and who, before His birth, was named Jesus — "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." Philip unfolds to him how Jesus came into this world that He might save man. He opens up the Scriptures, and preaches unto him Jesus. It is a charming name, the name of Jesus! Has it sounded sweetly in your heart yet? Oh! that name of Jesus; think of the grace of His life, His holy, spotless, sinless life! Think of what His death was; think of how He gave Himself in love for you, for me!

He told him of Jesus — Jesus the Saviour. Friend, I want to tell you of Jesus; it is Jesus you need, and Jesus that wants you, and Jesus who alone can save you. Jesus was the answer to the deep dilemma of the eunuch's heart. That is to say, he had not found anything in Jerusalem, and he could not understand the Scriptures; but he has here unfolded to him the story of the birth, the life, the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus; his eyes are opened, and light gets into his soul. He begins to understand the truth. All he sought, he found wrapped up in the person of Jesus. Oh! the blessed name, the charming name — Jesus! Is it attractive to your heart? Do you love the name of Jesus? Is His name precious to your heart? If you are a Christian, the name of Jesus is very precious to you. If you are not one of the Lord's children, you know very little about Him. I ask you this, however, What are you going to do with this mighty Saviour? Are you going to bow to Jesus? Are you going to render your heart up to Jesus? There is a day coming when you will be glad to render up your heart to Him. I ask you to receive Him tonight, for you cannot tell what is to be the next thing in your soul's history.

Christ is worth knowing as your Saviour; and I am sure if you had met that eunuch a little later, a few miles down that sandy road, and asked him about Jesus, he would have told you a marvelous tale of the joy the knowledge of that Saviour gave him. As they went on their way, I have no doubt Philip told the eunuch much about the death and ascension of Jesus, as well as the atonement that He had made; how He had met the needs of man as well as all the claims of God; how He had destroyed Satan's power, and put away sin; and how the grave had been opened, and the stone rolled away, not to let Jesus out, but to let you and me look in to see there the proof and trophy of His victory. The folded grave-clothes tell us that He annulled death. That, and much more, would Philip tell him. Presently they come to "a certain water," and what does the man say? I do not read that Philip said anything about baptism, but the eunuch says, "See, here is water; what cloth hinder me to be baptized?" Now, what did he mean by this? He had heard of the, life and death of the Lord, and he learned that Jesus had gone into the grave and risen again. He seems to say, "He came into this scene for me, and has died out of it; and now I should like to identify myself with Him, even if it be only in the figure of baptism. In this water I would like to put on His name." That is what the eunuch practically said, as he enlisted on the side of the rejected Jesus. So to speak, he took the shilling in his chariot, and he donned the red coat, and went at once on the parade-ground, as he was baptized. He took up this position — I would like to be stamped from this hour forward as a man who has got the name of the Lord Jesus upon him. That was the meaning of his being baptized. The eunuch took the name of Christ upon him, and he carried the Word into his own country.

It is not said that Philip told him to be baptized. No; but the man's heart was right, and he easily learned the truth. As they came up out of the water, we read that "the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip." No doubt this was a miraculous intervention of God; and mark, it was not only the eunuch who saw it. That man was not driving his own chariot that day; somebody else was driving it. He had a good equipage, and I expect there were a good many servants looking on. It is a fine thing when the master takes a stand for Christ; you will generally find that then a blessing comes to the servants as well.

And what is recorded next? "The eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing." I can say honestly, that I have gone on my way rejoicing for thirty-seven years now since the Lord saved me; and if you receive the Lord tonight, you can go on rejoicing as well. You get into your soul the sense —the Lord has loved me, and saved me by the value of His atoning work. If you do that, and believe God's Word, then you may go on your way rejoicing. Let me say this, a Christian is a man who really is entitled to be happy. I know people say to me, Christianity is a dull thing. Dull! why you never made a greater mistake! I remember a fashionable young lady coming to me and telling me she wanted to come to Christ. I met her some days afterward, and I put it to her, "Have you come to Christ?" She looked the reverse of happy. "I am trying to give up the world," said she. "Just that," I said, "you have not come to Christ." "Well," she said, "I have made a sort of profession of Christ, but I am not happy." That is not it at all. If you yield your whole heart to Christ, and believe the gospel, then you may go

on your way rejoicing, as well as the eunuch or the man who addresses you, because every Christian knows he is saved through the blood of his Saviour, and hence is entitled to rejoice in the Lord.

The truth is, that Christ has died, and risen again for us, and the Christian lives in the ascended Saviour. What gives a person joy and peace? Looking at Christ, feeding on Christ, and dwelling in Christ. There is nothing more blessed than to be a downright — what I call a backbone Christian. Do you understand me? I said to a young medical student today, “My dear fellow, you have no backbone in you.” And he said, “I quite feel that you are right, doctor; there is no earnestness, no go about me.” A man without backbone, you know, is a helpless sort of article. There is no fervor, no rigidity, no energy about him. What is wanted is the spirit which says, Let me know what I have to face, and by grace I will face it.

Now if you are converted, young man, hoist your colors. You say it was all very well for the eunuch, no one saw him. I do not agree with you there; I am sure a good many people looked on, and, what is more, he became the carrier of the gospel to his own country — for that it got in, there is no mistake. Would it not be a happy thing, my friend, if you were to take the gospel where you live? Let me encourage you. You make up your mind to believe this night; trust the Lord Jesus, and confess Him. Remember, “that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:10). If you were to do that, you would go on your way rejoicing.

This chancellor’s dilemma is over. Jerusalem yielded him nothing save the Scriptures. From them he hears of Jesus, believes Him, confesses Him, and witnesses for Him, and then goes on his way rejoicing. God give you, my friend, to do exactly the same.

Simon Peter: His Life and Letters, Tempting the Spirit of the Lord (4:23-37)

Acts 4:23-27; Acts 5:1-16

The connection between the early part of Acts 5 and the end of chapter 4 is easily apparent. In the fourth chapter we hear of the apostles, and those with them, having a prayer-meeting, and we get the result. “When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (vs. 31). This was the normal condition of things at the beginning of Christianity. Every one possessed the Holy Spirit, and knew it. As a Divine Person He was on the earth, and dwelt in every believer. The Church was a large company by this time. Five thousand men had been converted, but we do not hear of the introduction of a woman till the fifth chapter. Afterward we hear of numbers of men and women being added.

It must have been a lovely spectacle that met the eye, in these Pentecostal times, recorded in the end of Acts 4. The Church then made everything of Christ. It was not a community, formed and maintained, on a dead level, by law, but the result of the working of the grace of God in the heart, so that everyone was thinking of everybody else — no one of himself. It was the spontaneous outcome of Divine love in the believers, as they found out the place of blessing and privilege they had in Christ. We read that, “With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and great grace was upon them all” (vs. 33). Great power and great grace are here seen, and the two ever go together; wherever you have great grace, you will find great power.

“Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the price of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.” I have little doubt there was a common fund. Very likely many a young believer lost everything by becoming a Christian, but they counted it all joy to suffer shame for Jesus’ name. Yet none were allowed to lack, for all were supplied by the love of the rest. Those who had goods came and laid them down at the apostles’ feet, as they liked; there was nothing to compel, it was all voluntary.

This you have Barnabas beautifully illustrating (vss. 36-37). He makes a beautiful start, for there is the complete surrender of all that he had to Christ. I wonder if you, my reader, have started so. I do not believe there is a real start, if Christ has not become everything to the soul.

The beauty of this scene is great. It is a sort of spiritual Eden. But, alas! as the serpent entered that scene of joy, so does he enter this. Eden was the habitation of man, with God as a visitor. Satan entered to spoil it. The Church is the habitation of God by the Spirit, who has formed it by His presence. It is here seen in its first beauty formed of God, and being His habitation. The Holy Spirit of God dwelt there, and ruled for a while. Alas! the flesh soon entered, for Satan could not bear to see unbroken communion, an unalloyed attachment to Christ.

In chapter 5 the imitation of this lovely attachment of heart to Christ is before us. Undoubted! Barnabas was looked on as very devoted to the Lord. Things among men are often merely imitative. We have such hearts that even the desire to seem devoted may be imitated, and, evidently, Ananias and Sapphira desired to appear as devoted, in the eyes of men, as Barnabas really was. Alas!! they did not think of how their actions would appear to the Lord. Ananias posed as one who would appear more devoted than he really was; but God will not be mocked. Ananias appears in the guise of a man devoted to the interests of Christ. Peter comes to the front again, and, led of God, at once detects this unreal state of matters.

“A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?” Did that man tell a lie? We do not read, at that moment, of any words being spoken. He came and laid down his money at the feet of the apostles, for the common need of all. But God was there, and He could not be deceived. Peter simply says, “Thou halt not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost” (vss. 4-5). This man wanted to appear to possess a devotedness that was not real, but God was in the midst of His assembly, and the unreality was detected, exposed, and judged by Him. How solemn! Yet, if there be anything that it is truly blessed to learn, it is that God is in the midst of His people, in the bosom of the assembly, and He will have reality. What burning thoughts must have possessed Ananias’s soul at that moment, as he

felt — God has detected me.

"I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified." God had long ago said, as He judged the impiety of Nadab and Abihu (see Lev. 10:8). They offered strange fire, and died. Again, Achan took of the accursed thing, and died too (Josh. 7).

Here Ananias dies, for the Lord will have reality. The two priests betrayed impiety; Achan, cupidity; Ananias, unreality. These are solemn lessons. The Lord would have every one of us weigh them in His presence, and feel that it is a solemn thing to enter God's assembly, and to take His name upon our lips. I believe the nearer we get to the truth, the more sure we are to be detected if we are not real. If you want to have mammon inside, with a cloak of religiousness outside, do not you come to the Lord's table. Do not come near the place where the Lord is, for you will be detected. Such is the lesson of Acts 5.

A little later Sapphira comes in, "And Peter answered and said unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much." She is bold, and defiant in her lying. "Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" God knew what had taken place — they had talked over the matter, and made an agreement. What did Peter mean by tempting the Spirit of the Lord? How could they do that? Israel tempted God in the desert, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" (Ex. 17:7). They were not sure of His presence among them. Ananias and Sapphira, evidently, were not sure if the Lord was in the assembly after all. But God was there! The great, the grand truth of the Acts is, that a Divine Person is dwelling on earth in the bosom of God's assembly. The Lord showed that His Spirit was there, by unveiling the heart of both husband and wife to His servant Peter, and then judging the evil and the evil-doers.

God is ever intolerant of evil in His assembly. He judges evil amongst His saints, just because He is amongst them. He cannot allow evil even where He does not dwell; how much less where He does dwell. The more His presence is manifested, and realized, the more intolerant is He of what is unsuited to Him. It cannot be otherwise. God is holy, and He will have holiness among His saints. What makes this scene so sad is the subtle way in which the evil came in to at first corrupt the Church. Ananias and Sapphira pretended to follow an impulse of the Holy Spirit, whose actual presence they disregarded — yea, even doubted — and they fall dead in the presence of Him whom in their blindness they forgot they could not deceive, though they might deceive His servants.

No testimony to the presence of God in the assembly could be more mighty, albeit that it be most painful in its effects. The presence of God in the midst of His own is a truth of the deepest importance. Its seriousness is only equaled by its blessedness.

But, you ask, had Ananias and Sapphira been really converted? Were they Christians? I do not know. They were, outwardly, members of God's assembly on earth, and they were unreal in the position they occupied. The hand of the Lord came upon them in judgment; and, as a direct result, "great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." The assembly itself, and those outside it too, were greatly moved. All felt God's presence was there, and, as a holy consequence, "of the rest durst no man join himself to them." People were not in a great hurry to come into God's assembly in those days. Those who wanted to be thought something of, said, It will not do to go in there; if we are not real, we shall be found out. I fancy I see a number of half-hearted souls, hangers-on round the divinely gathered company of that day, and when the news comes out that God would not have unreality, they feared to go in.

"And of the rest durst no man join himself unto them; but the people magnified them," is a striking word. "The rest" were clearly those who had some place in the world; religious or otherwise. They fear to offend the world that has given them a position; for the more place man gives us the less we like to forfeit his approval. "The people," — the common people, I presume — however, were not so affected by the world's favor, or its fear. They had nothing to lose, and everything to gain by receiving Christ; and being simple they received the truth. Among them were found plenty of real souls. "Multitudes both of men and women," "were added to the Lord." Here, after Sapphira, we have the fact noticed of the introduction of women into the assembly, and they come in, in multitudes.

I believe the lesson we have to learn from such a solemn scene is, that God's eye is on us. He keeps a long look-out, and eventually always deals with unreality; but if a soul is simple and honest, it says, and loves to say, like the Psalmist, not only, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me," but adds, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa. 139:1-24). The simple and dependent soul that clings to the Lord is always safe, and always kept.

Night Scenes of Scripture, Night in Prison, A (16:6-40)

(Acts 16:6-40)

The events related in this sixteenth chapter of Acts have a peculiar interest for us as Gentiles, because, you will observe, this was the first time that the gospel got into Europe. Oh, what infinite mercy that God has sent us the gospel of His grace. The way in which it comes out is exceedingly interesting. The Apostle Paul is going on with his work in Asia; he tries to go this way and is hindered, and then he tries to go in another direction and is hindered again, and he does not know what to do. God sends him a vision in the night: he sees a man of Macedonia beckoning to him, and saying, "Come over, and help us." Nothing could be plainer than this: here was a man who felt his need. "Come over, and help us," is the language of a needy man.

Paul wakes up, and evidently understands the vision: "Assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them" (vs. 10). He was at this time at Troas, a large maritime city of Asia Minor, and there gathered assuredly that the Lord would have him preach the gospel in Europe. Immediately, therefore, he goes down to the harbor, and finds a vessel ready to take him over. And God gives him a fair wind, for he gets across in a day and a half, whereas you will find that when he is coming back he takes five days (chap. 20:6). The Lord loves to send the gospel to sinners, and I think the Holy Spirit delights to record God's readiness to meet the needy soul. There was a hungry heart in Macedonia, a needy sinner, and God orders everything so that His messenger with the gospel of His grace may reach that needy one speedily. Is there a needy soul here tonight? I have glorious news for you, my friend. I delight to tell you that there is not a need in your heart that my Savior cannot meet; there is not a need of your soul that the Son of God cannot supply, and therefore you need be no longer

wretched, peace-less, joyless, if only you will believe God's message.

Well, the voyage is made, and Philippi is reached. Paul and his company go into the city, and they look all around for the man, but they do not see him. They find quite a number of women going to a prayer-meeting, but the men of the place evidently thought that a waste of time. Most young men think it rather a poor thing to go to a prayer-meeting. Well, never mind, dear women, if you want salvation God has it for you, if the men will not have it. No wonder a blessing came when we find these earnest women constantly going to prayer.

I believe, if we could trace it out, that we should always find that where there is a real work of God's grace it has been preceded by much prayer. I do not gather that there was any set preaching to these women on the part of Paul and his companions. From the words which the evangelist Luke uses it would seem that they had just a little free conversation: "We sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither." I do not know anything better than that. I believe there are far more people converted by earnest Christians sitting down by their side, and having a quiet talk with them, than by sermons from pulpits, or preachings from platforms. The gospel in Europe begins, I do not say with an after-meeting, but with that which has the character of an after-meeting. Sit down by the side of a needy sinner, and tell what you know about Christ — that is what Paul, and Silas, and Luke did here.

The next thing we read is that Lydia's heart was opened. Clearly she received the gospel. I have no doubt that Lydia was an anxious soul, an inquiring one, who knew herself a guilty sinner, but anything she had ever heard up to that moment had not met her soul's need. And if you, beloved friend, have never met the Son of God the Savior, if you do not personally know the Lord Jesus Christ, there is a want in your heart that nothing but Himself can satisfy. Be sure of this, that let men have what they will here, if they are without Christ, they are unsatisfied. The fact is your heart is too big for the world to fill. Money will not fill it, and pleasure will not fill it. No doubt many go on in a careless, untroubled sort of way, but there is a need, a want, a void in the soul which is never met till Christ is known.

Such a void, no doubt, was in Lydia's heart, and, oh, with what gladness does this simple anxious woman hear the glad tidings of the blessed Savior, His coming into the world, His life, His death, His resurrection, the descent of the Holy Spirit, the joyful news of forgiveness, and pardon, and peace through His name! Her heart was opened, she drank in the good news, and when her heart was opened, her house was opened too. She received the gospel of Christ into her heart, and she received the servants of Christ into her house (vs. 15). She came boldly out for the Lord; she put on Christ; she was not ashamed to own the Lord; she took the shilling, as we may say, by the river's bank, and she put on the regimentals immediately after. With her household she took her stand as being on the Lord's side. It was a beautiful start for possibly the first follower of Christ in Europe.

She was a godly woman, and very often the women are ahead of the men in the things of God. Very likely in this room there are young men utterly unconverted, who have converted sisters, and praying mothers. The fathers, perhaps, are unconverted too, they are busy making money, and getting on in the world, but, thank God, they have praying wives. May those men be converted tonight, and the boys too! Beware that you do not think lightly of a pious, earnest, prayerful woman; you ought to thank God if you have such in the circle of your acquaintance. Perhaps your conversion to God may be in answer to the prayers of such a woman. Do not make light of it, for mark, if you are not converted to God you will, you must be, damned, for all eternity. I do not mince matters; God does not; for your soul is at stake, and His truth is at stake also.

What did God send Paul to Europe for? To show the way of salvation, and a woman was the first to find it. Lydia, having learned the way of salvation, immediately ranks herself on the side of the Savior. She is real; she has the courage of her convictions. Would to God you had! If you are a converted man, or woman, and have never yet truly confessed Christ, the Lord give you grace to do so now. She not only confessed with the lip, but in deed: "She besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us" (vs. 15). I think the heart of the Apostle Paul was exceedingly happy when he found himself under Lydia's roof. Thank God, he could say, I have got the first convert in Europe, and the work will now spread; and truly it did.

Now the devil does not like that sort of thing, and if he can hinder the work he will. First he tries to spoil the work by what I may call patronizing the apostles. He puts a poor girl, "possessed with a spirit of divination," the slave and tool of Satan, upon the track of the apostles; and day after day she follows them, saying, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation" (vs. 17). The devil tries to mix himself up with God's work, in order to discredit it. It is always so: wherever you find God working, be sure Satan will come in, and try to spoil it. I am afraid most of us would have accepted this girl's testimony, it sounded so fair. But the Apostle Paul would not have Satan's help in proclaiming the truth of God.

Lydia had been manifested by the gospel at the river's side, and now this poor slave of Satan must be manifested by the word of the Lord. So Paul "turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour." Immediately there was a great uproar, and why? Because the masters of this poor damsel saw that their money-making had been stopped. When you touch a man's pocket he begins to wince; nothing shows sooner where a man is. The moment these men see that the hope of their gains is gone, they are in a rage, catch Paul and Silas, bring them to the rulers, in the market-place, stir up the people, and put the whole city into a tumult.

I do not doubt Satan thought he had put a stop to the spread of the gospel in Europe when these two servants of the Lord were taken. They received summary justice, and without more ado were stripped, beaten, and handed over to the tender mercies of a brutal, callous man, the jailer of the city prison, who, commanded to keep them safely, "thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks" (vs. 24). This Eastern dungeon was not at all like the prisons of the nineteenth century, but a damp, loathsome place, such as Roman cruelty knew how to prepare in the way of a prison. The jailer takes evidently a sort of brutal pleasure in thrusting God's servants into the inner prison, and then making their feet fast in the stocks.

But this is the man God is going to save. This is the man who is marked out by grace to be truly converted to God. Having effectually secured the servants of the Lord, as he supposed, he left them in this horrible dungeon, with their feet fast in the stocks, and himself retired to sleep. No doubt the enemy thought that the work of the Lord was arrested. But you cannot check the grace of God, or the energy of the Spirit of God, and what looked like a great defeat, became really the opportunity for a wondrous display of divine grace, and the winning of a victory that only God could win.

But midnight approached, and what was heard in that prison? These two men, Paul and Silas, were praying, and singing praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them. If anyone had been passing by outside that night, who did not know the circumstances of the case, he would have concluded that they were having a good time in there; but what was the fact? Their feet were fast in the stocks, their backs were sore, and bleeding from the stripes they had received; they were hungry, cold, and comfortless, and yet they were not only praying, but praising. They were exhibiting the character of holy priests, and were soon to act as royal priests. As holy priests they were turning to God in prayer and intercession, and offering up to God praise and thanksgiving. They were able to thank and bless the Lord in the most adverse circumstances.

Now see what followed. God stepped in. It was midnight, and as the other prisoners heard what was going on, these songs of praise going up to God, we can imagine their astonishment. The particular nature or character of their prayer we are not told, but it strikes me very forcibly that it was connected with the testimony of God which they had come to render at Philippi. While others might be buried in slumber, and darkness reigned, the cry of prayer was going up from these two devoted servants of God for the testimony of Christ, and God heard them. He heard their prayer, and He answered it in this remarkable way: "And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed" (vs. 26). God answered the faith and confidence of His servants in this instance by an earthquake, and not only one earthquake, I think, but by two. There was a physical earthquake which shook the prison at Philippi to its very foundations, but this became the means of a moral earthquake in the soul of this poor godless heathen jailer, and he wakes up to find where he is, and what he has been doing.

God had stepped in; the prison was shaken, the doors opened, and every prisoner's bands loosed: "And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself." Have you ever been wakened up? If you have been going on hitherto listlessly, and carelessly in view of eternity, without the forgiveness of your sins, and without the possession of salvation, and of peace with God, you are really asleep, — asleep on the very verge of eternal woe, and I should thank God if anything you may hear tonight could awake you. I should like to be to you tonight like the shipmaster to Jonah when he came and put his hand on him and said, "What meanest thou, O sleeper?" I would say to every careless, unconverted, unsaved soul, that hears me this night, "What meanest thou, O sleeper?" Awake to the reality of your state as a sinner, to the holiness of God, to His righteousness, to His claims upon you, to the realities of eternity, Be roused, if you have never been roused before! You need not be roused by an earthquake. No, it may be by the still small voice in which God often speaks.

God has various ways of waking up a soul. Here in Philippi was a man whose course had been one of ignorance of God, and brutal harshness in the exercise of his prison duties, but God had His eye upon him for mercy. The intervention of the earthquake was undoubtedly a testimony that God was pleased to give

in connection with the introduction of the gospel of His Son into Europe, but it was also His direct interposition to reach this man. First he was rudely awakened, and finding the doors open, and every one's bands loosed, he immediately inferred, "The prisoners are all gone, and my life is not worth preserving." The rule that applied to Roman jailers was that the jailer's life went for the life of the prisoner whom he had lost. He concluded that the prisoners were gone, and his own life therefore forfeited, and he was just on the verge of committing suicide. We are told in history that Philippi was notorious for the number of its suicides. It was quite a common thing for men thus to hurry themselves into eternity, little knowing what lay before them, and here was this wretched jailer about to hurl himself into eternity in all his guilt and godlessness.

But note how beautifully the grace of God interposed. The voice of God's servant, whom he had treated so rudely and cruelly a few hours before, was heard saying, "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here." See the effect upon this man. It was the earthquake that woke him up out of his sleep, yet I do not think it was the earthquake that touched his conscience, but this, that he heard a man, whom he had so lately treated in the most brutal manner, calling to him in the most tender, loving way, and preventing him from taking away his own life, which he otherwise would have done. Is not that a lovely word for every sinner, "Do thyself no harm"? How many are doing themselves harm, fighting against God, fighting against the truth, refusing to bow to Jesus.

That word of affectionate pleading went to the heart of the poor wretched jailer; his conscience was reached, he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas. It was in the darkness that Paul had spoken, and the jailer must have thought within himself: "How in the world could that prisoner know that I was going to make away with myself? How could he know what I was about in the darkness?" He had a sense in his soul that God was there. Had he not heard of the preaching of these men? Had he not heard of Lydia and her household being converted? Had he not heard it proclaimed, "These are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation"? He called for a light. When a man begins to think seriously about the concerns of his soul, he always wants light. And I will tell you another thing: I never knew a soul come out of nature's darkness into the light of the gospel, that, as the truth began to dawn upon it, did not say, "I begin to see it."

A young man said to me only yesterday, as I was seeking to put the gospel before him, "I cannot see it." What a soul wants is light from God, and, thank God, He gives light. You have no need to call for it, it is shining before you. The precious Word of God is effulgent with light, both as to the ruin of man, and as to the salvation of God. It unfolds your lost condition, and it unfolds the Savior and His finished work. The darkness is past, and the true light now shines. The light of the gospel is now for anybody and everybody it is for whosoever will.

No doubt this poor man was in a great state of trepidation. He came trembling; he was in real exercise: he was an awakened sinner. A little while ago he was a careless sinner, doing Satan's work, but now by the grace of God he became an exercised man in the throes of the new birth, and deeply convicted of his sinful state. Have you ever been convicted? Have you ever gone to God in this condition, seeking light, and trembling with the sense that you have sinned against Him? If not, I beseech you, hear the voice of God's Word declaring that you have sinned, for "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." But, thank God, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." In the very scene of our sin, and ruin, misery, and degradation, God has stepped in, and brought salvation to us in the Person, and through the work, of His own beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

This awakened, convicted man now brought out Paul and Silas, and put to them the most momentous question that a man could ask, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He had heard before, no doubt, that these men showed "the way of salvation," but those words had no

meaning for him. Now his eyes are opened, his conscience is aroused, he sees that up to this point he had been on the road to eternal damnation. You must remember that up to this hour he was a poor dark heathen, who had never heard the gospel, who had never heard of Jesus, nor of the love of God, but now, awakened, and convicted, with a sense of his sins pressing on his soul, he cries out, "What must I do to be saved?" Let me inquire of you; have you ever in your soul's history passed through a moment like this? Have you ever got into God's presence, bowed down with a sense of your sins, your guilt, and your need, and put this question that the jailer asked of Paul and Silas? I confess to you that nothing gives me greater delight and joy than to hear this question, the breathing of an agonized sinner, the expression of his soul's desire to get salvation. And, you may depend upon it, it was with gladness of heart that Paul and Silas heard the jailer's query. "What must I do?" he cries, because when a man is awakened, he always supposes there is something he must do, something which must be performed or brought forth by him, to put things right between his soul and God. But let us distinctly get hold of this, that nothing which you or I can do can ever repair the breach between our souls and God. Then can it not be repaired? Yes, thank God, He repairs it from His own side. It is the One who has been sinned against who repairs the breach, and bridges over the distance, so that we can be brought near to Him.

Do you remember, when our Lord Jesus Christ was on earth, that certain Jews came to Him saying, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" (John 6:28.) And do you remember His answer? "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." The doing is not on our side, it is on God's side; it is Christ's doing, not ours, which brings salvation.

Again, in Romans 3 the question, what a man is to do to be saved, is exceedingly simply answered: "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (vss. 27-28). Then in Romans 4 we read: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that WORKETH NOT, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (vss. 4-5). I know of no more remarkable statement in the whole compass of God's Word than that. Works and grace are in absolute contrast. Works would be something on my side; grace is something from God's side.

But what is the jailer told to do? God's answer to man's query is exquisite in its simplicity. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house," falls on the ears of the awakened sinner. How divinely simple. He had only to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and he would be a saved man. There is no word of anything that he must do in order to get salvation. This is a gospel that exactly meets helpless sinners without strength, and no wonder the jailer believed at once. His conversion was a rapid one indeed. One minute asleep in his sins, the next awake and deeply anxious about these sins — and straightway thereafter he hears the gospel and believes it, and rejoices in God with all his house.

But some of you say, I do not believe in sudden conversions. Do you not? I do. Most likely you never will believe in sudden conversions till you are converted yourself. Was not this jailer converted suddenly? He puts a plain question, and he gets a straight answer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." It was not himself only, but his household was likewise to come in for God's blessing.

See what an immense difference one word makes. What shall I do? cries the jailer. He is not told to do anything but believe. I know that people have got in their heads the idea of being saved by works, but you will find in Scripture that men are not saved by works, but by simply hearing and believing. Faith rests on God's Word, faith comes by hearing.

Take the history of the conversion of Cornelius the centurion, as related by Peter in Acts 11. Cornelius is told to send to Joppa for Peter, "who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved." You see, beloved friends, works are what spring from our side, and by works no man was ever justified: words are from God, and it is on God's Word that faith rests: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). "Hear, and your soul shall live," says the prophet (Isa. 55:3). Therefore the answer to the jailer's question is most beautiful: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

But you might say to me, What did this man know about the Lord Jesus Christ? I do not think he knew anything whatever about Him up to that moment, and therefore the next verse is very important: "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." They did not stop with merely saying, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," but unfolded the gospel to him; they brought out the glorious truth of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Observe, he was not told to believe on Jesus merely, but on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is very important, because this full title sets forth what the Savior is — He is Lord of all, His name is Jesus, which signifies Jehovah the Savior, and His character is that He is the Christ, the Anointed One of God. From this it follows that He is more than a mere man. Yes, indeed, were He not more than mere man, He would be no Savior for you and me. If He were not very man He could not stand in our stead, and if He were not the Eternal Son of God He could not rise to the height of God's claims.

I will ask you to turn for a moment to the Old Testament Scriptures, for I wish to show you that the One in whom I want your hearts to confide, while truly a man, is much more than a man. Look at Isaiah 45: "Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? Have not I the Lord? And there is no God else beside Me; a just God and a Savior; there is none beside Me. Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." If you are to be saved, it must be by looking to Him. And the next verse shows that every knee will have to bow to Him because He is God: "I have sworn by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear" (vss. 21-23). Now when I turn to the New Testament I find that the homage which is so distinctly claimed by God, as God, in Isaiah 45, is with equal distinctness to be rendered to the Lord Jesus Christ as man. (See Phil. 2:5-11.) As man "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

In lowly grace He became a man, but He was a striking contrast to the first man. The first man wanted to be like God, the second Man was in the form of God; it was not an object of rapine to Him to be on an equality with God, but He emptied Himself and became a man. What was apostasy in man, or angels, was perfection in Christ. Adam wanted to rise from manhood to Godhead; he left his first estate — which is apostasy — and, in seeking to get up, fell definitively. Christ emptied Himself, made Himself of no reputation, came down to earth taking a servant's form, and as man, in death accomplished a work by which God is glorified, and sin put away. What happened then? God raised Him

from the dead, glorified Him as man, and then declared that at the name of Jesus — the once humbled but now exalted man — every knee should bow. Every created being, angelic, human, or demoniac, must bow to the name of Jesus, and confess that He is Lord. Paul doubtless told this poor jailer of the Person of Christ, of His life, of His death, of His resurrection, of the value of His blood, as well as saying to him, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

Does anyone now ask, What have I to do to be saved? Romans 10 furnishes a very simple answer: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:9-10). Are you going to believe God’s Word tonight, and confess His Son? Will you yield your heart now to this precious loving Savior? You could not do better than imitate this jailer. The jailer heard the gospel, “Believe ... and be saved.” He believed, and he was saved. Manifestly he believed with his heart, and confessed with his mouth, for we read: “He took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.” He did not wait till the morning.

That man wanted salvation, and got it. He asked how he could be saved, heard how he could be saved, and the same night he “rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (vs. 34). He had been told to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ: Scripture here tells us he believed in God, for he had heard who the Lord Jesus Christ was, as well as what He had done. Now he was a converted man, a saved man, a rejoicing man, by simply believing God’s message, through His servants, concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. He was an emancipated man. Delivered from the power of Satan, his chains all burst, he was out of prison truly and spiritually, and he at once identified himself with the Lord’s servants, and the Lord’s work.

What a wonderful change did grace make in that jailer’s history. Saved and blessed, he was manifestly on the Lord’s side, and his whole life and ways bespoke the radical nature of his conversion. How different the way he dismissed the Lord’s servants to that in which he received them. “Depart, and go in peace,” are the last words we have from his lips, as in the morning he brought his guests out of his house. The lion had become a lamb. The servant of the devil had become the happy servant of Christ. What emancipation indeed is that which grace brings to sin’s captives through the sweet and lovely name of Jesus!

Seekers for Light, Jailer's Inquiry or Europe's First Convert, A (16:6-40)

(Acts 16:6-40)

There is a peculiar interest attached to the scene before us, on this ground, that the Spirit of God records here the entrance of the gospel into Europe. No European should make light of such a weighty fact as that. It is a wonderful thing the gospel, because it is the revelation of God to men; moreover it brings men to God. And understand clearly, you do not know the gospel unless you know God, and unless you have been brought distinctly, and personally to God, so that your heart can rejoice in God, just as the poor jailer did. I think I had better call him “rich jailer” now, for indeed he was a wealthy man from that night onward.

This scene is one of the most beautiful in this way, that it shows that there is no limit to the grace of God. Europe was perhaps not more godless than other regions, but it was in heathen darkness, and wallowing in the squalor of sin, governed by Satan. If I may so speak, God says, I will begin at the bottom: I will begin with the very worst man I can find. Now, the man we looked at lately, Cornelius, was what you would call a good man; a prayerful, pious, almsgiving man; a benevolent man; but here you have what would be called a downright, hardened servant of the devil. If there be a man here tonight who feels, I have served Satan thoroughly, my friend, you may get great hope from this chapter. The fact is there are none too bad for Jesus; but there are a great many people too good for Jesus. I have met scores of them; and there are some of that hoodwinked class in this hall tonight. They are too good for Jesus; they do not need salvation; they are not lost, hence they do not need Him. But here was a man who knew he was lost; but he was not too bad for Jesus.

Now see the way in which God brings grace to this needy man. We read in the verse which I commenced with, that Paul and his fellow travelers “had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia.” They were evidently pushing on to preach in the surrounding district when they “were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia.” That is very remarkable; because, if they had been left to themselves, they would have been working in Asia, and they would not have crossed the water at all into Europe. But the Holy Spirit stops them. I believe, friends, in the leading of the Holy Spirit: I hope you do. I believe in the wonderful fact, that the Spirit of God, the third Person of the Trinity, is upon the earth. I never pray to God to send Him; I hope you do not either. I never ask the Lord to send the Spirit. Why? Because He is here.

That is the great truth in the Acts of the Apostles, that from the day of Pentecost onwards, the Holy Spirit had taken up His abode on earth in the church. Our Lord announced this wondrous fact in John 14, saying, “I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever” (John 14:16). He came to do two things — to reveal the glory of Christ, and to minister blessing to those who believe; and in spite of the sin of the Church of God, the Spirit of God is here now. Sometimes people say to me, Why do you not pray, that the Spirit may come? Because I know that He is here. I pray that I may not grieve Him (Eph. 4:30); I pray that He may not be quenched in the assembly (1 Thess. 5:19-20); but I never ask — and I hope if you have done it hitherto, you will never do it again — for the Holy Spirit to come. He is here, and I will further add, that I believe the crying sin of Christendom is infidelity as to the presence of the Holy Spirit. That, however, is by the way.

The Spirit more than once forbade these dear servants of God to go in the direction they themselves thought to labor in, for “after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia, came down to Troas” (Acts 16:7-8). This was a large mercantile city, a very important one too, from man’s point of view, being populous, and opulent. While there, “a vision appeared to Paul in the night. There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 16:9). What a touching petition for an evangelist to hear, “Come over and help us!” Ah! it is a fine thing when — a man knows that he needs help. “And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them” (Acts 16:10). A happy conclusion! A most blessed inference! A conclusion charged with the

deepest import for those who come before us in the after-part of the chapter.

Paul recognizes that the Spirit had called him into an entirely new sphere, and over he goes into Macedonia. Thank God! he does go, and preach the gospel there. And now it has come to Edinburgh: I wonder if it has got into your heart; that is the point. The gospel is round about you in these days, but has it reached you? Are you a saved man yet? Ah! the Lord save you tonight, my friend; and if you have never known what His salvation is, may you know it tonight. I am not ashamed of the gospel. Why? It is the power of God unto salvation; and mark you, you cannot be saved by anything but the gospel; and you will be damned eternally if you do not receive the gospel.

Ah! you reply, I do not believe in damnation. I know you do not: you are one of a very large company, who will join hands with you in your infidelity, but that proves nothing. It is usually a multitude who run to do evil. But you may depend upon it, if man did not need salvation, God would never have sent His Son: He never would have sent the gospel. Therefore if I do not receive the gospel it is perfectly clear that there is nothing before me, but the righteous judgment of God in respect of sin. The point is this, man has sinned, and God will not make light of sin: we have all sinned, but before the day when He judges man's sin, God, in the most blessed grace, has sent His own Son into this scene to bear that sin, and sustain the judgment it demanded, that He might deliver the man who receives the gospel.

Here He sends Paul into Europe. I think his heart was immensely cheered that day, and that he said when he got his message, Thank God! I have got a new field. Nothing warms my heart like the opening up of a new field for the gospel, and seeing God work in it. I know that many of you are, what is called "gospel-hardened"; but, still, it is the simple story of the gospel that you need. You have heard it all your days; but there is nothing for you but the old simple gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing will take you to glory but it. You may have science and learning, but these cannot take you to heaven. You may polish your acts up as you like, but they will never get you an entrance into the glory of God. I will tell you what will give you an entrance — the precious blood of the Son of God, shed on the tree for sinners: that is the gospel. I think you had better accept this gospel. God give to you, to receive it tonight!

I am quite aware that this blessed old gospel is nowadays quite out of date, and therefore I am not up to date at all; perhaps you have discovered that already. Be it so; I have no wish to be up to date, which simply means gilded infidelity as regards God's Word. I prefer to believe the Scriptures, and I want to go back, and to carry you back to the faith of the people, who first heard the good news, and received it; who enjoyed it; who lived on it; who lived for it, and who would have died for it, if God had called them to do so. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 1:16); so wrote the man whom we are reading about just now. Are you ashamed of it? I tell you, there is a day before you, when you will be ashamed that you were ashamed of it. Ashamed of Jesus! God forbid! You may be ashamed of yourself: I will go with you there. You may be ashamed of your life, of your heart, of your ways and of your unbelief: I will go with you there. But ashamed of Jesus: God forbid! Nothing can reach your heart and fill it, except the gospel. It comes with the glad tidings of the love of God on the one hand, and the holiness of God, maintained in the cross of Christ, on the other hand. God's love is manifested in giving His Son, and the Saviour's love manifested in His death. By that death He met the righteousness of God; nay more, He bore our sins, that He might in righteousness deliver us. He has gone into death, and, by so doing, has annulled death, defeated the power of Satan, and delivered the believers.

Now, the Holy Spirit has come down to proclaim this. It is very good news to me; and you and I are in exactly the same position. You may think not, but it is the case. You are a poor sinner like me. You may have a little more money; you may have a little more learning; you may have a better status than I have; but when you are stripped of all these, and when you are revealed to yourself, as God sees you, you are a poor sinner in your sins. And that is what I was, and then Jesus saved me. And He wants to save thee. You had better let Him. You do not love the gospel! But the God of the gospel loves you; the Jesus of the gospel loves you; and the Holy Spirit, that proclaims the gospel, loves you, for "God is love." Hallelujah! it was love, therefore, that sent up these men from Troas to Philippi; let us follow them. "Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis" (Acts 16:11). I think that is very interesting. As soon as the Spirit of God came with the message to go to Macedonia, Paul and his companions went down to the harbor, and quickly found a vessel going to Europe. It was not a very long voyage, for they took only a day and a half. When on this gospel errand, they, so to speak, got a fair wind, and got over the distance in a day and a half; but, when they were coming back, it took five days: they then had contrary winds, I suppose (see Acts 20:6). Ah! God loves to send peace to the anxious, troubled soul. God delights in that, and often gives His evangelists a fair wind, to carry the message of peace the quicker to the troubled soul. His keen eye and loving heart note every soul craving for light, pardon, and peace. Such is God.

Well, they got to Neapolis, the seaport for Philippi, which was about nine miles distant. And they went "from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days" (Acts 16:12). I suppose when they got to the city they looked for the man who had said, "Come over into Macedonia and help us!" I have no doubt Paul looked this way and that way, saying in his heart, "Where is the man who wants the gospel?" Are you the man, my friend, who wants the gospel? I am looking for my man tonight. Paul looked for his man, but he did not find him immediately. But we read, "And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by the riverside, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither" (Acts 16:13). He could not find his man anywhere, but he found a lot of prayerful women. Thank God for the women that pray!

Women are often more earnest than men, and have much less of the coward about them. Young man, you are afraid of being thought a Christian, while that young woman of your acquaintance is bold for Jesus. You know perfectly well, that if she were to try and speak to you about Him, you would try to get away: I know you would. Young men think they are fine fellows when they play the fool, drink, curse, swear, and blaspheme; and yet lots of them are the greatest cowards possible, and would blush ruby if they were requested to stand up for Christ, and own Him before their fellows. Do not I know it? Does not your conscience tell you that you are a moral coward, young man? Oh, you say, but what would the fellows in the class think of me? They would laugh at me. Well, I say, let them! I was a Christian before I became a medical student: I used to be studying for the law, I was going to be a lawyer; but when I became converted I did not think that the law and grace mingled very well, and so I went to medicine. That is the real truth. Where I was, studying in London in 1861 at first there was no young fellow Christian: none of the students were on the Lord's side. And, you say, what did you do? Well, I tried to make them Christians; though, of course, I could not; but I spoke to them of Christ, and looked to God to bless them, and I am thankful, some of them turned to the Lord. Of course they made fine fun of me: they twitted me, and jeered at me; but I just turned to them, and said: "All right, my boys; you are welcome to your fun; but I am better off than you are, because I have got a Saviour, and you have not. I have salvation, and you have not." They soon gave me a wide berth.

If there is any one here tonight afraid of hoisting his colors, I would like to tell him what an old Christian lady said to me. She has been a Christian for over fifty-two years, and as she sat this evening at my tea-table, she said, "Doctor, I think there is one thing we ought to do!" "And what is that, madam?" I asked. "We ought to be loyal to our colors." "That is exactly it," I said. First of all, my friends, get Christ; get to know Him, and then confess Him. Be loyal to your colors. Ah! but you say, I would not care to be seen at a prayer-meeting. No, you say, it is only fit for women. Thank God for the women that pray, I say again. Thank God for the praying mothers, praying sisters, and praying wives. I say this from the bottom of my heart, for when the Lord converted me, though I did not know it then, I found out afterward that I was fairly netted in prayer. There were people praying for me all over the country, although I did not pray for myself. Others prayed for me, and there were a good many women amongst them. My dear old mother, who has gone to heaven since, prayed for me, and how glad she was when she heard that I was converted. And do you not think your mother would be glad if you were converted tonight, my friend? When mine read the letter that I sent, telling her that the Lord had saved me, I understand she wept for joy for three days even on: the tears rolling down her cheeks as she read again, and again, the letter, telling her that her youngest boy was turned to the Lord. When is your mother going to have that joy? When is she going to know that you are turned to the Lord?

At Philippi these women were praying, and let me tell you, I never knew much work going on without prayer; while, on the other hand, much work has often been the fruit of the prayers of women. One of the most interesting revivals I knew, took place a few miles from here, and more than two hundred souls turned to the Lord. I found out afterward, when I came to inquire, that three simple elderly women had met for nine long months, and had been praying to the Lord to send somebody into their district, to preach the gospel; and without my having any knowledge about it, the Lord said to me, You go and preach in that place. I never saw such a work before or since, and it was all due to these three women, who had been praying to God during those nine months. God always answers prayer. Fellow Christians, pray on! You will get God's answer of blessing in due time.

"And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by the riverside, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither." They had not much light, but they were anxious clearly, to get the gospel, and God's messengers very wisely sat down, and spake unto the women. I sometimes say, I think the gospel got into Europe in the character of an after-meeting. I mean, in what should be the character of an after-meeting. There was no preaching. I do not find that either Paul, or Luke, or Silas preached. They "sat down and spake unto the women." Do you know, if you Christian young men were to go in a little more for that conversational evangelizing, you would be amazed at what would be the outcome. I was talking to a young man coming to the meeting tonight He has only been converted six weeks, and he said to me, "Doctor, I think we who are turned to the Lord, ought to be showing our light." "Yes, certainly," I replied. "And do you not think we should try to turn others about?" "Most surely," I answered. "Well," he said, "it strikes me that Christians do not do that very much." I replied: "You are quite right. We should bear testimony to other people, but I am afraid we are too much inclined to relegate our testimony to other people — people called preachers — and think that it is their duty alone to do so." But that is not so; if you know Christ and love Him, you will tell anybody you know about Him. That is the way to spread the gospel, and it is wonderful how it will spread.

"They sat down, and spake to the women." Here there was a simple colloquial unfolding of the truth. No doubt, that is what took place, and what was the result? "A certain woman, named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14). This earnest woman had her heart opened. It is a great thing when the heart is opened: what do you think takes place when the heart is opened? The Lord gets His right place there. "And when she was baptized" — she publicly owned the Lord — "and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there; and she constrained us" (Acts 16: 5). Well done, Lydia! There is a nice woman for you. She is not afraid to identify herself with the Lord. She is the first in Europe to do so. I believe, in Lydia you have the first convert to Christ, in Europe. She identifies herself with the Lord's servants. First of all her heart is opened, and then the next thing is her house is opened. Is your house used for the Lord? If so, it is a very happy thing. If you do not use your house for the Lord, even though it be but one room or two, I do not think He has got a very big place in your heart What can I do? You can take in some servant of the Lord — not necessarily to stop with you — nor does it imply that you require to be able to extend hospitality. The thought is this: I mean to identify myself thoroughly with the work of the Lord. Lydia was a genuine woman: would that every man who hears me were as earnest and real.

And now I read, "And it came to pass, as we went to prayer" — the prayer-meeting was kept up — "a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying; the same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour" (Acts 16:16-18). Why did the Apostle Paul do that? may I ask. Why does he refuse the testimony of this deluded girl? She was simply a servant of the devil: she was possessed by the spirit of Python. Satan was governing her absolutely, although she went after them day by day, crying, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." Why would Paul not accept this testimony? The fact was simply this; he was spiritual enough to recognize that this was the devil trying to get his hand into the work of God; the devil, in plain language, was going to patronize the work of Christ, and that would not do at all.

I daresay, some of us, had we been followed about by that girl, crying, "These are servants of the most high God," might have thought that we were doing pretty well; and we would have been tempted to accept her help. But the devil can never help the work of God. Satan wanted to get his hand in, so that he might frustrate the work of the Spirit of God. Paul, however, says to the spirit, "Come out of her." It was Satan in his deadly opposition to the gospel, endeavoring to spoil the work. There are two principles you find all through Scripture — they are corruption and violence. In the garden of Eden the devil corrupts Eve; and what is the next thing? Cain slays Abel, that is, violence. It is the same in the scene before us. Satan tries to corrupt God's work, before Paul develops it. When Paul refuses the devil's help, note the change in his tactics. Satan tries to crush the servants of God, and violence comes out.

"And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market-place unto the rulers" (Acts 16:19). The fact is, if you want to touch a man of the world most effectually, the spot to touch is his pocket. There is scarce a man here tonight, but can be touched through his pocket. These men were touched there, for when Paul commanded the spirit, he came out of the girl. She was, in fact, delivered from the power of the devil, and that is what you want, my friend. I do not say you want to be delivered in exactly the same way. You may say you have no spirit of divination, which I quite admit, but nevertheless it is a solemn truth that the man

who is not under the power of the gospel, is under the power of Satan. When Paul was converted, the Lord commanded him to go to the Gentiles, "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18). Therefore you see that, until you and I are brought to Jesus, we are in Satan's power. I frankly admit that men do not like to own it. I know I did not care to own it, nor would I have owned it when I was unconverted, but I own now where I was till Christ delivered me.

But here was a woman completely under the power of the devil, and when she is delivered from it by the power of the Holy Spirit, there arises a storm. Her masters "caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market-place, unto the rulers, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city" (Acts 16:20). All sorts of false accusation are made; they do not get a fair hearing; their clothes are rent off them, and after that they are beaten. "And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks" (Acts 16:23-24).

I have no doubt the devil thought, I have put a stop to the gospel now. I have put a conclusion to the work of the Lord, now that I have got His servants shut up. Do you know when grace wins its finest victories? In the moment when everything seems against God, and against His servants. There was a victory to be won on this occasion; but the way to it was painful. The man whom Paul had seen in vision was in the precincts of that Roman prison. God had His eye upon him, and he must be got at somehow. He was not likely to come out to hear the gospel, so Satan, in attempting to stop its course, is made to carry it in to him.

The apostles are thrust into the inner prison, and their feet are put in the stocks. The jailor seems to take a brutal pleasure in his treatment of them. He does not say, "Come along; I am sorry I must lock you up"; but apparently serving his then master gleefully, he "thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks." Then, clearly, he went to get asleep. "And at midnight, Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them" (Acts 16:25). What a wonderful thing is faith! Look at the faith and energy of these servants of God. Think of their condition with bleeding backs, and cramped limbs, in that damp, miserable, wretched dungeon of a prison. The prisons which the Romans prepared for their prisoners were awful places. And yet, if you had been passing by that old prison, I think you would have stopped, with the question, What is that I hear? Why, they are having a really good time of it in there! Singing, do I hear? They seem to be very happy! What has happened? They seem uncommonly well off in that prison. True, they were profoundly happy, hence they "prayed and sang praises." Ah you cannot crush or shut up the heart of a man that has Christ in it. You cannot spoil his joy. Do not you see that the Holy Spirit always brings joy to the heart of the persecuted? Persecution does not damp joy: the very contrary, the more men persecute you, the brighter will you get. A little persecution would brighten us up wonderfully, my friends. I could not find a better illustration of that than is found here.

Now what do you think was the burden of those midnight prayers? I do not think their prayer was, "Lord, let us out." I believe their prayer to God was, "Lord, turn this to Thy glory; turn this to the salvation of souls; turn this to the blessing of precious souls in this prison; and, O Lord I keep those who have believed, and especially Lydia, keep them firm." Besides they sang. Songs ascended to God in the night seasons. Had it been you and me, my friend, I am not sure we should have been like Paul and Silas. We should probably have turned to each other, and said: "This is a very blue lookout indeed. Instead of going on with the preaching, here we are in prison." Indeed, we are very wishy-washy Christians nowadays, I fear; but look at the sturdiness of these men; look at their boldness and confidence in God. It is lovely.

But not only did God hear their prayers and songs, for we read, "and the prisoners heard them." I think I can hear the others saying amongst themselves, "Uncommon kind of prisoners these; poor chaps, they came in just a short time ago, and they had an awful beating outside; now their feet are in the stocks. Still, here they are, praying and singing, as if they were in a palace, instead of a prison." They were doubtless a great enigma to their fellow-prisoners, but they were simply acting as holy priests, just as they acted as royal priests a little later in the night. A Christian is a most remarkable person. He is indeed a wonderful man. He is a holy priest, and a royal priest. What do you mean by a holy priest? you ask. He has the privilege of offering the sacrifice of praise to God; and as a royal priest, he has something for other people. He holds up one hand to God in praise; he is a worshipper. In the other, he holds out to the poor and needy that which he has to give them; he is a benefactor. (See Heb. 13:15-16; 1 Peter 2:5-9.) The Christian is the most independent creature under the sun, as regards man, but hangs on God. He has salvation through the blood of the Son of God; he knows God; and he is here to witness for God. I wish I were a little more of the backbone Christian myself, for in this scripture I read how unlike myself were these men.

Here then they were sending up their music to God; and what a sight for heaven that must have been! The servants of heaven's Lord were shut up in prison by the devil, but he could not shut their lips, so they prayed, and sang praises to God, and the prisoners heard them.

That God heard them is blessedly manifest, for we read, "And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loose." God steps in, and the prison is shaken to its very foundations at His command. This was God's answer to the prayer of His servants. It was God's tribute to the cheerful song of His beloved witnesses: it was God's testimony to the name of His blessed Son. I do not think it was the earthquake that converted the jailor. There were two great quakes that night. The earthquake woke up the jailor, as you will see presently, from his slumbers; the second, which I had better call a soul-quake, woke him as to his state before God. It was not the physical danger that did that. God steps in: the old prison is shaken to its foundations; the doors are opened, and the bands are loosed. That is a sort of figure of what the gospel does; I will tell you, it produces a moral earthquake in a man. When you get under the power of the gospel, you collapse. You are laid hold of by God, and reduced to nothingness. A man told me not long ago: "I was in a meeting last night, where you were preaching about the precious blood of Christ, and it just seemed as though God laid hold of me, and brought me down, down, down; till I got down to the very dust in the sense of my sin, and guilt, and danger before God." It is the same principle here. It is a wonderful thing when God deals with a man; when you have the sense in your soul that the eye of God is upon you.

"And every one's bands were loosed." That is what the gospel does. It comes out, and sets the captives free. Emancipation is emblazoned on the flag of the gospel. Emancipation for the captive, the slave of Satan. That is what I get in this chapter: and the first thing is everybody is loosed from their bands. Have you received the gospel? Will you be the Lord's tonight?

“And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled” (Acts 16:27). The jailor is awakened. He became conscious that the doors were open. In a minute he says to himself, They are all gone; my life is forfeited. He draws his sword, and is about to commit suicide. He knows that his life will be taken in the morning, for that was the Roman law. If a jailor allowed a prisoner to escape, he had to forfeit his life for that of the man — he had allowed to escape. Historians tell us that Philippi was the most wonderful place for suicides. It was quite the fashion, and this poor man was about to launch himself into eternity. Is there a wretched sinner, a would-be suicide here tonight? Ah, friend! are you fit to go into the presence of God? Can you go into God’s presence, above all, with the sin of self-destruction upon you? Is there a man here — I have sometimes met them — who has determined to hurl himself into eternity, as this poor wretch was going to do? Stop man, are you fit to go into the presence of God? No, you are not fit, unless you are saved.

Just as this man’s sword touches his breast-bone there comes out from the darkness a loud voice. The voice of a royal priest utters these wonderful words, “Do thyself no harm: for we are all here” (Acts 16:28). That woke the jailor up. It was not the earthquake that produced the state of exercise in his soul, that you read of. It was the word from the lips of the royal priest, “Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.” He would ask himself, no doubt, How in the world could he know I was going to commit suicide? Here it is thick darkness, yet he has seen me. The Spirit of God was the Author of that word. “Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.” You, who are going on your way to eternal ruin, do you know what God says to you? You, sinner, who are going on in your own way, sporting with the things of this life, and turning your back upon Christ, do you know what He says by my lips tonight? “Do thyself no harm.” That is just what man is doing. The jailor heard the voice, and we read, “Then he called for a light.” Is that not very striking? When a man is touched by the Spirit of God, he always wants a light. I like to see the man who wants God’s light. You know what light does? It makes things manifest. True, this man called for a physical light; but do you not want spiritual light? If you do, you will get it. The jailor had the physical, and desired spiritual light, and he got it.

He was just at the doorway, and he “sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas; and brought them out” And at that moment there burst from the lips of the awakened man, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Who had said a word to him about salvation? Who had said a word to him about his sins? Who told the man that he was lost? Who pressed upon him the necessity for salvation? God can do a wonderful work in a very short time; and even this night, since you came into this meeting, I trust He has wrought in your souls, to make you feel that you need salvation. “What must I do to be saved?” is a wonderful query. He had received light from God, and the first discovery in his soul was this, I am a lost man; and so he cried, “What must I do to be saved?”

Have you ever taken your place before God with a query like that? Have you — let me affectionately ask you — ever put such a query as that? Have you ever, in the presence of God, asked, “What must I do to be saved?” If you have not, I believe the truth is that you have not discovered what the jailor discovered, that you are a lost soul. Oh may God show you that you are a lost sinner, and give you grace to turn to Him with a similar query; that is to get light, and knowledge, and salvation. “What must I do to be saved?” is the sinner’s inquiry. How beautiful is God’s answer “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” How charming is that answer! Was he to do some great thing? No! He was to believe the good news of the love of God, made manifest in His precious Son. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” There was not one word about works; works come in, in their proper place: there is no doubt about that — in the history of the Christian. But you do not work in order to be saved. As the hymn puts it —

“I would not work my soul to save, For that my Lord has done; But, I would work like any slave, For love of God’s dear Son.”

What works could you do, sinner? As a careless sinner, you bring forth “wicked works”; and as a religious unconverted man you can only bring forth “dead works.” Both wicked and dead works must be judged of God. Not to him that worketh, but “To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:5), is God’s way of salvation, and that the jailor heard that night.

But what did this jailor know about the Lord Jesus Christ? Till then nothing, so “they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.” The Lord Jesus Christ he was bade to believe on. His full name was given. Why was it not believe on Jesus; or believe on Christ? It was the Lord Jesus Christ he was to know: He was the Lord; the Lord of all. Is He not your Lord? If not, oh! let Him have dominion over you in future. He was also Jesus! What does that mean? Jehovah, the Saviour! “Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.” And further, He was the Christ, the anointed One, the exalted One.

But this was not all the jailor heard, for by the statement, “they spake unto him the word of the Lord,” I have no doubt, Paul brought out the tale of the birth of Jesus, and of His holy, gracious life; the story of His death on the cross when men put Him there; and how at that moment, was accomplished the work of redemption, which He only could accomplish; and how God laid upon Him the iniquity of us all; how He who knew no sin, was made sin for us; and how, after His suffering was ended in His atoning death, and the shedding of His blood, He was laid in the grave for three days. How that after the third day He was raised from the dead, and was received up into glory at the right hand of the Father. I think Paul told him more than that. He told him that, after Jesus had gone to the right hand of God, the Holy Spirit came down to testify of Him, to proclaim forgiveness of sins in His name, and to seal the faith of the believers.

This, then, is the answer to your question: if you want to be saved, you must believe on God’s Son. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Mark you! it is Christ, you must know. It is the Person of Christ who is the object of belief, the object of faith. Christ, personally, is the object of the soul’s faith, and the one who believes in Him gets the benefit of all the work He has done. I do not agree at all with an old woman, in Arran, who said to a friend of mine, who was pressing the gospel on her, “You make far o’er muckle o’ that word, believe, believe.” That let out a great deal. You cannot make too much of believing. If Christ has not hitherto been the object of your faith, may God give you now to believe on His blessed Son, and you will get what the jailor got. “Thou shalt be saved” is God’s assurance to the believing soul.

The moment you turn to Christ, the moment you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that moment you get salvation. The moment the sinner accepts Him, acknowledges Him, and confesses Him, that moment is salvation the present, and eternal portion of the believing one. You get what the jailor got. He got salvation; for, I find: “And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (Acts 16:33-34). He was told to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I read he believed in God. Why was that? What he had heard led

him to see that the blessed Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom he had been told, was really God; that the blessed One, who became Man, that He might die for his sins, and save him, was the eternal, blessed Son of God. Accepting that truth, and believing that truth, in the simplicity of a little child, he believed in God "with all his house." Mark that! Not only he himself, but all his house were marked for blessing. Paul had found his man, but he got a good many besides.

Truly this is a charming scene. The first man converted in Europe is just a sample of what God's grace is still doing. Look at the contrast — at one moment the slave of Satan, and in the very pay of the enemy. One moment doing the devil's work, as he thrusts the Lord's servants into the prison, and makes their feet fast in the stocks; and the next he is suddenly awakened — awakened by God — and is about to hurl himself into eternity, when he hears a word that arrests him, and he cries, as a lost man, "What must I do to be saved?" He hears the gospel, believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, confesses the name of the Lord, and then identifies himself with the work of the Lord. He is a saved man, a trophy of grace, indeed. A wonderful trophy was that man — do you resemble him at all?

The next morning the magistrates sent to him, saying, "Let those men go," and he came and said to Paul, "The magistrates have sent to let you go; now therefore depart, and go in peace" (Acts 16:36). What a change between the way he received the Lord's servants, and the way he dismissed them. Indeed, a wonderful change comes over a man when the gospel is received, and the jailor knew it full well as he said "Go in peace," the very words his Lord and Saviour had often used to others.

My friends sometimes talk about transformation scenes. I think this is one of the finest transformation scenes. The man has been a servant of Satan till that hour. In a moment he is transformed. He comes out, and is identified with the Lord's interests, and he takes up this position, while discharging his daily duties as a jailor.

You say that you are converted, and yet there has been no change in your life. I doubt very much if you have been converted, if there is no change in your life. Converted! What are you converted to, if your ways, your habits, and your manners are unchanged. Converted! No, no. Whenever God is working, Satan has a number of false converts about, in order to spoil the work. Ah! says some one, that is what upsets me. I do not think I shall ever make any profession, because those who do so do not walk differently. I do not think there is any reality in conversion. Why? Because you think some people inconsistent. Do not let that upset you. If the Spirit of God were not making real, genuine converts, the devil would not make false converts in order to spoil the work. Do not you be a false convert. Do not you profess what you do not possess. But if you know Christ, own Him boldly, hoist your colors, and confess Him.

The Lord give you to be on His side from this night forward, and not ashamed to confess the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour.

Christian Truth: Volume 2, Conversion of the Jailor, The (16:6-40)

Acts 16:6.40

The events related in this sixteenth chapter of Acts have a peculiar interest for us as Gentiles, because, you will observe, this was the first time that the gospel got into Europe. The way in which it comes out is exceedingly interesting. The Apostle Paul is going on with his work in Asia; he tries to go this way and is hindered, and then he tries to go in another direction and is hindered again, and he does not know what to do. God sends him a vision in the night: he sees a man of Macedonia beckoning to him and saying, "Come over... and help us." Nothing could be plainer than this; here was a man who felt his need. "Come over... and help us" is the language of a needy man.

Paul wakes up and evidently understands the vision, "Assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them." v. 10. He was at this time at Troas, a large maritime city of Asia Minor, and there gathered assuredly that the Lord would have him preach the gospel in Europe. Immediately, therefore, he goes down to the harbor and finds a vessel ready to take him over. And God gives him a fair wind, for he gets across in a day and a half, whereas you will find that when he is coming back he takes five days (chap. 20.6). The Lord loves to send the gospel to sinners, and I think the Holy Ghost delights to record God's readiness to meet the needy soul. There was a hungry heart in Macedonia—a needy sinner—and God orders everything so that His messenger with the gospel of His grace may reach that needy one speedily.

Well, the voyage is made, and Philippi is reached. Paul and his company go into the city, and they look all around for the man, but they do not see him. They find quite a number of women going to a prayer meeting. I do not gather that there was any set preaching to these women on the part of Paul and his companions. From the words which the evangelist Luke uses it would seem that they had just a little free conversation: "We sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither." I do not know anything

better than that. I believe there are far more people converted by earnest Christians sitting down by their side and having a quiet talk with them than by sermons from pulpits or preachings from platforms.

The next thing we read is that Lydia's heart was opened. Clearly she received the gospel. I have no doubt that Lydia was an anxious soul, an inquiring one, who knew herself a guilty sinner, but anything she had ever heard up to that moment had not met her soul's need.

A void, no doubt, was in Lydia's heart; and oh, with what gladness does this simple, anxious woman hear the glad tidings of the blessed Savior, His coming into the world, His life, His death, His resurrection, the descent of the Holy Ghost, the joyful news of forgiveness, and pardon, and peace through His name! Her heart was opened, she drank in the good news; and when her heart was opened, her house was opened too. She received the gospel of Christ into her heart, and she received the servants of Christ into her house (v. 15). She came boldly out for the Lord; she was not ashamed to own the Lord. She is real; she has the courage of her convictions.

She not only confessed with the lip, but in deed: "She besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us." v. 15. I think the heart of the Apostle Paul was exceedingly happy when he found himself

under Lydia's roof.

Now the devil does not like that sort of thing, and if he can hinder the work he will. First he tries to spoil the work by what I may call patronizing the apostles. He puts a poor girl "possessed with a spirit of divination," the slave and tool of Satan, upon the track of the apostles; and day after day she follows them, saying, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." v. 17. The devil tries to mix himself up with God's work in order to discredit it. It is always so; wherever you find God working, be sure Satan will come in and try to spoil it. I am afraid most of us would have accepted this girl's testimony, for it sounded fair. But the Apostle Paul would not have Satan's help in proclaiming the truth of God. So Paul "turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her."

And he came out the same hour."

Immediately there was a great uproar, and why? Because the masters of this poor damsel saw that their money-making had been stopped. These men are in a rage, catch Paul and Silas, bring them to the rulers in the market place, stir up the people, and put the whole city into a tumult.

I do not doubt Satan thought he had put a stop to the spread of the gospel in Europe when these two servants of the Lord were taken. They received summary justice, and without more ado were stripped, beaten, and handed over to the tender mercies of a brutal, callous man, the jailer of the city prison, who, commanded to keep them safely, "thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks." v. 24. This eastern dungeon was not at all like the prisons of today, but a damp, loathsome place, such as Roman cruelty knew how to prepare in the way of a prison. The jailer evidently takes a sort of brutal pleasure in thrusting God's servants into the inner prison, and then making their feet fast in the stocks.,

But this is the man God is going to save. This is the man who is marked out by grace to be truly converted to God. Having effectually secured the servants of the Lord, as he supposed, he left them in this horrible dungeon, with their feet fast in the stocks, and himself retired to sleep. No doubt the enemy thought that the work of the Lord was arrested. But you cannot check the grace of God, or the energy of the Spirit of God; and what looked like a great defeat, really became the opportunity for a wondrous display of divine grace, and the winning of a victory that only God could win.

But midnight approached, and what was heard in that prison? These two men, Paul and Silas, were praying and singing praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them. Their feet were fast in the stocks, their backs were sore and bleeding from the stripes they had received; they were hungry and cold, and yet they were not only praying, but praising. They were exhibiting the character of holy priests, and were soon to act as royal priests. As holy priests they were turning to God in prayer and intercession, and offering up to God praise and thanksgiving. They were able to thank and bless the Lord in the most adverse circumstances.

Now see what followed. God stepped in. It was midnight, and as the other prisoners heard what was going on—these songs of praise going up to God—we can imagine their astonishment. The particular nature or character of their prayer we are not told, but it strikes me very forcibly that it was connected with the testimony of God which they had come to render at Philippi. While others might be buried in slumber, and darkness reigned, the cry of prayer was going up from these two devoted servants of God for the testimony of Christ, and God heard them. He heard their prayer, and He answered it in this remarkable way: "And suddenly there was a -great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed." v. 26. God answered the faith and confidence of His servants in this instance by an earthquake, and not only one earthquake, I think, but by two. There was a physical earthquake which shook the prison at Philippi to its very foundations, but this became the means of a moral earthquake in the soul of the poor godless heathen jailer, and he wakes up to find where he is, and what he has been doing.

God had stepped in; the prison was shaken, the doors opened, and every prisoner's bands loosed: "And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself."

God has various ways of waking up a soul. Here in Philippi was a man whose course had been one of ignorance of God, and brutal harshness in the exercise of his prison duties, but God had His eye upon him for mercy. The intervention of the earthquake was undoubtedly a testimony that God was pleased to give in connection with the introduction of the gospel of His Son into Europe, but it was also His direct interposition to reach this man. First he was rudely awakened, and finding the doors open, and everyone's bands loosed, he immediately inferred, "The prisoners are all gone, and my life is not worth preserving." The rule that applied to Roman jailers was that the jailer's life went for the life of the prisoners whom he had lost. He concluded that the prisoners were gone, and his own life therefore forfeited, and he was just on the verge of committing suicide.

But notice how beautifully the grace of God interposed. The voice of God's servant, whom he had treated so rudely and cruelly a few hours before, was heard saying, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here." See the effect upon this man. It was the earthquake that woke him up out of his sleep, yet I do not think it was the earthquake that touched his conscience, but this: that he heard a man, whom he had so lately treated in the most brutal manner, calling to him in the most tender, loving way, and preventing him from taking away his own life, which he otherwise would have done. Is not that a lovely word for every sinner, "Do thyself no harm"? How many are doing themselves harm, fighting against God, fighting against the truth, refusing to bow to Jesus.

That word of affectionate pleading went to the heart of the poor wretched jailer; his conscience was reached; he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas. It was in the darkness that Paul had spoken, and the jailer must have thought within himself, "How could that prisoner know that I was going to make away with myself? How could he know what I was about in the darkness?"

He had a sense in his soul that God was there.

No doubt this poor man was in a great state of trepidation. He came trembling; he was in real exercise; he was an awakened sinner. A little while ago he was a careless sinner, doing Satan's work, but now by the grace of God he became an exercised man in the throes of the new birth, and deeply convicted of his sinful state.

This awakened, convicted man now brought out Paul and Silas, and put to them the most momentous question that a man could ask: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He had heard before, no doubt, that these men showed the way of salvation, but those words had no meaning for him. Now his eyes are opened, his conscience is aroused, he sees that up to this point he had been on the road to eternal damnation. You must remember that up to this hour he was a poor dark heathen who had never heard the gospel, who had never heard of Jesus, nor of the love of God, but now, awakened and convicted, with a sense of his sins pressing on his soul, he cries out, "What must I do to be saved?" And, you may depend upon it, it was with gladness of heart that Paul and Silas heard

the jailer's query. "What must I do?" he cries, because when a man is awakened, he always supposes there is something he must do, something which must be performed or brought forth by him, to put things right between his soul and God.

But what is the jailer told to do? God's answer to man's query is exquisite in its simplicity. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house," falls on the ears of the awakened sinner. How divinely simple. He had only to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and he would be a saved man. There is no word of anything that he must do in order to get salvation. This is a gospel that exactly meets helpless sinners without strength, and no wonder the jailer believed at once. His conversion was a rapid one indeed. One minute asleep in his sins, the next awake and deeply anxious about these sins—and straightway thereafter he hears the gospel and believes it, and rejoices in God with all his house.

We see what an immense difference one word makes. What shall I do? cries the jailer. He is not told to do anything but believe. I know that people have got in their heads the idea of being saved by works, but you will find in Scripture that men are not saved by works, but by simply hearing and believing. Faith rests on God's Word; faith comes by hearing.

But you might say to me, What did this man know about the Lord Jesus Christ? I do not think he knew anything whatever about Him up to that moment, and therefore the next verse is very important: "And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." They did not stop with merely saying, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," but unfolded the gospel to him; they brought out the glorious truth of the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Observe, he was not told to believe on Jesus merely, but on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is very important, because His full title sets forth what the Savior is—He is Lord of all, His name is Jesus, which signifies Jehovah the Savior, and His character is that He is the Christ, the anointed One of God. He is more than a mere man. Yes indeed, were He not more than mere man, He would be no Savior for you and me. If He were not very Man He could not stand in our stead, and if He were not the eternal Son of God He could not rise to the height of God's claims.

The jailer heard the gospel, "Believe... and be saved." He believed and he was saved. Manifestly he believed with his heart, and confessed with his mouth, for we read, "He took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway." He did not wait till the morning.

What a wonderful change did grace make in that jailer's history.

Saved and blessed, he was manifestly on the Lord's side, and his whole life and ways bespoke the radical nature of his conversion. How different the way he dismissed the Lord's servants to that in which he received them. "Depart, and go in peace," are the last words we have from his lips, as in the morning he brought his guests out of his house. The lion had become a lamb. The servant of the devil had become the happy servant of Christ.

Another Comforter, Gift of the Spirit, The (10:43-48)

These scriptures present to us a series of four occasions, in the Acts of the Apostles, in which the reception of the Holy Spirit, by men on earth, is distinctly detailed. This book is emphatically the one that details not only the coming, but the abiding personal presence, and varied actings of the Spirit of God upon earth. As I pointed out, you will find the Holy Spirit spoken of in this book over fifty times, and manifesting His presence in various ways. But the most important point, that could possibly be pressed on the soul, is this, that He personally is here. That is the burden of the Acts of the Apostles. From chapter 2 onwards we are constantly reminded of the fact, that there is a divine Person here on the earth, and that He makes His presence felt, and heard, in manifold ways—I do not say seen (John 14:17)—but nevertheless His personal presence becomes an indisputable fact, brought out in many ways. Not only does He dwell in the body of the believer, as the seal of faith, but as a divine Person He is abidingly present, in the house of God, and makes His presence to be felt, and felt not only by those external manifestations of power, which we get recorded in this book, because these signs and gifts of tongues have passed away. Were they the only proof of His presence, any person might fairly say, Is He still here? Where are the tongues? Where are all those miraculous interventions—those extraordinary dealings of the Spirit of God—which were so abundant in the past, for example, healing the sick and raising the dead? They are not found—therefore the Spirit of God is gone. Such a thought is an utter fallacy.

It is important to see that what we find in the Acts of the Apostles, is the perfect counterpart of that which you find in the early part of the Lord's ministry, where He does miracles in abundance, not alone as being the natural outflow of the grace of His heart, to meet man in his need, misery, and sorrow, but to be the attestation of the glory of His person—the attestation that He, the sent One of God, yea, God Himself in human form, was walking through man's earth. Now, it is but meet, that, as the presence of the Son of God among men, was attested then by the miracles to which I have alluded, so should the presence of this unseen Person of the Trinity—this Holy Spirit that was of God—yea, that is God—God the Holy Spirit—should be attested in the same manner. I say it was but meet that there should be, when He first came into this scene, out of which the Son of God had been cast, a testimony to His presence, that should convince the most gainsaying, that a new presence, a new power, a new Person was here amongst men. You have, therefore, the gift of tongues, and the miracles recorded in the Acts

of the Apostles. The former are alluded to by the Apostle Paul, and their object signified, as he says, "Tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not" (1 Cor. 14:22).

But the gift of the Holy Spirit, I repeat, is infinitely higher than any effect that that gift may produce in the way of power; and although the signs and manifestations, and tongues, and miraculous interventions have disappeared, in the wisdom of God—their necessity no longer existing—we may rejoicingly be certain of this, that the Holy Spirit, not merely as an influence for good, but as a Divine Person, is still upon the earth today, and as active as ever, in leading the soul into the enjoyment of heavenly things. The very last page of the New Testament, yea, almost the last verse, records, spite of the sin and failure of the Church, His faithful abiding presence, as we read, "the Spirit and the bride say, Come," to the yearning Bridegroom—the Lord Jesus. God is faithful, however unfaithful man may have been. The Holy Spirit is faithful, however unfaithful the Church has been, and therefore what obtained in the Acts of the Apostles, obtains now. I say boldly, that for any man today to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, is an insult to the grace of God, as shown to us in the gift of the blessed Comforter, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. I know such a statement may seem a little strong, and may possibly awaken questions in some minds, but I adhere to it. To look then for a continually renewed outpouring of the Spirit of God is, to put it in plain language, a positive denial of the wonderful truth which the Acts of the Apostles records.

There are two ways in which I desire with the Lord's help, to look at this book. Firstly, to review the four great occasions on which the Spirit of God came to, and indwelt, those who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; and, secondly, the ways He took to affirm His Presence, apart from external manifestations, or sign-gifts. Of the four occasions referred to, the second of Acts is the chapter to which I first turn. There you have the fullest and the most comprehensive expression of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Not only does He fall, first of all, upon the hundred and twenty, and they are filled, and the Church, the house of God, and the body of Christ is formed, but, as the result of Peter's preaching, three thousand souls, without doubt, received the Spirit of God.

Now you will find that on these four interesting occasions, where the Spirit of God comes—upon the Jews in the second of Acts, upon the Samaritans in the eighth, upon the Gentiles in the tenth, and upon the Ephesian proselytes in the nineteenth—while they are all alike in the glorious fact of the Holy Spirit personally coming to them, each scene differs as to its antecedents, and in the way in which the Holy Spirit was received. This difference, we may be sure, is of God, and not to be lightly esteemed, or overlooked by any one who fears God, and seeks to know His ways.

When we look at the second of Acts, what do we find? Peter's beautiful testimony to the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." Tongues of fire, on the heads of the disciples, and miraculous testimony to Christ, in every known language, by unlettered men, who had never learned the same, were what they saw and heard. Peter's testimony to the One whom they had refused, and slain, but whom God had exalted, had the most powerful effect—namely this, "They were pricked in their heart "; that is they were convicted. You have there the very first effect of the action of the Holy Spirit upon the souls of men. They were convicted of their sins. Their consciences were reached. These men were confronted with their guilt. They were so to speak, arraigned by the Lord, and brought into the presence of God, and their sin not only charged on them, but they were made conscious of what that sin was. There was a distinct breach between them and God. God had delighted in Jesus. They had slain Him. God had raised Him, and put Him into glory, and the Holy Spirit had come down to declare this wonderful fact. Thoroughly convicted, they now say, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Note the apostle's answer: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

What Peter says in effect is this—If you repent, and are baptized in the name of the One, whom you refused and murdered, seven short weeks ago, you will receive like blessing with us—you will receive the Holy Spirit. Why is the truth put in this way? I think there cannot be the shadow of a doubt as to the wisdom of the Lord in guiding His servant to put it this way. He does not tell them to believe in Jesus. That may be needful when you come to Acts 10. He does not tell them to trust in Jesus. No, He peals out the clarion note of John the Baptist—unheeded in his day—Repent. There must be repentance. No man ever yet had to do with God unless there was repentance. I do not deny that faith is a requisite to blessing also, but faith is the reception of a Divine testimony. These men had faith. They believed that Jesus was exalted. What was the result? "They were pricked in their hearts." What next? "Repent," says Peter. You may ask, What is repentance? I believe it is the judgment which the soul passes on itself, as, in the light of God's presence, it learns what the truth is—the truth about God, the truth about Jesus, and the truth about my sins, and my sinful state. Repentance is taking God's side against myself. Repentance is the teardrop in the eye of faith. I would to God I saw that teardrop in every eye before me tonight. It was in the eyes of those Peter addressed. Repentance holds a large place in the preaching of the apostles. It would be well if, nowadays, it were more pressed. There must be the judgment of what I have done, and what I am. It is a blessed moment in his history when a man repents—when he judges himself. It is my accepting the testimony of God as to the state of my heart, and owning my utter ruin, in truthfulness and uprightness.

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins," is the counsel of God to those awakened hosts, now deeply convicted of their guilt in the murder of Jesus. Peter, so to speak, says, If you are really repentant, you will own your guilt, and, in as public a manner declare your repentance, by being baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ, as you publicly, and all together joined in the cry, "Away with him—away with him—crucify him, crucify him." The truth of their repentance would be manifested by their action. I do not doubt there may be spurious faith, and that there may be spurious repentance, but such was not the case here. All were deeply convicted of their sins, and they wanted to know what was to be done. The Gospel put before them was, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." And why? "For the promise is unto you, and to your children." Thank God for that! It is not only on myself, but on my family, that God has His eye. "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort." Peter was undoubtedly led to expound, and enforce what he had said, so that they might then get God's blessing; and I would press upon you to get blessing this night. Peter concluded with, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." It may seem a remarkable thing to say, "Save yourselves." But I advise you, my friend, to save yourself. Come clear out of the world, now under judgment, and cleave to the Saviour, who has gone through the judgment, and is now at God's right hand in glory. That is the way to save yourself. Go to the Saviour.

"Then they that gladly" (the word 'gladly' is perhaps doubtful; I do not think there was any great gladness at the moment: the sense of their sin made them sad, not glad) "received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." What a beautiful triumph of grace! That, then, was the way the Jew—the haughty, proud, rebellious Jew—got blessing from God on the day of Pentecost.

Let us pass now to the second occasion, which we find recorded in the eighth of Acts. In the seventh chapter of that book you will find that Stephen, "full of the Holy Ghost," gives a most beautiful testimony to the Son of Man, whom he sees, standing at God's right hand. His charge against the nation is most solemn—"Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost" (vs. 51). The guilty nation, to whom Peter had preached twice, or thrice, since the second of Acts, consummate their iniquity by refusing Stephen's message. They really are the "citizens" to whom the Lord referred when He said, "A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:12-14). Stephen was the man they sent after the nobleman, He was their messenger, and the message he carried up was, "We will not have this man to reign over us." The Jewish nation refused their Messiah on earth, and a Saviour in glory. They filled up the cup of their sins. Stephen died like his Master, with all the beautiful grace of Christ expressed in him. "Full of the Holy Ghost," his last breath was expended in saying, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

Stephen could not end his prayer as his Master did in the moment of His death. The Lord on the cross had said "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Stephen, full of, and held in check by the Holy Spirit, could not say these words, because he knew, for the Spirit knew, that they were all resisting light, as they did know who Jesus really was. Stephen, then, the first martyr for the truth, died with the image of His blessed Master stamped on him. The result was a tremendous persecution. We see in the next chapter that the whole assembly at Jerusalem was scattered abroad. "At that time there was great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (8:1). It is a remarkable thing that the very men, whom the Lord had told to go unto all nations (see Matt. 28:19, 20), contaminated by Jewish ideas, and metropolitan associations, remained at Jerusalem, and would not go forth. Well, says God, I must get others to do the work, if you will not, and lesser brethren are driven east, west, north, and south, to carry the gospel of God's grace far and near. There is a great lesson in this for us all.

In Acts 8:5 we read, "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." Philip before this had been appointed to diaconal work in Jerusalem (see Acts 6:1-6). He was a deacon, and as such he had the distribution of the funds of the assembly, and the happy work of looking after the poor; but as soon as the assembly was broken up, his duties ceased, and now, in the exercise of the spiritual gift, which the Lord (not the apostles) gave him, he started out to preach, having already graduated, not at a college or university, but in the bosom of God's assembly, for "They that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." This the Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 3:13. With a "good degree" to his name Philip goes forth, but he was also the possessor of a most rare gift. This is proved in chapter 8, and recorded by the Holy Spirit in chapter 21, where he is called, that which I am not aware that any other man is called in the New Testament, "Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven" (Acts 21:8). He did not get that spiritual qualification by apostolic appointment, or intervention, or laying on of hands. He got the diaconal office in that way. His gift as an evangelist he received from the ascended Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus, and he went out in its exercise, and preached in Samaria—a city ripe for blessing.

There were beautiful results. "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35), the Lord had said, as He sat outside this city; and they had been going on ripening ever since. Now Philip comes down and puts in the sickle; and oh! what a harvest! "Many believed," you will remember, because of the word that the woman spoke of Jesus, and when others came out to Christ, "many more believed because of his own word." Now, through Philip's preaching, most of them believed in the blessed Son of God. It was an illustration of the Lord's own Word, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father" (John 14:12). Philip "preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which, Philip spoke, hearing—and seeing the miracles." The whole city was moved by the testimony of the Spirit through the evangelist. "For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them; and many taken with palsies and that were lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city." This earnest man—not an apostle, but a simple evangelist—is empowered by the Holy Spirit to do what we read of here. But the Spirit of God had not taken up His abode in that city as yet. So far He was only in the person of that one servant; although there was "great joy in that city" through the reception of Christ, "as yet the Holy Ghost was fallen upon none of them" (vs. 16).

"Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John." I think that is a beautiful word, that "Samaria had received the word of God." The Jews had been trying hard to make them receive the law, but it had been a dead failure. That was the reason why "the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans." What the law failed to do, the sovereign grace of God effected. The whole city received the word. "And there was great joy in that city." It was one of the triumphs of grace. Hearing of this, the apostles sent down from Jerusalem, Peter and John—two pillars in the Church—"who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: for as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost" (vss. 14-17).

Now, at once you must see the marked and clear difference between this scene, and what took place in Jerusalem. There it was, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." They repented, were baptized, and received the Holy Spirit. Here, on the other hand, although they had believed, and been baptized, they had not one of them received the Holy Spirit. They had heard the Gospel, and had believed it. Philip had borne a beautiful testimony. There is only one thing stated. He went down and "preached Christ." That is the way to get at souls. If any of you here are preachers, and wish to know the way to win souls, let Philip teach you, for he "preached Christ to them," nothing more, and nothing less, and his results were splendid. But although these Samaritans had believed the Gospel, were full of joy, and, furthermore, had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, yet, strange to say, they had not received the Holy Spirit. Why was this? I think the reason is not far to seek, and it fills the heart with thankfulness when one sees the wisdom of God in that which took place.

When our blessed Lord met the poor woman at Sychar's well outside Samaria, and began to speak to her, she suddenly said, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." The Lord replied, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father." Worship therefore was to be of an entirely new order and character. It was to be worship of the Father, in spirit, and in truth, the result of knowing a heavenly Saviour, and being on heavenly ground, in the power of the Spirit. Samaria had always been in the position of the religious rival of Jerusalem. "This mountain" had a very strong hold upon the hearts of the Samaritans. Now, supposing that consequent upon Philip's preaching, and their believing the Gospel, getting their sins forgiven, and being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, that the Holy Spirit had fallen upon them, what would have been the inevitable result? The old religious rivalry would have been perpetuated. Such is human nature, even in saints, that the church in Samaria would have lifted its head and said, "We are the Samaritan church. We have been saved, and we have received the Spirit of God as well as those at Jerusalem," and thus the blessed truth of the oneness of the Church of God—which the presence of the Holy Spirit forms would have been practically denied, God's object frustrated, and there would have been engendered that which, alas, has sprung up since, and borne such sad fruit—the thought of a national Church.

Such a thought as this, I need scarcely say, is absolutely foreign to Scripture. A national church! Where do you as a Christian belong to? Why, you belong to heaven, and not to earth. The thought of independency is nipped in the very bud, in the perfect wisdom of God. He will not let the Spirit of God, which is the bond of union in the Church—He will not permit that which is the absolute formative power of the Church, to fall on the Samaritan believers until the two apostles come down from Jerusalem, and link the work of God there with that which Philip was instrumental in at Samaria. First of all, praying for the disciples, and then laying their hands on them, the Holy Spirit is received. This action is very simple. God would have the Samaritan believers to understand, that what was now going on among them, and the work at Jerusalem, was one and the same thing. One energy produced it—one Head in glory, and one Spirit on earth. God would have them apprehend that He would allow nothing that might seem to falsify the unity of the Church, and therefore, in divine wisdom, the Spirit of God did not come until the apostles, by the laying on of their hands, linked on, and connected the work in Samaria, with that already existing at Jerusalem.

This lesson is as important for us as for them. The Church of God is one. We live in a day when the differences among professing Christians are so multiplied, that we are told that there are no less than thirteen hundred different sects in Christendom. That is a shame to Christendom, and a shame to Christians too. What I find in Scripture is this that "by one spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). That was the truth which God would emphasize on this occasion, for the laying on of hands, in Scripture, almost always carries with it the thought of identification. When the worshipper, in Leviticus 1, offered his burnt offering, he put his hand upon the bullock's head so as to identify himself with the excellence of the burnt sacrifice offered to God. When Aaron, in the sixteenth of Leviticus, sent forth the scapegoat, he put both his hands on its head, to identify the sins of the people with it. It was this identification with His assembly, already preexisting, that God wished should be manifested, and in the manner in which the Holy Spirit was received by the Samaritan believers, the truth is most strikingly taught. The apostles came down and showed that the Church was one, and that God would not have the bare thought of independency, for one moment to be suggested, by the Holy Spirit coming in any other way.

I know that some Christians argue for, and defend independency. All such should carefully ponder this scene, for they will not find such a thought, or such a principle commended, but the reverse, in the Word of God. The great truth of Christianity is dependence, as regards Christ, and mutual dependence—not independence—as regards the Church, and therefore the Lord here in the early days of the Church taught this truth. The Church is one and God would have "no schism in the body."

Passing now to the third crisis, in Acts 10, we find that which interests us greatly, as here first we have the Gentiles brought into the Church, and the body of Christ expressed on earth. Between the eighth and tenth chapters, Paul, the apostle of the truth of the mystery of the Church, had been called. That remarkable servant of God, who was the apostle of the Gentiles, and the "chosen vessel" for the revelation of the truth of the mystery—the body of Christ, and whose writings develop that truth, had been called, and brought into the assembly, and was beginning to work. Peter, in the exercise of that which the Lord gave him in the sixteenth of Matthew—the keys of the kingdom of heaven (mark, it is not the keys of heaven—it is the keys of the kingdom of heaven)—had in Acts 2 opened the Jewish leaf of the door, to admit them to the kingdom, and now, in the tenth of Acts, he is led of the Lord to open the other leaf for the Gentiles. I admit he is not brisk at the work. At first he is slow, and it takes some time before he can be brought to do that which God would have him do. Nevertheless he does it; and the circumstances are remarkably interesting.

There dwelt a Roman centurion at Caesarea, a pious, godly man. As the early part of the chapter (Acts 10) tells us he was "a devout man, and one that feared God, with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway." He was a converted man—quicken by the Spirit of God, but he had not received the Holy Spirit, and as yet he had not peace with God. He was a type of thousands of souls today—awakened, quickened souls, with godly desires; devout, generous, benevolent, prayerful people, and yet they are without peace. They do not know what pardon is. While this man is in prayer, God sends an angel to him, telling him to send for Peter. While Peter is on the housetop, also in prayer, the Lord gives him a vision of heaven opened, and a vessel like a great sheet, knit at the four corners, let down to earth; "wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air." Then comes a voice, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." This Peter refuses, but the voice says, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." This is repeated three times, and at length, while he "doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean," the Spirit says to him, as we read in verse 19, "Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them." These men give him their message, and Peter goes with them the next day. Cornelius is waiting for him with his kinsmen and near friends. When he heard from God that His messenger is to come, he immediately desires that others should participate in the blessing. I do not think it is possible for a person to be born of God, and blessed of Him, without a desire springing up that those around him should share in this grace.

Cornelius tells Peter why he sent for him, and closes what he has to say with, "Now, therefore, are we all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." That was a very earnest audience gathered in the presence of God, and little wonder that there was deep blessing that day in Cornelius' house. Peter now knows the truth: he has learned the lesson of the great sheet, as he says, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is accepted (or, as it should be, "acceptable," or, "well pleasing to Him"—acceptance is on totally different grounds, as we learn from Eph. 1: 6) with Him." A new lesson entirely was this to Peter.

It is manifest that God's call had not gone out to a pagan idolater, and Peter only speaks of those who feared God, and wrought righteousness. This is exactly what Cornelius did, and the Lord had signified his acceptability to Himself by sending His angel. His was no mere hollow profession, but a real state of soul. God-fearing, pious, and prayerful, he was born again, converted, but not yet what Scripture calls "saved" (chap 11:14), a term implying the fullest blessing, in the knowledge of association with a victorious risen Saviour. But in going out to the Gentiles, how wise the way of God to begin with this man, whom not even the most opposing Jew could deny was godly? Thus you see a man might be godly, and yet not know the privileges of Christianity. These he is now to be brought into. "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all), that word ye know," says Peter. Cornelius was not ignorant of it. He had evidently heard what had gone on with regard to Jesus. He had heard, moreover, that God was preaching peace through Jesus Christ, but it was "to the children of Israel." Now, why did Cornelius not get peace? For a beautiful reason. He was just and upright, and he knew he was not in the favored circle of Israel. Consequently he judged it was not for him. He desired to get peace, but it was for Israel, and he was not in that favored company. While deeply desirous of blessing, he felt himself unworthy of it, and that he had no claim to it. Here it is then, that the grace of God comes in so sweetly.

Peter goes on, and tells how Jesus "went about doing good," how the Jews slew Him, how God raised Him, and how He was seen, after His resurrection, by many witnesses. He concludes his testimony by saying, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." What had they heard? Ah! this is wonderful news for you and me, for we are Gentiles. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." "Do you wish the remission of your sins? You are welcome to it. "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." Ah! but you may say, what about repentance? God says nothing about it here. I doubt not they had repented. There was no need to press it on those who were so deeply anxious. What they needed was the simple, beautiful Gospel of Jesus. "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." If you are here in your sins, and desirous to have them remitted, that is forgiven, let me tell you this good news of the Saviour of sinners, "through His name, whosoever believeth in Him SHALL RECEIVE REMISSION OF SINS."

Forgiveness of sins is now preached to every creature, Jew or Gentile, bond or free, through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. By the work which He has accomplished, sins are put away from before God, and whosoever believeth in Him receives forgiveness thereof. But who does he mean by "whosoever"? Does he not mean you? Yes, surely it means you as well as me. If you can truly say, I believe in Him, you receive remission of sins. But I do not feel it, you may argue. It does not say, "Whosoever believeth in Him shall feel the remission of sins." No, it says, "Whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." I forgive, says God, the soul that cleaves to My Son. It is due to Christ that God should pardon and bless the soul that believes in Him.

Undoubtedly the Spirit of God, in the case of Cornelius and his friends, had wrought in their hearts, and had given them the sense of need before God. To have the sense of need produced in the soul, to be quickened by the Spirit of God, and brought low in repentance is one thing, but to get the knowledge of forgiveness, and to receive the Holy Spirit, as the seal of faith, is another. What do we find here, however? "While Peter spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." Nothing could exceed this rich and singular display of God's grace. There is no limitation, nor any question of baptism introduced; and not a word about apostles coming down to pray for, and lay their hands upon them. The greater the distance from God, as was the case with the Gentiles, the freer does the grace come out to those who have no claim on God. The scene sparkles with the brilliancy of the grace of God. The rebellious Jew must repent, and be publicly baptized; the pseudo-religious Samaritan hears the Gospel, believes it, and is baptized in the name of Jesus, but he must wait till the apostles come down, pray for, and lay their hands upon him, before the Holy Spirit come. The Gentile, who was afar off, and had nationally no link with God—and that is where you and I come in—hears the truth, believes the Gospel, and gets the Holy Spirit on the spot, without any of these preliminaries. This is a blessed truth which we do well to hold tenaciously, for we live in a day when there are not wanting those who affirm, that there is no possibility of receiving the Holy Spirit, except through the intervention of man, and man's hand. Scripture, by the record of God's ways in the house of Cornelius, silences all such folly, for I can call it nothing else.

Nothing can be more beautiful than this outflow of the grace of God among this company of Gentiles. They believe the testimony sent them to the value of Jesus' name in the remission of sins, and, as a result, "the Holy Ghost fell upon all them that heard the word. And they of the circumcision, which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST." That they had received this incomparable Gift, is proved by what follows: "For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God." The evidence that they had received the Holy Spirit was patent to the ear, and eye, of Peter, and of his Jewish brethren. He had been careful for his character, and hence took down with him six brethren, that they might take note of what should happen, and join him in testimony concerning it, as they do, before the opposers at Jerusalem, in chapter 11. God had said, "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established," and so it was in this case.

Let us mark it well, that it is thus that we, believing Gentiles, receive the Holy Spirit. God is all in this scene, and man nowhere—he disappears in the excess of the grace of God. Had apostolic intervention been necessary to the Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit, an apostle was there, either to baptize, or to lay on hands, but such was not God's order. If any prefer to go back to Jewish, or Samaritan ground, they must do so, but faith always gladly hails any new departure in the ways of God. The truth is, that when apostles were here men despised them; now that they exist not, unbelief equally thinks they are indispensable, as the channel for the impartation of the Spirit. What grace of God, to make all so clear and certain to the contrary, in His written Word!

And now I would ask you, Have you received the Spirit of God? I daresay some may say, That is a very serious question to ask. I admit it, but if you turn to the fourth, and last occasion, where the Holy Spirit is related to have fallen on believers—as given us in chapter 19—you will find the question I have put to you, is that which led to their receiving the Holy Spirit. "And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus, and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" A very striking, and a very important question, and, moreover, it shows that a man may be a believer, may be a child of God, may be converted, and yet may not have the Holy Spirit. They were disciples, and the apostle credits their belief, but nevertheless says, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Perhaps you may inquire—What made him put that question? I think it is very likely they were not quite at ease. From their faces possibly the apostle could see that there was a want of joy.

When a man has received the Holy Spirit he is full of joy. When he has not received the Holy Spirit he is perplexed and exercised about his state before God; he has no settled knowledge of peace, or relationship, or of what it is to be in Christ; for all possession of Christian blessing is the effect of the Spirit's indwelling. Hence he never looks bright and cheerful, and it may have been the look on their countenances that caused Paul to ask the question, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether the Holy Ghost be (come)." They did not, as some ignorantly affirm, doubt His existence, but they knew not of His presence. That believers should receive Him was a promise known in Scripture, and proclaimed by John the Baptist, as we have seen. But these men had not heard of the day of Pentecost. They had not heard of the finished work of Christ, nor of the Holy Spirit having come down. Therefore Paul next asks—"Unto what then were ye baptized? and they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." John had only preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3). Forgiveness was not preached—it was to be waited for, but now, since John's testimony, Christ had died, and risen again, and been glorified, and the Holy Spirit had come down. John had insisted on self-judgment, and an acknowledgment of their total ruin, without proclaiming the news of forgiveness. Paul preached a Saviour come, redemption accomplished, and the Holy Spirit come down, to be the power in the soul, that leads it into the enjoyment of Christ's victory. "When they heard this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." They bowed to Christ, and owned Him Lord. They acknowledged the claims, and authority, and lordship of Him who was raised from the dead. "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied." Here again the external signs are apparent, but there is no confusion of THE GIFT and the gifts.

Why, here, does Paul lay his hands on them? As you know, Paul at this moment was dogged by Jewish teachers, who would have the law, and circumcision, pressed on the Gentiles. They were seeking to undervalue his apostleship, and make out that his ministry was of a lower nature, and character, than that of the other apostles, because he had not accompanied the Lord, when on earth. They failed to understand his ministry, his preaching, and his apostleship, or were ignorant of the truth, that he had received his call from heaven. God would substantiate His servant, and took this way of upholding his apostleship. It took Peter and John together to communicate the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans. Paul alone sufficed at Ephesus. It so pleased God, and in the same way as the two apostles linked on the work in Samaria, with that which preexisted, so here does Paul, by his action similarly link the work in Ephesus to that which had gone before. A passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians evidently alludes to this incident. "In whom ye also (trusted), after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). You have there the divine order; the sinner hearing the word of truth, the gospel of his salvation, believes in Him who has accomplished the work. What then? He is sealed "with that holy Spirit of promise." It is the sinner who believes; it is the believer who is sealed by the Spirit.

The great point for us to get hold of is this, that the way in which the Holy Spirit fell upon the Jews in chapter 2, the Samaritans in chapter 8, and the Jewish proselytes in chapter 19, is of a different character in each case, God having a special reason for the diverse actings mentioned. When the Gentiles were blessed it was God alone who acted, and it is under this class that we fall.

I will now briefly call your attention to the second point I named at the outset, namely, the frequent way in which in the Acts we read of the Spirit, not as an influence, but as a Divine Person, actually present on earth, and acting according to His own will. Not only is the Holy Spirit in us as believers, but with us. This the Acts strikingly reveals in many instances. When the apostles prayed in the fourth of Acts, "the place was shaken where they were assembled together." The Holy Spirit was there, and He made His presence to be felt. This had nothing to do with the truth, blessed as it is, that He was in any particular believer, for "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" then. The point is, an unseen Person was there. Again, when Ananias and Sapphira lied before the apostles in the fifth of Acts, Peter said, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?... thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God." To his wife he said, "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?" God was present in the Church, God the Holy Spirit. Amazing, but most blessed truth, God was now dwelling righteously, but in the most inconceivable grace, on earth, and amongst those who had been sinners by nature, but were now washed in the blood of His Son, and fit to be His temple. Peter recognized this wondrous fact that the assembly was now the habitation of God, and hence any sin was sin against the Holy Spirit dwelling there.

Again, in chapter 8, we find the Spirit busy with the Lord's work, as we read, "The Spirit said to Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot" (vs. 29). An angel (vs. 26) had told him what road to go. In this sense the providence of God was manifest to Philip, and even yet to us, for Heb. 1:14 is still surely true. But it was not an angel, but the Spirit whose voice bade him draw near the anxious Ethiopian eunuch. Guidance of a similar nature although we may not hear Him as Philip did, is surely vouchsafed to us in dealing with souls. The Spirit knows their need, and lovingly works through Christ's members, and servants, all unconscious oftentimes of what He is going to do. The love of the Spirit is a real thing, as well as the love of Christ.

We have already seen in Peter's case that "the Spirit said unto him, Behold three men seek thee, arise." (ch. 10:19). He had His eye on the awakened Gentile, and commanded His chosen vessel to go, and do His bidding. This Peter is careful to relate, as being quite conscious whose voice it was that directed him. "The Spirit bade me go" (ch. 11:12).

Passing now to chapter 13, we find the Holy Spirit the direct author of a missionary enterprise. We read, "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (vs. 2). This word was manifestly to the company of prophets, and teachers, in the assembly at Antioch. It was not merely an influence in Barnabas, and Saul, but a direct injunction to others about them, which was obeyed.

Again, in chapter 16, Paul and his companions were "forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia." Assaying to go into Bithynia, "the Spirit suffered them not" (16:6-7). Determined to go to Jerusalem, we read of Paul, that "the Holy Ghost witnessed in every city that bands and afflictions" awaited him (ch. 20:23). Nor is this all, for in godless Tyre, the disciples said to Paul, through the Spirit, "that he should not go up to Jerusalem" (ch. 21:4). This command, unheeded by the apostle, is followed, in verse 11, by a detailed statement of the issue of a journey, in which I find he was not led of the Spirit, although God might, and did overrule it for the blessing of His servant, and of the whole Church. It was in Caesarea, and in Philip's house, that Agabus "took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." Now, it is a weighty fact that from that moment, you never read of the Holy Spirit again in Acts, save Paul's allusion to him when a prisoner at

Rome (28:25). History goes on, but the Holy Spirit is not named. Why, I will not venture to say.

But is that same divine Person yet abiding on earth, or is all changed, and has He, because so sadly unheeded, disappeared from the bosom of God's Church on earth? Ah! let us not cast discredit upon the Spirit of truth, and upon the Word of God, by such unworthy thoughts. The Lord had said to His disciples, "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may ABIDE WITH YOU FOREVER; even the Spirit of truth.... He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." We have seen how Jesus went away, and we have heard also how the Spirit came to dwell with the early disciples, and He dwells with us now. I believe He dwells in the Church today, and what you and I want, is faith in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, at this present moment. God give us, dear friends, to have faith in His presence, because the more we count upon Him, the more blessing there will be for us.

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