Luke - Commentaries by William Woldridge Fereday

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 7:40-42: The Two Debtors

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THE Saviour was sitting at meat in the house of a Pharisee. His spirit was sorely grieved at the time. He had just had occasion to rebuke the men of His generation for their indifference to both John the Baptist and Himself. The stern asceticism of the forerunner so irritated them that they said he had a demon; and the geniality and graciousness of the Saviour so offended them that they called Him a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners (Luke 7:31-35).

Something to refresh His heart would have been deeply appreciated at that moment. But He was not to receive it at the hands of His host. He in his deplorable blindness was wholly unconscious who he had at his board that day. His God was there, but he knew it not. Yet he was a religious man—one of the ultra-religious indeed. His Guest was, in his eyes, simply a traveling preacher, to whom it might be well to grant a meal. It had occurred to him that He might possibly be a prophet, but this thought he dismissed as he noted His conduct in his house. So little did he esteem his Guest that he did not even offer Him the usual Eastern courtesies—water for His feet, etc. Truly there is nothing so blinding or benumbing as empty, formal religion.

Presently a woman of the city—a moral derelict from the streets—crept into the dining-hall, hearing that Jesus was there. Her soul was burdened. Sin lay heavily upon her. But she discerned in Jesus the Saviour of sinners. Whether He suited others or not mattered little to her; to one burdened with guilt like herself He was just the One she needed. None other in the universe could meet her case. She had heard of His grace to sinners, and her heart was attracted. No restraints or Pharisaical proprieties were suffered to stand in her way. She sought Him out, and claimed, not in words but in deeds, a personal interest in His saving grace. To the deep disgust of the host she rained tears upon the Saviour’s feet, wiped them with the hair of her head, kissed them fervently, and anointed them with ointment.

The Lord, aware of what was passing in the mind of the Pharisee, turned to him thus: “Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?” (Luke 7:40-42). To such a parable but one answer was possible, and the application was evident. If each man’s record of sin is not equally vile, there is no room for boasting, since “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” It ill becomes one therefore to scorn another. Each would be well advised to seek pardoning grace for himself.

Turning to the woman, the Saviour said: “Thy sins are forgiven.” He had come down from heaven for the salvation of such as she, and He was on His way to Calvary to expiate her guilt. Never again could she number herself amongst “miserable sinners”; ever after with gratitude her lips would say, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins, and in the life everlasting. Amen.”

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 7:11-17: The Widow's Son at Nain

IT was surely not unreasonable when Paul demanded of King Agrippa: “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8). Let it once be admitted that there is a God Who is supreme in the universe, and it is easy to believe in resurrection, however stupendous the miracle may be. He who created man from dust is surely able to call him forth again from the domain of death if it please Him so to do.

But God alone can perform such a marvel. When at different times Elijah, Peter and Paul raised persons from the dead, they were manifestly wielding power not their own, and the miracles were granted in response to their prayer of faith. But He who was greater than they could arrest a funeral procession with His majestic “I say unto thee, Arise,” and death immediately yielded up its prey. Well might the people say that He spake as One having authority, and that never man spake as He.

We have before our minds just now His action at the gate of Nain (Luke 7:11-17). As He approached the place, accompanied by His disciples and followed by the usual multitude, a dead man was being carried out to burial. He was the only son of a widowed mother. So sorrowful a spectacle could not fail to appeal to the tender heart of the Saviour. All His sympathy went out forthwith to the desolate mourner. But in Him sympathy was ever combined with power. Hence He not only said to the mother, “Weep not”; He also said to her son, “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.” “And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother.”

We recall His claims as recorded in John 5:21-29. He affirmed that as the Father raises up the dead and quickens them, even so the Son quickens whom He will. He further asserted that the Father has committed all judgment unto Him, that all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. Quickener of the dead, and Judge! Tremendous claims assuredly, with which none dare trifle. If Jesus of Nazareth be not all this, let us never more breathe His name. He who claims such prerogatives falsely must be branded as the worst and most dangerous of men. But if He is indeed both Quickener and Judge, let us hasten to His feet, and acknowledge His title with reverence and godly fear. He quickens the spiritually dead in this Gospel day by means of the written Word (John 5:24-25), and all who are thus quickened become possessors of eternal life; when the Gospel day is over He will quicken men’s bodies also, calling forth those who have done good unto the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment (John 5:28-29). Yet this does not imply that all will be raised simultaneously; Revelation 20:5-6 makes it perfectly clear that a thousand years will elapse between the resurrection of the blessed and the resurrection of the lost.

The greatest marvel of all is that One possessed of such prerogatives should have stooped to death Himself for the blessing and salvation of men ruined and undone. It becomes us to bow our heads adoringly in the presence of His own declaration: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14-15).

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 6:47-48: The Two Builders

BOTH Matthew and Luke give this heart-searching parable at the close of our Lord’s sermon on the mount. Multitudes had listened to His teaching with wonder and admiration. His gracious words attracted them, and His authoritative tone (so unlike that of their scribes) commanded at least their respect.

In their estimation “Never man spake like this Man.

So far well, but the human heart is deplorably fickle and unreal. This leads men to hear, and even to approve what they hear, while rendering no obedience to the heavenly message. Hence the importance of the parable of the two builders. “Whosoever cometh to Me and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: he is like a man who built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on the rock” (Luke 6:47-48). The man who hears manifestly stands in a position altogether different from that of him who hears not. The latter is utterly indifferent; the former gives more or less attention to the things which are eternal. But unless his sole foundation is the teaching of the Son of God, he has absolutely nothing that will avail him when the storm of divine judgment arises. “Back to Christ” is the cry to-day. Well, be it so; but what has Christ told us? In John 3:5 He insists upon every man’s need of the new birth; in the same chapter (vs. 14) He declares the absolute necessity for His atoning sacrifice; and then proceeds to show (vs. 16) that the heart of God has provided what the throne of God demanded. “He so loved the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son.” His own lips have told us also that every man’s eternal future depends upon his attitude towards Himself. “Back to Christ” if really meant, must lead men to bow at His feet in humble acknowledgment of His person and sacrifice. All who have taken this happy place have laid their foundation on the rock, and for them the impending judgment of God, however terrible, has no alarm.

“But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the storm did beat violently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great” (Luke 6:49). Thus graphically does the Lord of all describe the collapse of all the hopes of such as have not built upon His words. Heaven is silent to-day; no fiery bolts proceed thence to drive the guilty into eternal woe; but a veritable hurricane of divine wrath will burst forth ere long, which will reveal undisputably where men really stand. Every unreal superstructure will then totter and fall. The fairest moral and religious exterior will not shield from judgment those who have not as lost sinners put their trust in the Saviour and in His precious blood. As the prophet declared ages ago: “The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place” (Isa. 28:15). Happy, eternally happy, is the man who has built on Christ, the Son of God. This foundation will stand, and this alone.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 5:1-11: The Draft of Fishes

It was a notable day in the history of Simon Peter when the Saviour requested the loan of his boat on the lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1-11). It was not His first acquaintance with Him. Some time before he had been introduced to the Lord by his brother Andrew, and it had resulted in a heart-attachment to Him which was abiding and eternal (John 1:40-42). But, like many another truly converted soul, Simon had much to learn concerning the evil of his own heart, and the remarkable incident upon the lake was an immense blessing to him in this direction.

It happened on this wise. The Saviour was being hard pressed by multitudes eager to hear the Word of God. Being by the lake shore, and observing two boats nearby, He asked for the use of one that He might teach the people therefrom. Simon, who was washing his nets with his partners, responded with alacrity, and the preaching was continued under these exceptional conditions. When the speaking was finished, the Lord bade Simon launch out into the deep and let down his net for a draft. Though he had toiled all night in vain he obeyed the injunction, with the result that so great a multitude of fishes was hauled up that the net brake. The second boat was requisitioned, and both were so heavily freighted that they began to sink.

Never had Simon and his companions known such an experience. In Simon’s own case, it yielded deep spiritual blessing. It so brought home to him the reality of having to do with God that all the evil of his heart became naked and bare before him, and he fell at Jesus’ knees, saying: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Such was his soul-distress that he was completely oblivious to the dangerous condition of the sinking boat. This was not his conversion. He had been converted at his first meeting with the Saviour; this was simply a deepening of the work of God in his soul. Job had such an experience (42:6); Isaiah also (6:5); and Paul. The latter was reduced to confess: “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18). “No confidence in the flesh” was henceforth one of the mottoes of his life (Phil. 3:3). When a man reaches this point he learns that nothing counts with God but Christ, and his whole confidence becomes centered in Him Who died and rose again. Happy position in which to stand, involving, as it does, complete deliverance from one’s old self with all its pretensions and claims.

The poor conscience-stricken fisherman was soon graciously encouraged by the Lord. “Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men.” Accordingly Simon and his partners abandoned their boats and nets forever and followed the Saviour in His mission of love to the souls of men. Singularly, Luke omits all mention of Andrew in his narrative, while he alone tells us of the special work in the conscience of his brother. Catching men by means of the Gospel became the happy occupation of Simon and Andrew, James and John from that moment. An instance of fishing with the net is given in Acts 2, when three thousand converts were safely landed; and an instance of fishing with the hook is recorded in Acts 8, when an individual soul was savingly blessed by a desert road.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 22:50-51: Malchus' Ear

“THE beloved physician” tells us of a very touching scene in the garden of Gethsemane. It happened on the eve of the Saviour’s last woe. The cross was looming before Him with all its anguish and shame. He had just risen from His distressful prayer when a band of armed men approached to apprehend Him. The kiss of the traitor indicated to them the One of Whom they were in search. Yet for such an One there was no peril, save as He chose to yield Himself to the malice of His foes. At the sound of His voice His assailants fell to the ground (John 18:1-8); and nothing would have been easier for Him than to walk away, had it pleased Him so to do. But having come from above to offer Himself as an atoning sacrifice He meekly submitted Himself to their will.

But those around Him were not of the same spirit. Peter, with his accustomed fire, drew a sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest. How unlike the Lord are even the noblest of His followers! In Peter, at that moment, we see fleshly activity when his Masker was submissive, and an hour or two later when Jesus was confessing before Pontius Pilate the good confession, Peter was denying Him in the presence of the servants with oaths and curses (1 Tim. 6:13; Luke 22:54-62).

Now mark the Saviour’s grace. He rebuked His disciple for his unholy zeal, and forthwith touched the ear of the servant and healed him. It is Luke who tells us of this extraordinary display of healing grace, and it is John who records the names of the parties concerned (Luke 22:51; John 18:10). Truly, there is no limit to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not only during the days of His ministry, but when the clouds were darkening around Him, He was the willing servant of human misery and need. This is most beautifully shown in His kindness to the dying thief, and in His healing of Malchus’ ear.

An open antagonist healed and blessed! Can the annals of human nature show anything like it? Yet it is the very essence of the Gospel that the Saviour should act thus. Hence the words in Col. 1:21: “You who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death.” He who penned these words had personally experienced the truth of them. Malchus was hardly so pronounced an antagonist of the Son of God as Saul of Tarsus, “who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” It is no marvel that one who had been so divinely favored delighted henceforward to proclaim: “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. 1:12-15). No one in the universe is so able to melt hard hearts as the Lord Jesus, and to transform the most violent adversaries into humble and devoted disciples. All His ways are ways of matchless grace.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 21:29-31: The Fig-Tree and All the Trees

THE fig-tree is the well-known Scripture emblem representing the nation of Israel; “all the trees,” in the parable now before us, represent accordingly the various nations which have to do with Israel (Luke 21:29-31).

The Lord was giving utterance to His great Olivet prophecy. His sorrowful words about the temple being laid in ruins had drawn forth a series of questions from His surprised disciples. In His reply He spoke not only of the impending desolation by the Romans under Titus (which is the prominent feature in Luke’s account), but also of Israel’s last bitter sorrow when the Antichrist is in power in Jerusalem. Concerning the latter, reference must be made to Matthew and Mark for full particulars. In all three Gospels it is made abundantly clear that deliverance will be brought in by the appearing of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven.

Our parable runs thus: “Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand.” We are thus entitled to expect signs of life to manifest themselves in Israel and in the nations with which she has special dealings, before the Saviour’s coming to earth to inaugurate the visible Kingdom of God. This is suggestive that that great event is near, for it is indisputable that remarkable movements are proceeding amongst the people in question. The Zionest Congresses have revived the national spirit of Israel in a marvelous degree; the past few years have witnessed similar revivals of the national spirit in Greece, Italy, Egypt, and other powers, who have their respective parts to play in the stirring events that will wind up the present age. More extensive developments will yet be witnessed. Edom, Moab, Ammon, etc., long lost to view as nations, are destined to re-assert themselves and fall into position for the last great tragedy, if Scripture is to be credited. The Eastern Question, so often discussed, is in reality the Israel Question. Its center is not Constantinople but Jerusalem. This political problem, so long the vexation of statesmen, will not be settled until the Son of man comes forth from heaven and takes the affairs of earth in hand as the only rightful King of Kings and Lord of lords. Then Israel’s tribes will be re-established in the land of their fathers, and their foes and His will be put down forever. The world’s summer-time is indeed at hand, but desolating judgment storms must needs spend their force ere it can be brought in.

Meanwhile, believers in the Lord Jesus have an even more glorious expectation. For them the Saviour has promised to descend into the air with a shout, calling them home. In that moment of moments every sleeping believer will be raised from the tomb, and every living believer will be changed, and so be caught up to be forever with the Lord. The precious atoning blood entitles them to this, who otherwise had no hope and no claim, and no due but eternal woe. The removal of the whole Christian host will doubtless come as a tremendous shock to the world; but this must be ere the world’s last fearful tragedy begins.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 19:11-27: The Pounds

THIS parable, while similar in some respects to that of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30), seems nevertheless to be a distinct utterance. The Lord was approaching Jerusalem for the last time, and the hopes of His disciples ran high. Their thought was that now would be established the glorious kingdom of which prophets and psalmists have spoken for ages. The moral necessity of the cross had not yet become clear to them. They did not yet understand that man’s sin required the Saviour to accept the cross at His first coming, and to wait for the Kingdom until His

second coming. So the parable of the Pounds was given, in which the Lord likens Himself to a nobleman going away to a far country to receive for Himself a Kingdom, and to return, entrusting His servants with responsibilities meanwhile (Luke 19:11-27).

In the interpretation, the servants are those who “profess and call themselves Christians”; the citizens, who sent the insulting message, “We will not have this man to reign over us,” are the Jewish people. At the return of the Lord Jesus, two things will take place; the judgment of His adversaries, and the reward of His servants. In the parable of the Talents, the trusts varied according to ability; in the parable of the Pounds, each man received alike. Divine sovereignty is the point in the one; human responsibility in the other.

The first man called was able to say, “Lord, Thy pound hath gained ten pounds.” Diligence had marked his conduct in relation to his Master’s trust. Warmly did his Master commend him as a good servant, saying, “Have thou authority over ten cities.” What a Lord is ours! Such a recompense for fidelity in so small a matter. His pound was equivalent to 3, 2S. 6d. in English currency, yet for diligence with this petty sum he was assigned rule over ten cities in the Millennial Kingdom. No Lord is so easily pleased as the Christ of God, and none rewards so amply, devoted service to His name. The second man’s account showed five pounds. To him was granted rule over five cities. He whom we serve notices both the quantity and the quality of what is done for him (Luke 19:15; 1 Cor. 3:13). Thus Romans 16:12 tells us of Tryphosa and Tryphosa, who labored in the Lord, and of the beloved Persis, who labored “much” in the Lord. In like manner, Nehemiah 3. tells us of many who helped in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, but distinguishes some as working “earnestly.” The “much” and the “earnestly” should be pondered by all who would be well-pleasing to the absent Christ.

There is, alas! a dark side to this parable. One man returned his pound to the Lord wrapped up in a napkin. In order to excuse his utter indifference to the claims of his absent Master, he slandered His character thus: “I feared Thee, because Thou art an austere man: Thou takest up that Thou layedst not down, and reapest that Thou didst not sow.” This wicked servant represents Christendom’s merely nominal professors, who never dream of using their powers and possessions for Him whose name they bear. All such will find themselves utterly rejected in the great day; their judgment being richly deserved if only for their miserable perversion of the character of Him who is infinitely gracious and good. Has He not shed His blood for the perishing, thereby rendering salvation available for all, apart from works or price: and what does He ask from any but the simple fervent service that naturally flows from appreciation of His marvelous love and grace?

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 18:9-14: The Pharisee and the Publican

THIS was a shaft leveled at the self-righteousness, not only of our Lord’s day, but of every other day also. Two men are represented as going up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican (Luke 18:9-14). If men are real anywhere, surely it is in the presence of God. It is reasonable to suppose that there, if anywhere, men will weigh their words, and speak as their hearts really feel. But what have we here? A man parading his merits in the Divine presence! “God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” Not one word of thanksgiving or adoration for what God is in His gracious attitude towards men; every word was about himself and his own fancied perfections. What a spectacle is here! A man in the presence of the Giver of all good, yet no favor besought; in the presence of the Judge of quick and dead, and the Searcher of all hearts, yet no sin acknowledged. He asks nothing and confesses nothing.

Surely a terrible possibility is suggested to us in this parable. A man’s religion may be his ruin. His very strictness of life may land him in perdition. Why? Because the religious man is apt to pride himself in his religiousness, and the moral man in his morality, and so become utterly blinded to the fact of his real sinnership before a holy God. Romans 9:30-10:4 may well be pondered in this connection. The apostle groaned over his religious fellow-countrymen because they were seeking righteousness on the principle of works, whereas righteousness for man is only found through faith in Christ. Paul pursued the same false line himself until stopped in his career by the revelation of the glorified Christ (Phil. 3:4-9).

The publican took wholly different ground before God. He belonged to that corrupt and hated class who collected the Roman taxes, thus helping forward the oppression of his suffering people. But he was now in the presence of God, and he felt deeply the sacredness of the place and his own unfitness for it. “The publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, ‘God be propitious to me the sinner.’” He might well smite upon his breast, for the heart is the spring of all evil. Man since the Fall has been corrupt root and branch. The publican thought not of the Pharisee—whether he was better or worse than himself; his own personal evil overwhelmed him as he sought to measure it in the light of God. “Be propitious to me” (for so the verse should read) was his penitent cry.

The Lord of all declared: “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.” That is to say, the publican went home justified, and the Pharisee did not. This is the very opposite of all human thoughts. Weighed in human balances, the religious and benevolent Pharisee should have received the blessing, and the corrupt publican should have been driven away. But it is never so with God. This is a clear case of the kind described in Romans 4:5-6, of righteousness imputed apart from works. But on what equitable principle is God able to deal thus with the guilty? Let us note it carefully and reverently— it is the blood of Jesus (Rom. 3:24, 25; vs. 9).

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 18:2-5: The Unjust Judge

IN a materialistic day such as the present, prayer is at a discount. Sense is more than faith, and the visible is greater than the invisible. But it nevertheless remains true that man is the most helpless creature conceivable apart from the God who made him; and he who ignores this is riding for a fall—rushing forward to destruction.

Even true-hearted souls are frequently tried by divine delay in answering prayer and are tempted to give up the praying attitude in consequence. To all such the parable of the Unjust Judge has an encouraging voice. It was also given to the disciples as a stimulus to pray always and not faint. The parable runs thus: “There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, ‘Avenge me of my adversary.’ And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself ‘Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth rue, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me’”

(Luke 18:2-5).

Dispensationally there is a reference here to “the days of the Son of man.” In the previous chapter the Saviour had spokes of the last great crisis, and the painful circumstances in which the godly remnant of Israel will find themselves at that time. The parable of the Unjust Judge follows this immediately, and is connected with it. In the dark days of Antichristian apostasy when Christendom and Judaism will join hands in the bases iniquity, those who cleave to God will have no resource but prayer. The book of Psalms gives us prophetically many of the agonizing appeals that will then be wrung from their distressed hearts. God will certainly avenge their wrongs, and judge their oppressors in His own time; the question is, will His people wait for Him, and accept no deliverance but that which comes from His hand? This is the force of the Saviour’s words, “When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

At all times, and under all circumstances, it is good to trust God. Ever since the Fall, it has been the tendency of flesh to plan and provide for itself in utter independence of God. This is the root cause of the misery of which the earth is full. It is the beginning of good things when a man’s pride and self-will become broken down, and he turns to God in humble penitence, pleading for salvation the Saviour’s worthy name and His atoning blood. Such faith is blessed immediately and forever. But this step, supremely important though it be, is only an initial one. It is the introduction into a life of faith, every step of which should be marked by simple confidence in God. Let Him delay to answer prayer if it so please Him, still faith perseveres, knowing assuredly that infinite power and love will never suffer a single trusting soul to be overwhelmed. “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psa. 30:5).

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 17:1-19: The Ten Lepers

Tiffs striking incident happened during our Lord’s last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. The record of it is preserved in the third Gospel only (Luke 17:1-19). Ten lepers met the Saviour at His entrance into a village, and with one accord cried to Him for mercy. The fame of His deeds of power had spread from Dan to Beersheba; hence the readiness with which these victims of disease appealed to Him. Remarkably, one of them was a Samaritan, the rest being Jews. Under ordinary circumstances the nine would have spurned the company of the tenth (“for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans”); but the stress of a common disease had put them all on one level, and they apparently felt it. The greatest leveler of all is sin, of which leprosy is in Scripture the expressive type. High and low, rich and poor, religious and irreligious, are all in the same position before God in this respect; “there is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). What matters is that some owe 50 pence and some 500 if all alike have nothing wherewith to pay? (Luke 7:41-42).

In answer to the cry of the lepers the Saviour said: “Go, show yourselves unto the priests.” Why did He act thus? Why did He not put out His hand and touch them, and so give them instantaneous healing, as with the leper of Luke 5:13? The reason appears to be that He would test them as to their confidence in His word. Their response was perfect. With no change whatever in their condition they turned their steps in the direction of the temple to offer their two birds (Lev. 14:1-4), being confident that healing would be experienced on the road, as it really happened. “As they went they were cleansed.” Let these poor fellows read us a lesson to-day. Confidence in the divine word (for us the Scriptures) is the deepest need of our time. Higher criticism, and the “opposition of science falsely so-called” are destroying faith in the Word of God. Multitudes are weltering in unbelief, to their deadly peril. Yet blessing for us, as for the ten lepers, is only found in the way of faith; and “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17)

A remarkable thing happened as soon as the little band became conscious that they were healed. The Samaritan broke away from his companions (who continued their journey towards the temple), and returned to Jesus, falling at His feet, and glorifying God with a loud voice. In his eyes sanctuaries, ceremonies, and priests were the veriest trivialities compared with the Son of God. The nine might occupy themselves with the religious formalities of Jerusalem, but he could only be happy at the Saviour’s feet. The Lord commended him for it in the words: “Were there not ten cleansed; but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.” If the Lord could so speak in a land where the religious ceremonies of the people were of divine institution, what would He say to-day when the ceremonies in which men pride themselves are derived partly from Judaism and partly from Paganism, all of them in defiance of the teaching of the New Testament epistles? There is nothing so spiritually barren as ceremonial religion; there is nothing that so satisfies and delights the heart as living contact with the person of the Son of God. To Him, not to religious centers, our allegiance is due; for has He not purged our sins by His blood, and does He not live now on our behalf in the glory above? Let others impoverish themselves with mere religion if they will, but let us find our all in Christ Himself.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 16:1-12: The Unjust Steward

THIS parable, unlike those immediately preceding it, was addressed to disciples only (Luke 16:1-12). An important lesson is contained therein for those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

An unfaithful steward is held up to our view—one who was convicted of wasting his master’s goods. Receiving notice of discharge, his mind turned upon his future. “I cannot dig,” said he; “to beg I am ashamed.” He therefore resolved to ingratiate himself with his master’s debtors during his brief remaining term of office, with a view to receiving benefits at their hands at a later date. He accordingly called them together, and bade one who owed his master for a hundred measures of oil sit down and write fifty; another who owed for a hundred measures of wheat was told to write eighty. The Saviour’s comment upon this has frequently puzzled even devout readers of Scripture. “The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely; for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.”

Let us consider this carefully. First, the one who thus corn mends is not the Lord Jesus, but the imaginary lord of the parable. Second, the steward was not commended for his honesty but for his wisdom. A clever rogue necessarily elicits from his observers admiration—of a kind. The point of the parable is that the man acted with his eye upon the future. He used hi: brief term of stewardship with a view to the years that lay beyond. In doing this he set an example even to true disciples. Hence the words that follow: “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”

To read these words of our Lord as if they had any reference to men seeking salvation would be disastrous. Salvation is by grace alone, and it is founded upon the Saviour's atoning blood. This cannot be too earnestly or too frequently insisted upon. But those who are saved have serious responsibilities concerning which they must each one give account at the judgment-seat of Christ. Hence each "disciple" should take a leaf out of the book of the unjust steward, and use the brief period of life here with a view to blessing and reward in the life beyond. Perhaps there is nothing concerning which even true Christians fail more deeply than in the matter of money. Riches are called "the mammon of unrighteousness," because they are the fruit of sin. Such conditions as now prevail, one rich and another poor, could have no place in an unfallen world. A grave responsibility therefore rests upon the Christian as to how he disposes of that which he holds, be it little or much. He is indeed a steward; to Another he must render an account. He who spends all upon himself, reserving only his three penny-piece for God, is living for the present only; he who uses his substance for God in the midst of a needy world is making friends by means of his possessions. There is no thought in Luke 16:9 of the objects of our benefactions welcoming us into the habitations above. Reference to the Greek shows that the Lord spoke in the third person— "that ye may be received." The one who welcomes the self-denying disciple to rest and reward is none other than the living God Himself, who is prepared to abundantly honor in another world those who have surrendered night in this world for the sake of His name, and under the constraining influence of His mighty grace.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 15:11-32: The Prodigal Son

IT is not now the grace that seeks the lost one, but the grace that receives the repentant one to home and blessing. This is the Father's part in the wonderful scheme of salvation. The basis of all blessing for men is the atoning blood. This, however, is not the point in the parables of Luke 15, but rather the principle upon which men are blest, which is sovereign grace.

The Saviour now depicts two sons—one profligate, the other self-righteous (Luke 15:11-32). These represent the lawless and the religious classes respectively. The younger son, having obtained his portion from his father, forsook him, and wasted his substance in a distant land. In like manner do the mass of men live in utter disregard of Him whose offspring they are, and squander His rich endowments—health, means, and faculties, in the gratification of their carnal lusts. The first man aimed at independence of God, and the love of this has characterized all his progeny since. When the prodigal had "spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land." Thus all around him were destitute like himself, so that no man could relieve the pangs of his fellow. Graphic picture of the godless man's utter inability to assauge the grief and disappointment of his neighbor's heart. In truth they are all needy together, if they would but confess it.

Presently the wanderer descends to the swine-trough. Penniless and hungry, he is thankful to be permitted to tend swine, and even to share their food. "No man gave unto him." So says the Lord of all. Let infidelity inform us how many hospitals, orphanages, and other refuges of mercy would be dotted about on the face of the earth if Christianity had never shed its gracious influence into the hearts of men.

Feeding swine giving time for reflection, the prodigal's mind turned to the father's house, and its abundant provision. His heart became attracted thither, and he resolved to return and cast himself upon his father's mercy. This reminds us of Rom. 2:4: "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." But the transgressor made one huge blunder. He purposed to say: "I am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." Conscience should have taught him that he had fallen too low for this, for surely the first requisite of a servant is a good character. Let us take the very humblest place before our God. Such is our state by nature that we are absolutely without fitness for any place whatever in the divine presence. But he who gives up all thought of merit, and casts himself unreservedly upon sovereign grace, pleading only the worthiness of Christ and the efficacy of His blood will find himself forthwith brought into the relationship of son to the Father, with rights and privileges such as even elect angels can never know.

This the sinner of our parable proved. The great God is positively represented as running to meet him with kisses. Soon the best robe was upon him, with ring and shoes accompanying. The best robe is Christ, in whom the pardoned sinner stands complete, and with whose perfections he is henceforward covered in the eyes of God. "And they began to be merry." Not a hint as to its cessation. The father's heart finds present and eternal joy in what his love has wrought for the objects of his favor; while these, and all who understand their case, feast and delight themselves in the divine presence for evermore. Truly, it is good to know a Saviour-God.

Our Lord's religious critics could not fail to recognize themselves in the elder son, whose attitude towards the repentant transgressor, and towards the father also, because of his goodness to him, He so strikingly portrayed (Luke 15:25-32). The elder son has a natural claim; and religionists in all ages have considered themselves in this position in relation to God—in a greater or less degree. But for this very reason they are rejected, "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1:29). It is surely not without intention that the elder son is invariably represented in Scripture as outside divine blessing. Cain, Ishmael, Esau, and Reuben are a few cases in point. It is the confessedly guilty sinner, who has nothing to plead but what he finds in God Himself, who gets the blessing.

"His elder son was in the field." There was joy within, but he was without. "The field" is the place of labor. The sincere religionist is always a hard worker. He has a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Going about to establish his own righteousness, he does not submit himself to the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:2, 3). Like the elder son, he is "nigh" to the Father's house, but he never gets inside, and the warmth of the Father's heart he never experiences. Occupying himself with legal works and religious ordinances, his life is cold and cheerless; so that, like the elder son, who was puzzled by the sound of music and dancing, his heart is a stranger to the fullness of joy which is found alone in the divine presence (Psa. 16:11).

"He was angry, and would not go in: and his father came out, and entreated him." He need not remain without; the door was not closed to him; he was as welcome as the prodigal to all the bliss of the father's house. But the whole difficulty lay there. In his self-parade— "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment" —he made it manifest that he looked for preferential treatment. In his own eyes he was one of the ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. In his anger he levels a positive complaint against his father: "thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." Here he tells out his own heart. His nearness to his father had been external only; his toil had proceeded from some other motive than love; his notion of real happiness was to be away from the father and in the company of his friends. Terrible exposure of the religious man's true state of heart in relation to God.

Hear the father tenderly pleading with the self-righteous one: “Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. But it was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found.” As far as this world is concerned, the man who has lived decently and religiously has a distinct advantage over the profligate. Health and fortune remain with him, hence the words, “all that I have is thine.” But what is the value of this if pride and self-righteousness are suffered to exclude the soul from the presence of God forever? Our parable closes with the elder son still outside, angrily objecting to the grace which had been shown to his wayward brother. He is the parent of all those who in this day scorn the idea of being “converted” and “saved,” and who will never consent to the wastrels of earth being labeled “the sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling” (1 Cor. 1:2). The very thought of it touches them to the quick.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 15:8-9: The Lost Silver

SINCE the first of the three parables (of Luke 15) indisputably refers to the Son, and the third to the Father, it is surely reasonable to look for the Holy Spirit in the parable that intervenes. And indeed it is blessedly true that each Person in the Godhead is equally interested in the blessing of men. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost work together in holy harmony in the gracious work of salvation.

The Saviour asked: “What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one of them, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and search diligently till she find it?” (vs. 8). Here that which is lost is lifeless, in contrast with the first parable, which represents a living thing as going astray (the lost sheep). These are the two points of view from which the epistles to the Romans and Ephesians respectively regard the sinner. Activity in sin is the point in Romans; death—spiritual death—is the point in Ephesians. The painstaking work of the Holy Spirit in seeking the lost is presented in a veiled form in our parable. It is a woman who acts. This suggests the Church of God, the individual members of which are the Spirit’s instruments for reaching the souls of men. Many a dark heart needs the light of divine truth to be let into it, that its evil may be exposed, and its deep need of salvation be brought home. The woman’s candle expresses this.

Unlike the sheep, which had strayed upon the mountains (Matt. 18:12), the piece of silver was lost in the house. The great professing mass called Christendom is likened in 2 Tim. 2:20 to “a great house” containing a mixed medley of the precious and the vile. Thus it is not only that the profligate and the wicked are lost, but many religious persons also. Perishing souls may be found in both tavern and “place of worship.” The lost sheep is the image of the one; the lost coin is the image of the other.

The joy of the woman, when the missing piece was found, is declared by the Saviour Himself to resemble the joy that bursts forth amongst the angels of God when one sinner is brought to repentance. One soul is of sufficient value to engage the interest of all heaven. Who but God knows its worth? A single weeping reprobate furnishes more delight in heaven than a whole host of religious formalists, who wrap themselves around with the garments of their self-righteousness. It is marvelous, moreover, that the angelic host should unselfishly rejoice in the blessing of a being inferior in natural status to themselves, yet raised by sovereign grace to a more exalted position of blessing than the highest of the heavenly hierarchy have ever known or ever will know. Yet Peter says, concerning our blessings, “which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12). And Paul lets us know that through the Church is being made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10). They study His ways with us, and find profit and blessing thereby.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 15:4: The Lost Sheep

THE cynical remarks of the religious classes in Israel rendered it necessary for the Saviour to justify His attitude towards the guilty and lost. The three parables of Luke 15. were accordingly given, in which is explained, in a manner calculated to move every true heart, the yearning of the divine Trinity over the erring, and the various parts played by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the blessing of such. In the parable of the lost sheep we have portrayed the work of the Son; in that of the lost piece of silver we have the work of the Spirit; while in the parable of the prodigal son we have graphically described the warmth of affection with which the Father welcomes the wanderer home.

The Lord spoke first of His own work for two reasons. First, because it was with Him men were finding fault at that moment, and second, because His self-sacrifice on behalf of sinners necessarily precedes (and is, indeed, the basis) of the work of the Spirit and of the Father in men’s souls. He put this question to His critics: “What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?” (Luke 15:4). If they would be so solicitous about a straying animal, why marvel that the Lord of all should yearn over lost men, made in the image and glory of God? To seek and to save such, He was even then upon that wonderful journey which began from the heights of heavenly bliss, and which would only end when the cross of Calvary had been endured. Such grace as this has no charm for religionists; their self-complacency hiding from them their need of it. It may suit the profligate, but pride maintains that it does not suit them. In their own eyes they are the ninety and nine just persons who have no need of repentance. So utterly alienated are they from divine interests and affections that they are unable to understand the joy of the Father and the Son when one sinner is brought home. The fact that the religious talk were ever the Saviour’s bitterest enemies is sufficient to put this painful truth beyond controversy. But the Shepherd rejoices in the fruit of His sufferings and toil. He shoulders His sheep, and carries it home rejoicing. By His mighty power is every saved one kept until the end. No force, either human or infernal, can wrest even the feeblest of His lambs from His care (John 10:27-30). He brings them, not into the fold, but home to Himself. There is no fold in Christianity. “One fold” is a sheer perversion in John 10:16; “one flock” is what the Saviour said. Wycliffe and Coverdale so rendered His words long before the Authorized Version was published; it was departure from truth when “one fold” was adopted in preference. The “fold” savors of the bondage of the law, which men, ignorant, alas, of the grace of God, have revived in Christianity: “the flock” suggests the liberty of divine love, which attracts, and binds, men to a personal Saviour.

The Shepherd’s joy is shared by His friends and neighbors, to whom He says: “Rejoice with Me; for I have found My sheep which was lost.” Those who are accustomed to intimacy of communion with the Son of God know, to their blessing, what this means. His interests are theirs; His achievements in the way of saving grace furnish them with material for holy triumph and delight. But in what relation did these religionists stand to Him, who, instead of rejoicing in His joy, could only coldly criticize the exercise of His goodness to the needy and lost?

THE Spirit of God in this place has linked together two very important yet distinct principles. First, we get the fullness and freeness of divine grace set forth in the parable of the great supper, then we have truth for the conscience as to the pathway of discipleship. Our deceitful hearts are prone to disassociate these things, but they are divinely joined in the scriptures. The Lord was at meat in the house of a Pharisee on the sabbath day. He did not forget (how could He?) that He was the witness of God in this world, though for the moment a guest in the house of another. His all-searching eye detected the selfishness that reigned there. As to the guests, poor self-assertive flesh in them all struggled for the chief place; and as to the host, he had gathered a company who were well able to recompense him again. The Lord rebuked all parties. The spirit of grace was lacking all round—self reigned in all their hearts.

He set before His host, that when making a feast, it were better far to fill the house with the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind, and to await reward at the resurrection of the just. There was no honey in the meat-offering of God. He was a guest, but merely natural courtesy and deference could not make Him withhold the rebuke that was due. He set forth in His remonstrance God's grace in contrast with man's selfishness. The word apparently charmed one, who said “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.” This led to the well known parable. Alas! however men may like the sound of grace, when the heart is tested, it is found to have no real appreciation of what is in the heart of God. If God invites, excuses are made; if He wishes a houseful, He must Himself seek them, yea, compel them to come in.

God's grace is attractively expressed. The Lord Jesus likens it to a great supper well furnished, Nothing is lacking; all that is good is provided by bounteous hand. His principle ever is, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” In the interpretation of the parable, I suppose the first invited guests were the Jewish leaders. But their hearts were in the world, there was no taste for God and His Christ. The field, the oxen, and the wife furnished excuses ready to hand. If the world is in the heart, whatever form it may take (and the world has many forms), there is no room for Christ. We should remember that the things that were put forward in this way were really the temporal blessings pertaining to the Jewish calling. So treacherous is the natural heart that it is possible for the very blessings of God to supplant Him in the affections, indeed to shut Him out altogether.

But if the rich man had no desire and thus went empty away, He fills the hungry with good things: to the poor the gospel is preached (Luke 1:53. 4:18). It was the common people who heard Jesus gladly. The publicans and the harlots went into the kingdom of heaven before the scribes and Pharisees. The streets and the lanes of the city were scoured; and all the despised of men were gathered together, “the poor, the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.” This did not exhaust divine grace. “The servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.” Consequently the highways and hedges must be searched, that the wanderers and outcasts might be brought in to share also. Here we come in. We were highway and hedge folk. Do we object? As Gentiles we were completely outside. We were uncircumcised men—dogs—sinners of the Gentiles.

The picture is charming. A divine hand has drawn it. It is grace full and free. The branches run over the wall. The well is deep. Nothing is sought for from the guests, all is according to the riches of God's grace. Let us deeply enjoy this. There can be no discipleship until this is thoroughly understood. Any attempt to follow Christ before grace is fully known is mere legalism and displeasing to Him. He must be blessedly known as a giver ere we can speak of surrendering aught for His sake. He gives all, no payment is required, we are not asked to give anything up. This is grace. Let it have full place in all our hearts.

Flesh likes the sound of this, “and there went great multitudes with Him.” We can understand it, for we know something of our own hearts. This must be tested. Did they know who they were following? Did they apprehend the path that He was treading in this scene? He was not yet the Reigning One, surrounded by all the pomp and glory of the kingdom (all of which will be seen in its day), but He was despised and rejected of men. Israel had no heart for such a Messiah. Their thoughts were carnal. A mere temporal deliverer like Saul would have satisfied them; a lowly man full of patient grace (yet withal God manifest in the flesh) was repugnant.

Do we sufficiently realize in this day, that we are called to follow a rejected Christ? He has been here, but is not here now. How is this? Men cast Him out. Yes, the creatures of His hand rose up against Him and slew Him. The heavens have received Him, and He is at the Father's right hand. But, as far as earth is concerned, He is the rejected One. Such a Christ we have been called to know and follow. What manner of men ought we to be? The Lord turned upon the multitude and said unto them, “If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” Does the Lord despise natural relationships? By no means. They are of God. It is one of the features of the last days to be “without natural affection” (2 Tim. 3:3). He knew how and when to render obedience Himself in the days of His flesh.

The point is that He must have the very first place in the hearts of His own. The time is straitened. Things here, whatever they might be, must be held with a loose hand. It cuts very close when we read “and his own life also.” Paul knew the meaning of this better than any. He always carried the sentence of death in his person. How far on are we in such a path? This rises above, yea crosses, nature. Are we prepared for it?

It was trying for Aaron and his sons to be forbidden to uncover their heads and rend their clothes when Jehovah made a breach upon them (Lev. 10). It was equally trying for the Levites on the day of the golden calf. But they responded well to the summons, “Who is on the Lord's side?” “who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children” (Ex. 32:26, Deut. 33:9).

The cross must be taken and a rejected Christ followed out into the way, or the path of discipleship is not known. But here the Lord guards against the flippancy to which we are prone. The cost must be counted. A man intending to build a tower must count whether he have sufficient to finish it. A king going to war must consult “whether he be able to meet him that cometh against him.” It is easy to say, “I am ready to go with thee into prison and to death.” A breakdown is humbling. The Lord is dishonored. It is tantamount to saying that He has called the soul out into a path in which He is not able to sustain it. Such is the appearance to those who observe. And the failing one is mocked—— “This man began to build and was not able to finish.”

How heart-searching and strange must all this have been to a Jew! Perhaps some said, as in John 6, “This is a hard saying, who can hear it?” Perhaps, too, many went back and walked no more with Him. The Jew was filled with thoughts of earthly kingdom glory, and to be told to bear a cross! Many misunderstand in this day also. The professing church has allied itself with the world, dwelling in honor where Satan's throne is. Flesh is sanctioned and worldly glory is sought all round. Therefore how strange the cross must sound to some, and how perplexing to be called upon to go forth to Christ without the camp bearing His reproach (Heb. 13:13)! But this is the true place of the Christian to-day. He who would do the will of the Lord in all things must step into this pathway of reproach and loss.

Alas! how many we have known who have essayed to tread the path and who have turned back with confusion of face! They once abandoned the abominations of Christendom, and took their place with Christ outside and professed considerable devotion to His name and to His word. They boasted of heavenly light and spoke glibly of the advanced things of the truth of God. We thought them firm and true. We believed they apprehended the seriousness of the position and pathway. But some cold north wind blew, some test came, and they failed. Their name was Lot, not Abraham. They now build again the things they destroyed. Thus is the Lord put to shame, and His truth exposed to ridicule. Better far never to have ventured forth than turn back thus. But it is a warning to us all, “Let him that thinketh he standeth beware lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Let us look matters straight in the face and weigh them up in the sanctuary of His presence.

The closing word in Luke 14 is very solemn, “Salt is good, but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is fit neither for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear let him hear.” To lose one's savor is a different thing from turning back and giving up the path. The outward position may be maintained, yet the true character gone. Salt expresses that spiritual energy which preserves the soul from the corruption around and enables it to bear a true testimony for Christ. If this declines, where are we as witnesses? Of what use are we in this scene? Of how many is this sadly true! They did run well, their sound was clear, their walk was unequivocal; but they are not the men they used to be. Not that they have abandoned the path, nor surrendered the truths formerly professed. These are held still, but the world has got in, the tone has become lowered, the heavenly ring is scarcely discernible now. How sorrowful that this should be true of any! Our devotedness should be deepened as time proceeds, and our faith strengthened as difficulties increase, and we are cast more and more on God.

Discipleship is an individual thing. “If any man.” “He that hath ears to hear.” Each must look to Christ for himself, each must follow in his own appointed path. There is ever a tendency to look at our brethren to see what they intend doing. It is easy to walk with a crowd. Faith is but little exercised in such circumstances. He who cannot. follow Christ for himself is not fit to follow with others. Many have been hindered in this way. Others have been looked to or waited for. Satan has taken advantage of it, and has got in, and chilled the desire to follow Christ in all things.

I dare not despise the fellowship of my brethren, but must seek it, and cultivate it in every possible way; but they must not be allowed to take the place of the Lord. He must be looked to and followed, or the testimony cannot be good, nor discipleship true and real. The Lord give us understanding in all things.

W. W. F.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 14:16-24: The Great Supper

THE Lord of all was dining with one of the rulers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees. Being the Sabbath day, He was watched critically by all who were present at the table. Observing a dropsical man before Him, He healed him, administering at the same time a stern rebuke to those who blamed Him for it in their hearts. He then addressed a remonstrance to His fellow-guests for the self-seeking which had led all of them to choose the best seats at the feast; and this He followed with a word to His host as to showing kindness to the poor and needy rather than to those who were certain to recompense him again. The pride and selfishness which His holy eye thus detected contrasted deplorably with His own profound humility and grace (Luke 14).

One of the guests interposing with the remark: “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God,” the Saviour gave utterance to the parable of the Great Supper, wherein is shown that, however eager men may be for the best seats at feasts provided by their fellows, when God spreads a feast they want no place whatever, but pray to be excused.

The Great Supper is an attractive presentation of the grace of God as revealed in the Gospel. The first invited guests were the religious mass in Israel. To them the Saviour first showed Himself with tenderest overtures of love. “And they all with one consent began to make excuse.” The character of the excuses show that the blessings of God may be used to exclude God Himself from the affections. Such possessions as ground and oxen, and above all, a wife, are good gifts from God to men. That these should turn their heart away from, rather than to, God, only proves how evil the human heart is. There is, moreover, glaring absurdity in the excuses given. Those who had bought property and oxen, having concluded their bargains, could well wait until the next day in order to see and prove what they had purchased. There was nothing in the circumstances to hinder their presence at the supper if their hearts really desired to be there.

Being thus affronted by those he had invited, the master of the house sent his servant into the streets and lanes of the city, with orders to bring in the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind. These represent the moral outcasts of Israel—the publicans and the harlots, concerning whom the Saviour once said to His religious hearers, “they go into the Kingdom of God before you” (Matt. 21:31).

But this was not sufficient; accordingly the servant was instructed to “go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.” The servant referred to in this parable is the Holy Spirit of God, Who has graciously made it His business to reach men with the glad tidings of divine goodness and love. The highway and hedge folk are the Gentiles, to whom the Gospel of God is now being proclaimed, Israel having definitely refused it. As Peter put it to his Jewish audience on the day of Pentecost: “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” (Acts 2:39).

How the Gentile world has treated God’s invitation is painfully evident to all. The story of His sacrifice of His Son for men’s salvation should subdue every heart to which it is presented. His gracious offer of pardon and justification to all who believe in the Son should evoke the humble gratitude of every one who is privileged to hear of it. But the human heart is everywhere alike, whether in the Gentile or in the Jew. It

wants nothing to do with God and His Son. The flimsiest and most contemptible excuses are too readily found, to the present and eternal loss of all who are guilty of such egregious folly.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 14:2: The Dropsical Man

YET another Sabbath-day incident. The place, not a synagogue, but the dinner-table of one of Israel's chief ecclesiastics, and he a Pharisee. Luke (who alone reports the case) says "they watched Him" (14:1). Nothing more need be stated concerning the attitude of the host and his friends towards their Guest. They were sitting at table with God manifested in flesh, yet so blind were they that they knew it not.

It was an instructive occasion for those who had ears to hear. The lips of Eternal Truth were freely opened. Things were said that day which should have sent every guest to his closet in humiliation before God. The Saviour spoke of the boundless grace of God, and He spoke also of the hopeless evil of the human heart. The presence of a sufferer—a man afflicted with dropsy—furnished Him with His text. He raised the question of the Sabbath himself this time. He demanded of the lawyers and Pharisees about Him: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day or not?" Obtaining no response, he healed the poor fellow and let him go. Knowing that they were bitterly censuring Him in their hearts for His deed of mercy, He proceeded thus: "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day?" The challenge was unanswerable. Where their own interests were concerned they would not scruple to act promptly, let the day be ever so sacred.

Man—even religious man—thus stands convicted of being utterly out of harmony with God. His boasted fidelity to religious forms is not the fruit of love to God, but simply gratification of his spiritual pride. What can be conceived more offensive than this? If open transgressors produce "wicked works" (Col. 1:21), religionists produce "dead works" (Heb. 9:14), and both are equally hateful to Him with Whom we have to do. So morally alienated is man from God that it has to be said to all alike: "Ye must be born anew" (John 3:7).

The Saviour's exposure of the human heart at the Pharisee's dinner-table is painful to read. First, He rebuked the pride of His fellow-guests, as shown in their eager scramble for the chief seats, then He censured the selfishness of the host in that he had invited only those to his table who would be certain to recompense him again (Luke 14:7-14). Pride and selfishness in the presence of the self-sacrificing One who had left heaven's glory for Calvary's cross in His love to perishing sinners! A person venturing the remark, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God," He added the parable of the great supper, the sad moral of which, as regards man, is that though God provide something ever so costly and rare, man has no heart for it. The scramblers for the best seats in the Pharisee's house wanted no seat at all where God and His grace were found. "I pray thee have me excused" was their uniform reply to His loving invitation. If God would have guests at His feast, such is the animosity of the human heart towards Him, even amongst the religious, that He must needs "compel them to come in." Truly, if man's heart be only evil, the heart of God is only good, and that eternally.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 13:6-8: The Fig-Tree in the Vineyard

THE history of Israel is the history of man. The special dealings of God with that nation have served to bring out the incorrigible evil of human nature. Tested in every way, endowed with every conceivable privilege, encompassed by divine care and attention, man is a hopeless failure. He yields no fruit for God. The parable of the fig-tree in the vineyard shows this with all plainness.

The city of Jerusalem had just experienced a painful shock. The Roman governor, Pilate, had butchered a number of Galileans, who had come thither to offer sacrifices. Some reported this to the Lord Jesus, desiring to hear His opinion upon the subject. In His usual way, He used the opportunity to deal a direct blow at the consciences of those who questioned Him. "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:1-3). Nothing is easier than to impute exceptional wickedness to those overtaken by calamity, in utter forgetfulness of the fact that man as man—man everywhere—is deserving only of the judgment of God. The Saviour accordingly added a parable, in which it is shown that the whole nation (not a few Galileans only) was altogether unprofitable to God, and, in consequence, going on to judgment. "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard: and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he to the dresser of his vineyard, 'Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?' And he answering said unto him, 'Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down'" (Luke 13:6-8). Both the vineyard and the vine represent the nation of Israel (Isa. 5; Psa. 80); the fig-tree planted in the vineyard represents the remnant of Judah which returned from the Babylonian captivity. A bright testimony for God should have gone forth from a people so graciously blest; instead, such was their hypocrisy and evil, the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles through them (Rom. 2:24). The "three years" suggest the various testings by means of the law, the prophets, and Christ (Acts 7:51-53). By none of these had the people's hearts been reached. God was still without any return from them. One more opportunity—only one—was to be granted in answer to the prayer of the dresser of the vineyard. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who prayed: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The fresh opportunity was the testimony of the Holy Ghost after Christ's departure to heaven. This resulted in the murder of Stephen, and in the chasing out of Christ's other witnesses (1 Thess. 15). The fig-tree has therefore been cut down: the guilty nation has been expelled from the land by the righteous judgment of God.

Christendom's turn is coming. Nineteen centuries of Gospel light have produced little else than worldliness, pride and blasphemy—all perpetrated under cover of Christ's holy name. Divine forbearance, long exercised, will ere long come to an end. Then the stroke will fall, and Christendom will be the scene of the sorest judgments of God. Let each individual look to himself. What answer does my heart give to the costly sacrifice of Calvary, and the exceeding riches of divine grace proclaimed in virtue of it? Not until the heart appreciates Christ and His atoning blood can fruit begin to be produced for God.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 13:10-17: The Bent Woman

This was a Sabbath-day incident, and is recorded by Luke only (13:10-17). Probably on no day in the week was our Lord so closely watched by His adversaries as on the Sabbath, in the hope that they might convict Him of some breach of the law concerning it. How little did they realize, in their unbelief and perverseness, that they were criticizing the very One who gave the law from the fiery mount! The sadness of it is heightened by the fact that these were not the ignorant of the land, but the religious leaders of God's chosen people.

The present miracle was performed in a synagogue, most likely in Jerusalem. A woman was there who "was bowed together and could in no wise lift up herself." Expressive picture of every man's spiritual condition through sin—unable to look up into the face of his God, and without strength to remedy his evil plight (Psa. 40:12; Rom. 5:6). The woman had suffered in her deformity eighteen years. If Scripture numbers are significative, as we believe, eighteen, being the treble of six, is suggestive of the full manifestation of evil. Compare Revelation 13:18. She thus becomes the type of the worst of sinners. Her condition appealed at once to the sensitive spirit of the Saviour. He called her to Him, and said: "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

Had there been a spark of spiritual discernment in the ruler of the synagogue, he would have at once called for Psalms 103. From every tongue present there might well have sounded forth the refrain: "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and All that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases." Alas for the ruler! No such sentiments occurred to his spiritually darkened mind. Instead, he blazed forth with indignation, saying to the people: "There are six days in which men ought to work; in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." This outburst suggests a serious question. When God prescribed the Sabbath for man, forbidding him to work therein, did He thereby intend to bind His own hands, and make it improper for Himself to work on that day, even to perform a deed of mercy? The very suggestion is profanity itself. So good is He, so compassionate in His love, nothing can stay Him in His ministry of grace to poor ruined man. The woman just healed was "a daughter of Abraham," i.e., she was possessed of Abraham's faith. Must faith wait for blessing because it is the Sabbath day? Impossible, seeing that faith, not works or ceremonial observances, is the standing principle of blessing with God. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness... Therefore it is of faith, that it might be of grace" (Rom. 4:5,16). Grace gives the blessing, and faith receives it. All the work necessary for man's eternal good was wrought by the Son of God, when He died upon the cross of Calvary.

The Saviour did not hesitate to expose the hypocrisy of His heartless critic. He would loose his ox or his ass and lead it to the water on the Sabbath day, yet would deny God the right to relieve a suffering woman. Truly our God has no more malignant or unreasonable antagonists than those who oppose Him in the name of religion.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 12:35-36: The Returning Lord

THE Saviour frequently spoke to His disciples of His going away and coming again, and indicated to them two things that should characterize them during His absence—watching and working. The watching attitude is described in Luke 12:35-36 thus: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately." This attitude was early abandoned by the Church. When the Church became worldly she lost touch of the truth of her Lord's return and settled down to the enjoyment of ease and honor here. Having thus forgotten her heavenly calling, she fell into the blunder that her mission was to improve the world; and in the pursuit of this object she became too blind to perceive that her fancy was not being realized, and that instead the world was corrupting and ruining her.

The Lord in His grace has revived the lost hope in these last days, with the happy result that many to-day are looking with fervor for His coming again. Watching is necessarily the fruit of affection, and this the absent Lord values more than the costliest sacrifices or the most toilsome labors. The highest possible character of reward is set before His watching ones: "He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37). Every believing heart cherishes the prospect of serving Christ eternally with a perfection of service that is impossible at present; here we have quite another thought—more delightful far—that He will condescend to render service to us. It will be His joy forever to minister to the happiness of those whom He has redeemed by His blood.

Working has its place no less than watching. Salvation is by grace alone, works having nothing whatever to do with it. Its basis is the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. But the realization of this incites the soul to hearty labor for His name's sake. Concerning the diligent worker, the Lord has said: "He will make him ruler over all that He hath" (Luke 12:44). This honor is great—too great, indeed, for the most spiritual mind to grasp at present, but it is altogether a lower character of reward than that which is in store for watchers. To work for Christ is good; to watch for Christ is better.

The Lord proceeded to speak of the evil servant who says in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming," and who, in consequence, beats his fellow-servants and carouses with the drunken (Luke 12:45). It is the false religious professor who says "Lord, Lord," but has no mind to do what He says. Such the Lord will not only disown but destroy at His coming. In His work of judgment He will discriminate between those who knew His will, and those who knew it not. This is just the difference between the professing Christian and the heathen. Evil is evil, wherever it is found, and must needs be judged; but responsibility is measured according to what men know of God and His Word (Luke 12:47-48). Upon this equitable principle need we marvel if the heaviest strokes of the divine hand fall upon Great Britain when the hour comes for judgment to begin?

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 12:13-21: The Rich Fool

SOMEONE had just appealed to the Saviour concerning a property dispute. He declined to interfere, the matter being foreign to His mission at that time. He had come from heaven, not to adjust the world's wrongs, but to seek men's souls in love. The crooked will certainly be made

straight by His hand, but in another era. For this He must return from His present place on high. But meanwhile He Who never missed an opportunity of dealing with men's consciences concerning things unseen and eternal, used the occasion of the appeal to warn His, hearers against absorption with this world's affairs. In order to present this the more forcibly he added the familiar parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21).

The world has never been without such characters as the Saviour here describes. His omniscient eye had observed the like repeatedly. Men to whom the Creator had been specially kind, into whose lap He has poured blessings in abundance, and who have only used His favors to the utter exclusion of Himself from their thoughts., The rich man of our parable was hampered in regard to his produce. His farm had brought forth plentifully, and his barns were full to overflowing, so that greater storehouses must be erected. The possibility of any hitch arising in connection with his projects never occurred to his mind, so self-confident was he. Accordingly, he addressed himself thus: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." No thought of God, no thought of eternity, found room in his foolish mind. To him this world was everything, and he confidently expected to hold and enjoy it indefinitely.

He ought to have remembered that for man, unlike the beasts there is a life beyond this world, and a God to meet, to whom all must render an account. The divine word to him, and to all of his kind, is, "Thou fool." This is God's epithet, not man's Surely it is not too strong a term to apply to one who absolutely ignores his possession of a never-dying soul. He who think; of nothing but his few years in this world, in utter forgetfulness of the ages upon ages which lie beyond, is a fool indeed. In Luke 16. the Saviour draws aside the veil and shows us the torments of one to whom this world had been everything. He did it in mercy, as a warning to men in all succeeding ages.

The question was recently asked concerning a deceased millionaire: "How much did he leave?" The solemn reply was given: "He left it all." So to the fool of our parable God said: "This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?" "Whose," indeed! A matter of but small moment to the original possessor when the gates of death have closed upon him. To find then that a supreme blunder has been committed is almost too awful to contemplate. To get one's eyes opened to the reality of things when the borderline is passed can only lead to eternal despair; to face realities now will result in humble saving faith in God and His beloved Son. This is life indeed.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 11:21-22: The Stronger Than the Strong

IT was suggested by some that the power by which the Son of God wrought in this world was the power of Beelzebub. The suggestion was as absurd as it was blasphemous. But it furnished the Saviour with an opportunity of showing the relation of man to Satan as the fruit of the Fall, and His own relation to the enemy as having come from heaven for man's deliverance and blessing. He put it thus: "When the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when the stronger than he shall come upon him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils" (Luke 11:21-22). The strong one is. Satan; the stronger than he is the Son of God. Satan's "palace" is the world as it is now; "his goods" are the men and women who dwell therein. The position is a terrible one; none the less so because the mass have no realization of it. Man's revolt from God has not yielded him the independence to which he aspired; it has reduced him to Satanic servitude instead. The Lord Himself on three occasions spoke of the enemy as "prince of this world."

The blind eagerness with which men pursue their lusts and pleasures, some decent and some indecent, is sufficient proof of Satan's dominion over them. Even though no satisfaction is found for money or effort, and though the ultimate issue is manifestly ruinous, men rush heedlessly on. In fact, if they would extricate themselves from the toils of the destroyer, they have no power to do so. Satan has nothing to fear from the struggles of his captives, be they ever so frantic. His hold is firm; his dominion is ancient; and his resources are beyond anything known to the children of men.

But Christ has come. From the Father's heart He came, as the living expression of His compassion for the wretched and lost. Hear Him proclaiming in the synagogue of Nazareth the character of His mission. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; because He hath anointed Me to preach deliverance to the captives," etc. (Luke 4:18). Ere deliverance could be, He must meet the strong man and overcome him. In the wilderness He bound him; at the cross He bruised him. By submitting to death for a brief moment, He annulled Satan's power. His resurrection is the glorious proof of His complete triumph over all the might of the enemy. Deliverance is, in consequence, available for all. None need remain a single hour under the dominion of the strong man. The cry of distress will assuredly be heard; pardon and eternal life will be freely bestowed upon all who believe on the Son. The soul is thus set free forever.

In the same discourse the Saviour gave utterance to the connected parable of the restless spirit (Luke 11:24-26). It is the case of one from whom the unclean spirit has gone out (not cast out), only to return later with seven-fold power. Dispensationally, this is the history of the nation of Israel, from which the demon of idolatry went out after the Babylonish captivity, with the certainty of returning in its most evil form in the day of the Anti-Christ (Matt. 12:45). The Christ of God having been disowned in Zion, "the abomination of desolation" is destined to stand in Israel's holy place (Matt. 24:15). Reformation is insufficient, whether for that nation or for individuals, in this or in any other day. It will not avail to put the soul beyond the reach of the enemy's power. Living faith in the One Who died and rose again can alone effectually meet human need.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 11:15: God or Beelzebub

"HE was casting out a demon, and it was dumb" (Luke 11:14). "Blind and dumb," adds Matthew (12:22). A most merciful deliverance assuredly, for which every observer should have been profoundly thankful to God. The common people were not altogether unappreciative, for they said: "Is not this the Son of David?" It has frequently happened that the simple ones of the earth have been very true in their perception of the hand of God.

But with the religious leaders it was otherwise. They said: "He casteth out demons by Beelzebub the prince of demons" (Luke 11:15, R. V.). Matthew says this came from the Pharisees; Mark adds that the scribes were involved in it also (3:22). It is a question whether we should

condemn the most their spiritual incompetency or their desperate wickedness. If they were really quite unable to distinguish between the hand of God and the hand of Satan they were utterly unfit to be instructors of God's people; if instead they saw God's power and deliberately imputed it to be the operation of hell, because it did not happen to work through official channels, the wickedness of it is almost too awful to contemplate. No evil is worse than religious evil; how much there has been of it let the annals of ecclesiasticism declare.

There have ever been certain recognized channels through which, in men's judgment, divine power and blessing ought to flow. But it is most certain that the blessing of God has reached multitudes of souls apart from official channels altogether. Like Gideon's fleece, ecclesiasticism has been dry while the refreshing dew of God's Spirit has been experienced all around (Jud. 6:40). This, instead of producing heart-searching in those thus divinely passed by, has only too often evoked rancor and blasphemy. It is a settled principle with ecclesiasticism that everything outside of itself is unauthorized and abominable.

The compassionate Saviour stooped to reason with His evil critics. He asks them how Satan could possibly cast out Satan, and pointed out that a kingdom divided against itself must needs come to desolation, and that a house divided against itself cannot stand. The true position was this: —Satan as the strong one had long kept his captives in peace; now a Stronger had come, with power to overcome him, and divide the spoils. For this let us praise our God. The Stronger than Satan is manifestly the victorious Son of God. He has met the enemy in his last stronghold—death, and has vanquished him, putting away sin the while; there is not a single child of Adam but may be set free from the thraldom of Satan forthwith by appealing to the Saviour's grace. Sin-distressed souls need not concern themselves with the ways and criticism of contentious religionists; the Saviour is their true resource; let them cast themselves on Him.

To His stern rebuke our Lord added these words: "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad" (Luke 11:23). He was undoubtedly wielding the power of God in grace and blessing to needy men; those who opposed Him were not gatherers but rather scatterers, of God's "beautiful flock" (Jer. 13:20). Let us tremble lest religious prejudice land us in this terrible position to-day. Where the hand of God is clearly seen, where the Spirit of grace is really blessing and comforting souls, let us frankly acknowledge it, and without a reserve in our hearts let us praise and magnify our God.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Luke 10:25-37: The Good Samaritan

THIS touching parable was related by the Saviour as a rebuke to a caviler, who had challenged Him as to what he should do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25-37). To an honest inquirer, He would have replied that eternal life is the gift of God to those who believe on His Son; but to a caviler He could only speak of the law of Sinai. Unabashed and unconvicted (though a professional exponent of the divine law) His questioner then asked: "And who is my neighbor?" This parable was then given, which not only furnished a complete answer to the question, but also shows in a vivid, way man's utterly ruined condition as God sees it. No one who understands the parable of the Good Samaritan would ever seek to obtain eternal life by meritorious works of any kind.

The man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and who experienced so disastrous a journey is a representative character; in him every man may see his own portrait, if he will. It is folly to speak of human progress; man's course has been retrograde ever since the catastrophe in Eden. He has fallen into the hands of the hosts of evil, who have stripped him of his once-fair robe of innocence, injuring him mortally in so doing. His condition is hopeless so far as creature aid is concerned.

Two persons passed by as the stricken traveler lay weltering in his blood, the one a priest and the other a Levite; but neither proffered a helping hand. Yet the law taught that even the ass of an enemy was to be succored if he was seen groaning under his burden (Ex. 23:5). But why did the Saviour select, out of the many classes and ranks of men, the priest and the Levite as those who did nothing for the dying one? Surely to teach us the utter inability of the system which these characters represented to meet the need of ruined man. The priest's business was with religious forms and ceremonies, and the Levite was responsible to instruct the people in the law of God; yet both of these are represented by a divine hand as doing nothing for a man in his hour of deadly peril. What a lesson is here! Yet so little heed has been paid to it that to this hour multitudes in their quest for salvation cast themselves, some upon priests, and some upon moralists, to meet their deep need. The blunder of it is painful to contemplate.

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him." Thus graphically the Saviour describes His own mission of grace. From heaven's glory He journeyed, going ever downward until Calvary was reached, where He bowed His head in death as an atonement for human guilt. Man being righteously under sentence of death, He must needs suffer and die in order to lift him out of his degradation and ruin. The Jews once called Him a Samaritan in contempt (John 8:48); in our parable He meekly accepts the title. Yet the scorn of man could not be suffered to dry up the springs of His grace, hence His loving provision of oil and wine, typifying the Spirit's application to the soul of the healing efficacy of His precious blood. In the picture before us we have the man, cured, carried, and cared for in every way. There is yet a higher aspect of saving grace—the sinner brought into the Father's presence, to be forever a sharer of divine joys. But this is shown to us in the later parable of the prodigal son.

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