# Luke - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

Short Meditations, Accomplished Decease, The

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THEY talked of His decease which he was to accomplish-three words of sweet and various import. They tell us of the intimacy, the personal intimacy, that there is between the Lord and the elect in the realms of glory. As it was in the garden of Eden at the beginning, and then among the patriarchs, and then with the disciples and their divine Master in the days of the evangelists, so will it be in the ages of glory, there will be personal intimacy between the Lord and His people, so signified by the word " talk." " God talked with Abraham."

But we have the subject of their conversation also-it was His decease-a theme most worthy to engage the glorified hosts. We may well speak of it on every Lord's day, in the light, of the resurrection, since the ransomed in the heavens speak of it in the light of glory. For it is that great fact or mystery that will be celebrated forever, as it is the great fact that is to prove itself the pillars of eternity, the pillars of the creation of God.

And again, they will let us learn a very weighty matter connected with this subject-it was a decease that was to be accomplished-a word which suggests the full, finished, perfected character of the way in which that great mystery, the death of the Lamb of God at Jerusalem, was to be conducted. All due solemnity was to mark it, that nothing might be left uneffected, unproduced, or unsecured, which it was counseled to do.

And what a comfort to us sinners! The sacrifice of the Lamb of God was the precious eternal secret that was to give us blessed eternal peace; and we have to learn that all that was committed to it to do, it has done-the counsels, the throne, the weights and measures of the sanctuary of salvation, all have been satisfied to the last jot and tittle.

I would meditate on this accomplishment of the decease of the Lamb of God a little carefully.

As we read Lev. 16, we may be impressed with the carefulness and order and exact and perfect regularity with which the priest went through the business of the day of atonement. No haste, but all in well-ordered and defined exactness from first to last.

He was to take the appointed victims, whether bullock or goat. Then he was to offer them. Then he was to kill them, as in due time and. order. He had then to prepare the cloud of incense, which was to accompany and invest him, when he went into the holiest with the blood. And (enrobed with this cloud, his simple, holy linen suit, not his high-priestly garments of glory and beauty, being upon him) having entered the holiest, he sprinkles the blood on and before the mercy-seat; in witness that God on the throne of righteousness had accepted the sacrifice. He then comes forth, and uses the same blood (the blood which had thus been accredited and sanctioned at the throne), for the reconciling of the outer places and the outer things-no man but himself being allowed in the sanctuary while he was thus, in all this solemnity, going through the business of this mysterious day.

And having thus reconciled the outer places and things, he lays the iniquities of the people on the head of a goat, called the scape-goat, and sends him into a land where those iniquities could never again be called to remembrance.

Then, arrayed with his proper priestly garments of glory and beauty, he offers a burnt-offering for himself, and another for the people; a witness that all this great and gracious work had issued in the worship and praise which was thus rendered to Him, by the ransomed, the blood-purchased congregation of the Lord. And then, he puts the fat of the sin-offering upon the altar, in token that the blessed God had the richest portion of the feast, the deepest joy in this sacrifice and atonement, reserved for Himself-after the manner, I may say, of the Father in the parable of the prodigal.

The sin-offerings, both bullock and goat, were then entirely consumed " without the camp "and the fit man who had taken away the scapegoat, and the other who had now thus consumed the sin-offerings, carefully purify themselves, and then take their place in the camp again.

Such was the business of this great day in Israel, the day of atonement, the tenth day of the seventh month. I affect not here to interpret it; I merely design so to present it, as to show the careful and deliberate way in which it was accomplished, the well-defined and well-ordered manner in which this great solemnity was gone through and celebrated in all its stages, and through the length of its proceeding, from first to last.

Now this is in company with the great substantive atonement accomplished in the hour of the cross. With what calm, sacred, measured, well-weighed advisedness, the death of the Lord Jesus was brought to pass! Well surely might Moses and Elias have spoken to Him about His "decease " which He was to "accomplish " at Jerusalem. All along the course of His ministerial life, He had been exposed to the enmity of the world. Nay, at His very birth it was so. And at all times, man appeared to have Him at his mercy. As far as the scenes through which He passed expressed His conditions, there was no guard, no Mahanaim around Him, no angelic host ascending and descending for His security or provision. Nor would He let His voice be heard in the streets, refusing to make a party for Himself meeting confederacy by confederacy, when He might have done so. And yet, none could lay hands on Him till His hour was come. As in the fullness of time He was born, so in the fullness of time, but not till then, He must die. But when that time does come, all is fulfilled in calm, sacred, measured, well-weighed advisedness -as we may see from the hour of the last supper to the death itself.

At the supper, as a Victim, He bound Himself to the horns of the altar. In Gethsemane, immediately afterward, He renews this surrender of Himself to His Father. When the soldiers come to take Him, they cannot touch Him till He pleases. But in due time He puts Himself, as a willing captive, into their hands. He passes from the traitor-kiss of one of His own into the hands of the Jews, and from them into the hands of the Gentiles-because such things had been prophesied of Him. Every jot and tittle of scripture is fulfilled, even to His saying, " I thirst." All His

foretold sorrow, in all its manifold forms of endurance and insult, was realized; the very garments also in which He suffered, and the company that were with Him on the cross. His disciples forsake Him, the sheep of the flock are scattered abroad, for thus had the prophets written. And then, when all was finished, and the paschal hour had fully come, He went into the three hours of darkness under the bruising of the hand of God as His Lamb for the sacrifice.

The death is thus wonderful, in the very form and character of its accomplishment, as it is beyond all thought wonderful in its moral glories, and in its saving, cleansing virtues.

But, in contrast with all this, let us consider for another moment, the death of the Baptist which went before this death of the Lord Jesus, and that of Stephen which followed it. What a difference! And yet, no wonder-all is easily accounted for.

There was no value with the throne of God, no place in the counsels of God, for the death of either John or Stephen. Precious in the sight of God they were, we may assure ourselves-but they were not important, again I say, either to the throne or to the counsels of God. Neither His righteousness nor His grace demanded them. Secrecy and haste may, therefore, give them their character and their history. Nor is it necessary that the material of them, the circumstances that accompany them, should give them any dignity. Neither of them was a " decease" "accomplished," as Moses and Elias speak of that of Jesus.

The Baptist was the victim of the wanton passion of a woman; Stephen was a martyr at the hands of the sudden, heated frenzy of a blinded and religious rabble. This was the history of these deaths. And how they set off the one we have been looking at, and which lay between them! Not that they were not, as I have already said, precious to God. Indeed they were deeply so. (Psa. 116:15.) But they were not taken into His hand, according to eternal counsels, and according to prophecies which had gone before from the beginning, as His was. The passions of man disposed of John and Stephen. " They did to them whatsoever they listed," I might say. But the counsels and the throne of God, His righteousness and His grace, the glorious revelations of Himself, the whole story of creation in its purpose and in its results, stand to account for the death of Jesus, and have their interest in it.

With this the convicted sinner has to acquaint himself, in this the believing sinner reads his title. What an object for the sustaining of eternity, and for the joy and celebration of eternity!

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(Luke 9:30, 31.) "Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease." They were occupied with His death while talking with Him. One thing occupies the minds of heaven and earth. He was going to be crucified where He ought to have been King. Under such circumstances there was nothing for heaven or earth to talk about but His death. And so for us, the great thing to talk about Messiah is, that He died.... We shall never cease having interest in this subject: when with the Father in the glory, it will be the absorbing theme. He said Himself, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life." How much more shall we not love Him for the same cause?

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(Luke 9:28-43.) Jesus was as much with His disciples when they came down as while they were on the mount, and that is our comfort. Do not let us suppose we have lost Christ.... The Lord give us, to know, while passing w through this world, what a Christ we have, taking our hearts clean out of the defiling circumstances around, so that whether we get a taste of the glory or are passing through the crowd of this world He may be everything to us, as He is everything for us.

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, "Looking Upon Jesus As He Walked": Luke 8:22-56

Luke 8:22-56

Beginning in Luke 8:22 we read, “On a certain day . . . He went into a ship,” and He fell asleep. In Psalm 127:2 we also read, “So He giveth His beloved sleep.” Now if the disciples had been wise, they would have directed their intent and worshipping gaze at their sleeping Master. They would have said, “Let winds and waves arise; He has said, Let us go to the other side, and that is the pledge of safety.” They might have gone to sleep with their Master, but instead, they look at the rising waves and cry, “Master, we perish.”

Are you often, in providence, called into company with a “sleeping Jesus”? He does not always manifest Himself at your side. Nevertheless, He has said, “Let us go over unto the other side.” His thought is on the end of the journey. Then, when the Lord makes good all that He had promised, they reap astonishment where they should have reaped worshipping admiration. Have you not often found it so? How often He comes down to your level, when you cannot reach His elevation! The result is a poor experience instead of a bright and sunny experience. If He cannot take you up on the wings of faith to His elevation, He will come down and save you to the end, though He will show you what you have lost.

Now beginning in verse 26 we get three cases together: Jesus in Gadara, Jesus in the crowd, and Jesus at the bedside. It is a series of victories. First we see Him in Gadara. Here the strength of Satan is displayed. Here Jesus did not wait on faith, for He came to destroy the works of the devil, and He would destroy them.

In the case of the poor woman in the crowd, He waits for and upon faith. But with this poor captive of Satan, nothing else could meet his desperate need. Human power must leave him as it found him. The Lord delivers him, and deliverance in His hand is as perfect as captivity in Satan’s. And more, his restoration is more than mere restoration. That would never describe the ways of God. With Him it is a bringing forth of

fresh glories from ruins. Not only was Legion cast out, but the man was impregnated with this principle, that he would be with Jesus for eternity. Yes, and more at His bidding would go to the ends of the earth. Is that merely restoration? What would not one give for such a mind as that! To have found a home in His presence and yet, if it be His blessed will, to go anywhere in His service!

Then, as He passed on, a poor woman touched Him in the crowd. He was touched by thousands, but the virtue that was in Him waited on faith. The moment faith commanded, virtue went forth. Now, have you not more in Christ than a healer? This poor woman had. She did not know when she came up that she had a title to Himself. So she modestly retreated as a debtor. Very right that a debtor should carry herself with humility. But oh! Christ is more to you and me than that! The Healer puts Himself into relationship. When He inquired after her, she began to tremble. Her faith had measured her title to touch Him, but she was not prepared when He called her to look at Him face to face—not until He had said, “Daughter, be of good comfort.”

There is no spirit of liberty in our souls if we do not know relationship. Nature cannot trust God, but the blessed way of God is to show me that I have an interest in Himself, as well as in the saving virtue that is in Him. We have relationship now—it does not wait for glory. In spirit I walk in the family mansion now, as soon I shall personally in the glory. The woman left Him, not only with a healed body, but with a calm and satisfied spirit.

And finally we get to the house of Jairus. There the Lord meets the power of death in fresh victory. The poor damsel is delivered from the bands of death, as the man was delivered from the bands of Satan and the woman from the bands of corruption. Oh! let us acquaint ourselves with Him and say, “Christ for me, Christ for me!”

J. G. Bellett (adapted from Notes on the Gospel of Luke)

Short Meditations, Two Debtors, The

PRESENT full assurance of soul is the spring of the purest affection and of the freest service. Indeed, it is necessary to each of them. The present forgiveness of sins is to be asserted with all confidence.

I ask, What has been the business of the blessed God in this world of ours, if not for the very end of putting us into such a condition? Our sin brought Him here—and then, the putting away of our sin gave Him His history here, after He had come among us. He died and rose from the dead. For what do I see in that history, the death and resurrection of the Son of God, if I see not the putting away of sin?

As soon as ever sin entered, He was revealed in this connection with us. Not as a Lawgiver or a Judge, but as a Savior. He is seen in the very first promise. It was as a Savior, as the purger of sins, He was revealed then, in the mystery of the bruised heel and the bruised head-and that was His death and resurrection as the Son of God and the Lamb of God. And what, again I ask, do I see in those great facts, if I see not the putting away of sin? How can I, with any reason, with any simplicity of mind, stand before the cross of Christ, and not apprehend the purging of sins there? If I did not apprehend that, everything would and must rebuke the darkness of my soul. Did not the rent veil, accompanied by the rent rocks of the earth and the riven graves of the saints, tell out, that the death of the Son of God then accomplished had restored man to God, casting up a highway from the prison-house of him who had the power of death up to the bright heavens, and the throne of the majesty there? Did not the empty sepulcher follow in its appointed day, to bear like witness, and to tell that God was satisfied with the death of Christ, and that it had atoned for sin and made reconciliation? And then, did not the gift and presence of the Holy Ghost come, in its due Pentecostal hour, to seal the same great fact? And I further ask, What was the preaching, the gospel, the testimony of the apostles immediately afterward, as we have it in the Book of the Acts? Surely it is, remission, forgiveness of sins, upon the virtue of the blood or death of Jesus, to all who will receive Him. Peter, in his first word in chapter 2, and then in his second word in chapter 3, and in his earliest testimony to the Gentiles at Caesarea in chapter x., rehearses this great fact-and when Paul takes up the testimony, he takes up the same wondrous tale, as we see in chapter 13. And in their epistles, where they teach rather than preach, instructing the saints rather than arousing sinners, we find the same, the Epistle to the Hebrews making it one of its great characteristic businesses, to show us the Purger of our sins now in the highest heavens, in the midst of His own many glories there.

All this is truly and indeed so. And now, our souls are to keep this blessed fact, that sin is put away, as in the foreground. It is not to be treated as something which we might be able to descry in the hazy, misty distance, after some anxious scrutiny. It is to be set in the foreground, where the rent veil, the resurrection, the Pentecost, apostolic preaching and apostolic teaching have already set it, that we may apprehend it as in the very light of noonday, and possess ourselves of it with all assurance.

Scripture, as one once observed, makes a much simpler thing of the putting away of sin, than our religion makes of it. Scripture puts it at the outset, human religion makes it the great attainment. Scripture puts sin in company with the blood of Christ, and it disappears.

We may grant by the way, that when the grace of God which bringeth salvation, and which had, shone out so brightly in the first promise, and had maintained its place through the age of the patriarchs, gets connected, under Moses, with the law, it becomes clouded. Naturally so, I might say, for it is then mixed up with a foreign element. The forgiveness of sins, God's own provision for the state of the guilty, had a large and various testimony there, I grant; but that testimony was borne by shadows and ordinances and religious official services, which either clouded or encumbered it. The whole Mosaic economy had important ends to answer-but as far as grace was concerned, it clogged and obscured the actions and manifestations of it. Grace did not appear in its simplicity, as in patriarchal days. And according to this, the New Testament, in its divine reasoning and commentaries, commonly sets the gospel of grace in company with the patriarchs, but in contrast with Moses. Abraham was blessed as a believing Abraham; Moses put a veil on his face, and the law is declared to have gendered a spirit of bondage to fear.

But grace at length emerges from this mixed element, this clouded atmosphere; and now, ascertained and effectuated by the death and resurrection of Christ, it shines, as we have seen, in its infinite brightness, and claims to occupy the chief place in Christianity, and the very foreground in the sight and apprehension of our souls.

From the different purpose and character of each of them, we find this truth, the forgiveness of sins, variously presented to us in the Gospels, in the Acts, and in the Epistles. We have it preached to sinners in the Acts: we have it taught or expounded to believers in the Epistles: and we have it illustrated in individuals in the Gospels. The Spirit, as I may say, is an Evangelist or a Preacher in the Acts; a Teacher of the saints in the Epistles; and in the Gospels we get living narratives, illustrative of what is elsewhere thus preached and taught.

How simply is this leading truth, the forgiveness of sins on the authority and in the name of the death and resurrection of Christ, preached in the Acts. Peter begins testimony to that, and repeats it again and again, as we have already said, and Paul continues it.

How largely and forcibly the same truth is expounded to us in such Epistles as the Romans and the Hebrews, shown to us in the stability of the foundation on which it rests, and in the glories in which it results-all the Epistles, I may say, assuming it!

And how affectingly is the power of the same truth in the soul of one who receives it, illustrated in this narrative of the sinner of the city in the house of Simon the Pharisee, at the close of Luke 7!

This is so indeed. And sweet is this varied method of presenting this great leading truth. We have it preached to sinners, expounded and opened to believers, illustrated in individuals.

In this house of Simon the Pharisee, the Lord comes in contact with two persons, representatives of two moral generations. I mean, His host, and a sinner of the city. And these constitute the two debtors in the parable which the Lord delivers on the occasion, and which is found in the bosom of the narrative.

Simon I look upon as one who surely owned the excellence of the Lord Jesus. He had invited Him into his house as a mark of honor. He was one, too, I doubt not, who would daily own the debt of thankful gratitude for the blessings. of God's care and mercy, and know himself to be less than the least of them. He was as one who had been forgiven fifty pence.

The sinner who had now entered his house, most surely was a sinner; but she knew herself to be such. But Jesus was a Savior; and she knew Him to be such. She was not merely convicted, so as to be confounded and ready to surrender everything; she was consciously forgiven, as after conviction. She was in a day of grace, out of judgment. She was not, like David of old, before the angel of God with a drawn sword in his hand. She was before Him as her salvation-not in the sense merely of providential mercies, but of eternal acceptance.

She was as a debtor who had been forgiven five hundred pence.

Such, I believe, was this woman, this sinner of the city, and, in the midst of the narratives in the evangelists, she illustrates the virtues and victories which accompany the knowledge of forgiveness.

It made her bold. She ventured, sinner as she was, into the house of a Pharisee. It was very bold of her. She might have counted on the very thing she got-contempt and injurious whisperings, the murmurings of self-righteous reproach. And what she might have counted on she got.

It made her happy. That made her independent of the creature, and set her above the world. It put into her the spirit of sacrifice and of worship. All that she was and had was not good enough or rich enough for the One who had saved her, who had loved her and given Himself for her. She brought all with her to the feet of Jesus, and cared not that any should be conscious of her but Himself. She was reading the new name on the white stone. The Pharisee's thoughts of scorn were lost upon her; as Michal's reproaches had been lost upon David in a moment of kindred joy. She had her all in Jesus, and got her, answer to all from Jesus.

She was one who knew the great leading characteristic truth of Christianity, as we have said, the forgiveness of sins. " Her sins, which are many, are forgiven." She knew Jesus as Simon did not. She stood in another relationship to Him. He wag before her as her Savior. Simon took but very poor and partial account of her. He could not understand her, and that which he knew, he knew altogether in a way that deceived him. He said to himself, that "she was a sinner." To be sure she was. None but a sinner could render such sacrifices as she was then offering. But Simon did not know that her sinner-character was really the root and ground of all he was then witnessing. Nor did he know his Guest either. He doubted that He could be a prophet-but He soon let him know, that He was not merely a prophet, but a prophet of a divine order, who could tell him the secret workings of his own heart. He said that the woman touched the Lord. " Was that all, Simon?" we might say to him. Surely the whole action was lost on him, for he did not understand it. The kisses and the tears and the treasures of the alabaster box he saw as if he saw not. The fifty pence was far away indeed from measuring the five hundred.

Surely this is so-and this I receive as the characteristic lesson of this little narrative, and of the parable it carries in the midst of it. It illustrates the value of the soul having right thoughts of its relationship to God, the value of knowing that we are sinners, sinners hopelessly, eternally self-ruined, but that Jesus is nothing less to us than a present Savior, a perfect Savior, a Savior for eternity.

The gospel, amid the multitude of moral glories which shine in it, has this, that it forms the most wondrous and precious link between God and His creatures, a link which, in its different way, is inestimable both to the Giver and the receiver-the work of salvation with all its results on God's part, and responsive grateful love on the sinner's; the highest benefit to the most distant and undeserving.

Angels have kept their first estate, formed as they were in excellency of strength and brightness; and their original, their " first estate," as it is called, being thus kept, is the link between them and their Creator. Adam's innocency, as we may admit for a moment, kept him in his connection with God as a creature formed upright, to walk in the garden of Eden. But what are such links as these in comparison with that which grace has formed in the great system of salvation?

And how, then, does it become our duty, our very obedience, our service, to entertain rich and sure thoughts of the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of God! Affection will then return to Him after the pattern of this sinner of the city.

And how divinely beautiful and wondrous, surely I may say, is that book which opens by exhibiting the link of innocency between the Lord God and His creatures, and closes by exhibiting that of salvation! The Lamb's wife in glory will love as Adam in the garden could not have loved. She will love, I may take leave to say, after the pattern of this woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee. She will love in the strength and joy of that grace which has forgiven five hundred pence.

And indeed I judge that I can say, I know not that any one, in the progress of scripture from the very beginning of it to the very end, has illustrated the affection of the bride of the Lamb more deeply and affectingly than she has done. The family at Bethany and Mary Magdalene express very fervent personal affection. Their hearts were attracted and drawn and detained very beautifully. One greatly enjoys the sights we get of them. And I may say, that the moral power which lies in the sense of forgiveness and acceptance is finely exhibited in the early gathering of believers at Jerusalem in Acts 2 And likewise, that David in Psa. 32, and Isaiah in chapter 6 of his prophecy, and repentant Israel, as anticipated in Isa. 53 and Mic. 7, among a multitude beside, set forth some very fine emotions of the soul under the fresh sense of pardon and reconciliation. And so, Peter and Matthew and Zaccheus, and the Samaritan in the days of the evangelists, and Paul afterward, as he delineates the condition of his heart towards the Lord Jesus, in Gal. 2:19-21. All this is so; and all these cases give us great samples of the power of the sense of forgiveness. But again I say, I know not that anywhere we get so affecting an illustration of this, as in this sinner of the city in Luke 7 She presents to us the full measure and the perfect way, in which, at times, the sense of forgiveness and the consciousness of acceptance seizes upon the whole soul, commanding it with unquestioned, unrivaled authority, laying its easy and welcome yoke upon everything, and filling the spirit with the richest and most generous affections.

What will it be, to have hearts for eternity in the possession of such a joy as these conditions secure to them!

There are, however, incidental or secondary lessons in this little narrative. We see in it, or we learn by it, that all is to re-appear in due time and place. The services of the woman and the neglects of Simon are all remembered by the Lord at the last. All seemed to have been passed over, at the time the things were either done or left undone; but it was not so. And this illustrates an interesting, serious truth. Nothing is of no importance, but everything has a character, a moral character in it, while there are balances now hid in the sanctuary of God that are destined to weigh it by-and-by. As here-the kisses and the tears and the service of the hair of the head, and the fragrant treasures of the alabaster box, which had marked the previous way of this loving woman, with the corresponding neglects of the Pharisees, are all rehearsed by the Lord Himself at a moment when perhaps both of them were unaware-as it is written, " The Lord of that servant shall come in a day that he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of."

This may be laid to heart. Have we been rendering secret service to Christ? Have we any interest in the day of the manifestation of all things? How stand we in relation to that day? I put not these as questions of life, but as godly appeals to my own heart and ways, that present doings may be set in the light of coming days.

And again in this instructive story. At the end the Lord publishes the salvation of the woman in the face of all those who were sitting at meat with Him. He puts His own broad, authoritative seal upon the fact that she was forgiven, as in the presence of the whole world, let there be what accusing thoughts or unbelieving questionings there may be. " Thy sins are forgiven," the Lord says to her-" and they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" What a voice upon the waters that of Jesus must have been! The waters were swelling again-the winds and the waves of Galilee were abroad-but the voice of Jesus had again risen. The whispers and the accusings were not heard by the woman. " Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." This was enough for her.

But then, in turning from her accusers to herself, the Lord changes His voice. The fruit of forgiveness may be, and is, love, but the root and spring of forgiveness is faith. It was not her love, ardent and self-surrendering as it was, which had saved her. Her faith had gone before her salvation, ere this scene had opened; love now comes after it, as we have been seeing. And according to all this, when He now turns from her accusers to herself, He says, "Thy faith 'lath saved thee; go in peace." No mention of love or what love had done, in company with salvation. Salvation is of grace, in company with the blood of Christ and the faith that apprehends and leans upon that blood. Salvation is too high a thing to stand on a level with the works of man. It is God's work, and it comes " to him that worketh not," as saith the apostle. "It is of faith, that it might be by grace."

And let me add, that she who is principal in the Book of the Song of Solomon represents the same generation to which this woman belonged. She stands above the daughters of Jerusalem, as this one does above Simon the Pharisee. She had discovered that "she was black yet comely," and that was the secret of her earnest, longing affection. She thus reminds us of the elect one in Song of Solomon and she foreshadows, in her affection, the Lamb's wife. She stands as between them, and they all belong to one generation. " I am black but comely," expresses the secret of such affection. It is the joy and the love of consciously pardoned and accepted sinners that fills the spirit of the one in the Song of Solomon of this poor sinner of the city, and of the bride-companion, the sister and the spouse, the wife of the Lamb forever.

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(Luke 7:36-50.) “Her sins are forgiven; for she loved much." The Lord is able to make this pardon known. He reveals it to the poor woman. But it was that which she had seen in Jesus Himself which, by grace, melted her heart and produced the love she had to Him-the seeing what He was for sinners like herself. She thinks only of Him. He has taken possession of her heart so as to shut out other influences.... She goes into the house of this proud man without thinking of anything but the fact that Jesus is there.... She saw what He was for a sinner, and that the most wretched and disgraced found a resource in Him.... A Savior-God being present, of what importance was Simon and his house? Jesus caused all else to be forgotten. Let us remember this.

The Christian Shepherd: 1999, "Looking Upon Jesus as He Walked": Luke 4

In Luke 4 we have a beautiful principle. Before the Lord goes to assail Satan, He must withstand Satan. He lets Satan see that he has nothing in Him. If I take part in evil, I cannot rebuke it. So with Him; there was not one single principle of the power of darkness in Himself—and His victory was complete.

Satan tries to get into the Lord what he got into Adam, but he utterly failed, as he had entirely succeeded before. In Genesis 3 you get the defeat of man; here you get the victory of Man.

Jesus returns in the power of the Spirit and under that power goes into the synagogue and teaches. He opens the book to Isaiah 61—why? Because that chapter is the deep expression of the ministry He was entering upon the ministry of grace. Are we entitled to listen to such a voice? It makes no demands upon me such as Moses and John did. I am called to listen to One that is doing everything for me. Oh! Happy soul that knows what it is to listen to Jesus! It will do more for the purifying of the soul than could ever Moses and John. “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10).

But they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son”? It was their pride that could not brook the thought that the carpenter’s son should be their teacher. They wanted a teacher from college. They had admired His gracious words, but now they yield to a stronger current—pride—and seek to cast Him over the brow of the hill. But He goes on teaching and healing. They had no link by faith with Him.

How is the link formed between the sinner and Himself? Admiration, as we have seen, will not form it, nor will the healing of the body. Nothing but a work in the conscience will do. You must learn your need as a poor sinner one that cannot do without Him. Then the link is formed for eternity. The world is full of its wisdom, religions and speculations. The gospel makes short work of it all. It lets me know that I need a Saviour, and then shows me that I have a Saviour. I just ask, “Do you want Him?” If so, you are welcome to Him.

J. G. Bellett (adapted)

Footprints for Pilgrims: Evening Meditations for the Day of Days, Footprints for Pilgrims - 301

(Luke 4:4.) It is the written word He ever uses, and Satan is powerless. What amazing importance Jesus gives the scriptures.... It was not as an act of divine authority He dismissed Satan, but the enemy is proved unable to grapple with obedience to the word of God.... Jesus does not reason with Satan. A single text silences when used in the power of the Spirit. The whole secret of strength in conflict is using the word of God in the right way.

Notes on the Gospel of Luke, Luke 24:33: Notes on the Gospel of Luke

We are closing the Gospel of Luke, and we still find the same thing that we were meditating on the last time — the unbelief that lurked in their hearts touching the resurrection. Now the Lord sets Himself to dissipate it. It must be dissipated, for it is fatal to the faith of God's elect. Nothing could be a substitute for resurrection. The whole dealing of God with sinners depends on its being an accomplished fact. In several cases during His ministry we get the people expecting Him to interfere between sickness and death. But that was not God's way. The wages of sin is death. So now, He must go into death. He must meet the enemy in the place of his strength and defeat him there. In the history of Jairus's daughter, it was just that. He tarried so long that she died — a beautiful witness that the Lord did not come to intercept death, but to defeat death. So in the case of Lazarus — the Lord tarried till the sickness ended in death. They were all crying and bewailing —howling over the ravages of death. That was the very place for the Son of God to display Himself. To be sure, He did heal and cleanse, but He came into the world not to interfere between sickness and death, but between death and life again. He is the holder of victorious life. Supposing He had met sickness and not death, nothing would have been done, for the wages of sin is death. Did He come to qualify the original judgment, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”? He did not. He came to meet it, suffer it, verify it, and get the victory on the other side of it.

When the two disciples are satisfied, they get back to the city to report what they have seen and, while they speak, Jesus Himself stands in the midst of them. There are many things for us to observe here. I will tell you a sweet thing. He not only rose, but He rose the same as He died. Could you put up with an altered Son of God? Though throned in glory this moment, He is the very same as He was at the well of Sychar. If you want to know what Christ is now, go and learn Him in the four gospels. Do you want a different Jesus than the one that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have introduced to you? Perhaps it is hard to understand that He is the same now in glory as He was here. It is part of the business of the post—resurrection scenes to assure us that He is the very, very same. Treasure that up in your souls. It will make the pathway to heaven easy. He has come into your world before ever He asked you to go into His, and the way to make the path there easy is to know that you will find, in yonder world of glory, the very same Jesus that came into your world. The Lord of the distant glories has been in the midst of my ruins, and has shown me that He is the same in the midst of the glories as in the midst of the ruins. It is among the moral wonders of the gospel that the blessed Lord has taken such means to accommodate my eye and ear to future glories. He has given beautiful pledges of that.

As He entered the room, He said, “Peace be unto you.” Had He ever said that before? Were those strange words on His lips? He was only redeeming His pledge. Before He died, He said, “Because I live, ye shall live also.” After He rose, “He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” That is another witness. Before He died, He said, I will meet you in Galilee. Did He not take up the pledge? You may say that was a little thing, but whether big or little, a risen Christ makes good what a ministering Christ had promised. Circumstances cannot change Him. Ruins here and glories there have no power to touch Him. He said before He suffered, “I go to prepare a place for you.” After He rose, He said, “I ascend unto My Father, and your Father.”

If you go through the post—resurrection scenes, you will be able to track a risen Christ in company with a ministering Christ, taking up the pledges and showing all the beautiful traits of character that He exhibited before. Do you ever think of sudden death? You may be borne without a moment's notice into His presence. Will it be a strange place to you? I may be a stranger to His circumstances, but not to Himself. Therefore, the more we acquaint ourselves with Jesus, the more we are in heaven already. It matters little about His palace if I know Himself. The blessed Lord wants to make us intimate with Himself. So in the post—resurrection scenes He lets us know that we know Him already.

Now we come to the verification of the fact of resurrection. Why is that such an important point? Suppose God had said, Satan has ruined your body, so I will take you to be with Me in spirit; it would have been verifying the victory of Satan over the body. Did God come into the world to do that? So the apostle says, “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain.” Then He makes us, in our glorified bodies, the witnesses of His victory. Resurrection was not only the seal of His victory. He has made an atonement, and the throne has owned it by raising the Surety from the dead; but not only so, it is necessary to see that He has got a victory in this world; so to verify this, the Lord wonderfully condescends. “He said unto them, Have ye here any meat?” Why was all that? Simply to verify that it was no mere spirit that stood before them. The Lord came to fight a battle for you — palpable flesh and blood. Palpable manhood had been destroyed — palpable manhood must be redeemed. Having established the fact in the 44th verse, He makes all to hang on it. Then having recited what He had once told them, He here knits His present ministry with what had gone before. He opens to them in law, prophets, and Psalms, the things concerning Himself. We see something like this in His dealings with Peter. He had said, “Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny Me thrice.” That came to pass. Then the Lord looked at him. He had awakened his conscience by the crow; He relinked him with Himself by the look. When the Lord rose, He took up Peter exactly where He had left him. He did not want to awaken his conscience again, or relink him with Himself again; but He took him up at the critical point where He had left him. He puts him into the ministry again.

The Lord knows the path of your spirit and will take you up exactly where you are. He had told them while He was with them that all things should be accomplished, and now He gives them an opened understanding (which He had not done before), and sits down to give them a lecture on them. It is beautiful to see how He educates us. What a wonderful moment! and that moment has been continued to this moment. That was a moment that characterized the present dispensation — that on the warranty of His death remission of sins should be preached to every poor sinner. In one sense we have never got beyond it, and we never shall till the last of the elect is brought in. Now He has done everything; and, as a preacher to the world, He was silent. He had declared remission of sins to a world of sinners. As an evangelist, I take leave of Jesus there. As a high priest, we have not yet fully seen Him, but, as an evangelist, that was a stereotyped moment of His ministry. He cannot add to that. He has told me, as belonging to a world of sinners that through death and resurrection remission of sins is preached to me.

Now He led them out to Bethany. I believe it was a silent walk. If my spirit is drinking in the simplicity of such a gospel, it will be in deep-toned, silent satisfaction of soul. “And He lifted up His hands, and blessed them.” That was priestly service. There He “ever lives.” I never have done with His uplifted hands, and in that attitude He was taken up to heaven to carry on His priesthood on high. What effect has all this on you and me? — to look at an evangelist Jesus giving peace to the conscience, and then see Him going up to heaven in the act of blessing! What effect had it on the disciples? The whole character of their religion was changed. They were no longer trafficking with Moses. Their service became that of eucharistic priesthood. They went back to the city with great joy, “And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.” Can anything be more divine? Nothing. And there Christ takes leave of you. The heavens will retain Him till the times of refreshing; but have you lost Him? Could He give a more graphic impression than He has done here? He has accomplished redemption and He ever lives to bless you. Go to your Jerusalem, and be ever praising and blessing Him.

There it drops. “We through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness.” The trail of the serpent is everywhere, but in such shining paths as I see the feet of Jesus treading here. What He lays His hand to, He accomplishes to perfection.

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The Christian Shepherd: 2002, "Looking Upon Jesus As He Walked": Luke 24:13-32

We now find the Lord joining the two disciples on the road with their gloomy hearts and reasonings. What made them sad? It was unbelief. Their sadness was attractive to Jesus, for if the affection that took the spices to His tomb was delightful to Him, the sadness that gathered round their clouded hearts was also delightful to Him. It was reality.

The Gospels give us little displays of eternity, and here you have communion between the Lord of glory and poor sinners—the same communion that will be found in glory. It is worth everything to have an intimate eternity with Christ! Our hearts are prepared for it through the Gospels.

The two disciples found their confidence won and retained, though the Lord never made an effort about it. He just threw Himself out on their hearts, and they took Him up as He was.

They tell Him of the reason of their sadness and He returns a loving rebuke: “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.” That was the cure, and that was where they came short. Oh! how should that bind round your heart and mine every jot and tittle of God’s Word! Then He showed them how Christ should suffer, and expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Now their unbelieving reasonings turned into faith’s kindlings. How did that happen? Jesus had interpreted Himself. How natural then that He should make as though He would go farther! He was hiding Himself under a veil, and, as a stranger, He would not intrude on them. “But they constrained Him.” What wonderful kindlings they were enjoying—and that caused this piece of courtesy. Let us thank, then, the One to whom thanks is due, not they who constrained Him.

Be sure, the joy of eternity will never weary you. Kindlings will be there in seraphic order. Give me a seraphim mind within and the glories of Jesus around—that will be heaven.

J. G. Bellett (from Notes on the Gospel of Luke)

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, Meditations on the Man of Sorrows

“Their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not” (Luke 24:11).

How do we account for the apostles’ lack of belief in the Lord’s resurrection? We would not call them Corinthians, who, by intellectual workings, denied the resurrection, nor Sadducees, a depraved sect who denied it. Ah, but is it not hard to believe that God is doing your business in this world? It is much easier for us to do Christ’s business than to believe that He has done ours. Not one form of human religion takes up that thought. And it was so with the disciples. They could bring their spices and their ointments, but they were not yet able to believe the mighty fact that He had been doing their business.

We think of Him as hard and exacting and watching above the clouds to find occasion against us. Their hearts had been as leaking vessels of the words of Christ, and they came as the living to the dead instead of believing that He, as the living, has come down to us, the dead. We will spend our days in penances, but we will not trust Him.

Then we see Peter in the same plight. Peter! Is it possible—he that had made the very confession on which the church is founded! When Peter had to live the confession, he failed. The one among the eleven that ought eminently to have blushed was Peter. How you can distinguish a man from himself at times—his condition from his experience! If he had known what he was confessing, he never would have thought of “the Son of the living God” as among the dead.

J. G. Bellett (from Notes on the Gospel of Luke)

The Christian Shepherd: 2002, "Looking Upon Jesus As He Walked": Luke 24:1-12

In Luke 24 we see Jesus in resurrection, and we find many things here to invite attention. In the opening verses, as soon as the Jewish Sabbath was over, the women came with spices which they had prepared, and they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre, but they found not the body of Jesus.

Do we not find something exceedingly comforting in all that mix of ignorance and affection? It was ignorance that took them to look for the living among the dead, while it was affection that counted the dead body of the Lord Jesus worth more than all else around.

What did Christ do with it? He appreciated it but was not satisfied with it. He will not have love in the place of faith. Love is the principle that gives; faith is the principle that takes.

Christ will have us debtors, for He will occupy the place of the more blessed. Another has said, “Faith is the principle that lets God think for us. If I come naked and empty and make God everything, that is faith.”

The law makes man the principal and God secondary. Man is to be doing this and that, while God is passive. But the gospel changes sides altogether. Here God is the giver and you are the receiver. But with these, it was not faith but rather ignorant love. They had affection but did not understand the victory He had gained on their behalf. It is Christ that has visited me in my grave, not I that have visited Him in His grave. He is the living One; I am the dead one.

So they bring their spices looking for a dead body and were startled by a glittering stranger. The word from the angelic messengers is, “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how He spake unto you when He was yet in Galilee.” That was a rebuke, because though they were about the business of love, it was also the business of unbelief. God stands vindicated in all.

Then they remembered the words. Oh! how much mischief we get into by not remembering God’s words! When the blessed Lord Jesus was tempted, He had the Word of God at hand, and by that Word He gained the victory in battle.

They had acted so because they had not remembered the simplest words that could have fallen on their ears. Yet, how sweet to see the grace of God in communicating with us, even in our mistakes! The rebuke was well meant and well deserved, but it was an excellent oil that would not break their heads (Psa. 141:5).

Their mistakes now put them in company with Jesus. How much better that my mistakes put me there too, rather than my not being in company with Him at all!

J. G. Bellett (adapted from Notes on the Gospel of Luke)

Footprints for Pilgrims: Evening Meditations for the Day of Days, Footprints for Pilgrims - 307

(Luke 23:39-43.) Jesus crucified was more than King—He was Savior. The poor malefactor was a testimony to it, and the joy and consolation of the Lord's heart—the firstfruits of the love which had placed them side by side, where, if the poor thief bore the fruit of his sins from man, the Lord of glory at his side was bearing the fruit of them from God.... Through a work unknown to man save by faith, the sins of His companion were forever put away, they no longer existed, their remembrance was only of the grace which had taken them away, and which had forever cleansed his soul from them, making him that moment as fit to enter Paradise as Christ Himself his companion there!

J. N. D.

Notes on the Gospel of Luke, Luke 22:39-71: Notes on the Gospel of Luke

We have reached chapter 22:39 and, as we were observing, we must be more particular with each verse, for each verse is pregnant with something. It is very blessed in this chapter to see how the Lord passes through different relations — with the disciples, with His Father, and with His enemies. It is beautiful to mark the moral pictures that adorn that path. Now He came out; He left the supper table and went to the Mount of Olives. That is a mystic spot. Why do I call it so? There are various lessons to learn there. A mystery is the enclosure of a secret. For instance, Abraham taking his son up to Mount Moriah was the incrustation of a secret. We find the Lord in these chapters in three conditions — coming down the mount, ascending, and on the hill. As His royal descent was refused, we see Him making a wearisome ascent; and if we read Zechariah, we find Him again on the Mount, but it will split beneath His feet in judgment.

Now He is consciously leaving the disciples for the presence of His Father, and He leaves them with wholesome words: “Pray that ye enter not into temptation.” His business is now with the Father. And what is He saying? “If Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me.” Surely this was part of His moral perfection. It ought to have been so. His love made Him a willing victim; but it would have been a blot on the moral beauty of His journey if He did not deprecate such a relative position to God as that He was about to enter into on the cross. Since it cannot be disposed of except He drink it, “not My will, but Thine, be done.”

“And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him.” How do you interpret that word “strengthening”? It was not the same thing as “strengthen thy brethren.” It did not extend beyond His frame. That is the office of angels. They are the messengers of providences. The Holy Spirit deals with your spirit. So I take it they were imparting some supporting virtue to His frame. It is a proof that He was not yet forsaken. We find nothing of that in the three hours of darkness. He was left in deep unfathomable solitariness. Not a ray of light from the countenance of God gladdened Him there. But as yet He was not made an offering for sin, and angels can come and strengthen Him. He is strengthened for a fresh agony. When He rose He came to His disciples and found them sleeping. They were His thought, not He theirs! He their thought? They could not watch with Him one hour. So it is now. He ever lives to make intercession for us. Do we live ever to love Him — serve Him? He ever lives for you. Do you ever live for Him?

Now He is brought into His last relationship. He is plunged into the midst and thick of His enemies. “While He yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas.... drew near unto Jesus to kiss Him.” Then one of His disciples makes a mistake. It is a terrible thing to make mistakes. There is a class of mistakes that arise not merely from an imperfect understanding, but from a wrong condition of heart. That was the mistake of the disciples here. They had not been in Christ's company as they ought to have been. Can you conceive anything more distant from the Lord's heart than drawing the sword to smite the servant of the high priest? On His way to die, the just for the unjust, to see a hair of a poor sinner's head touched! I may mistake about the calling of the church, or about coming glories, but there is another class of mistakes that you and I should keenly judge ourselves for. The Lord of course heals him.

Now mark verse 53. It gives a character to the moment. What is meant by this “hour”? How long did it continue? How is it distinguished from all that went before it, and all that followed after it? As to what went before, they could not touch Him till that hour had come. He must be a willing captive as He was a willing victim. But now the hour of the evening has arrived, and He becomes their captive. The moment you leave that hour (which stretches to the three hours of darkness) you have a new era altogether — no longer the hour of the power of darkness, but the bruising of the woman's seed. Now He puts Himself into their hands. He was a willing captive now, as He was a willing victim on the cross. They took Him!

Did you ever, in the light of Scripture, consider what the heart of man is? You will tell me it is a wicked thing. Aye, that it is; but it is not only capable of wickedness, it is incurable, desperate. Conceive a man taking stones in his hand to batter and beat a face shining like an angel's! Could you conceive it? Look at the priests in the temple in the presence of the rent veil. They plotted a lie. Look at the soldiers in the presence of the rent tomb. They consented to a lie. The riven waters of the Red Sea did not cure Pharaoh's heart. The shining countenance of the martyr Stephen did not cure the heart of the multitude. A rent veil did not cure the priestly heart, and a rent tomb did not cure the soldiers' hearts. Now the sight of the healed ear (for the blessed Lord is a divine surgeon here) — in the presence of that they take Him. Is that a picture of the heart you carry? You may have different habitudes, but the flesh is the same in all — not only evil, but incurable. The watery walls did not cure it, and here in the very garden, they see Him performing a wondrous divine miracle of healing, and yet they take Him with murderous purpose. Tell me what you can do with a heart that has been proof against those things? Has hell had power to cure the devil? He may be overcome in Legion; out he goes into the herd of swine.

Now we have the little episode of Peter warming himself. Cannot you fancy him sunk down into humanity? He became not the companion of Jesus of Gethsemane, but of a poor man in the outer court of the palace. Here we have two things —the crow and the look. How do you interpret them? They are symbols of very different things, but two things we must all have to do with — conscience and Christ. The crow awakened his conscience; the look placed him with Jesus. I want to have an awakened conscience and an eye by faith directed to Jesus. Then let Jesus close the story of my soul. If we are not all conscious of the cock—crow and the look, we are not yet in the school of God. My intellectual activity about the things of God will not do. Conscience must be occupied, and faith must be occupied. “And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.” But his faith did not fail. He may be sent through sorrow and tears, but his faith does not fail.

“And the men that held Jesus mocked Him, and smote Him.... And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led Him into their council, saying, Art Thou the Christ?” How He looks at the inquirer! Do you think we deal faithfully with one another? No; we are too fond of letting people think well of themselves, and we call it tenderness, but it is a vapid thing! You never find in Christ the human amiability that gratifies. There was love in every form of faithfulness, but no human amiableness. Now the Lord deals with their condition in answer to their question — You will not deal with Me righteously —You are set on mischief, and mischief you will have — You are set on My blood, and My blood you will spill. Having convicted them, He rises up; “Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.” This is the exhibition of Christ in judicial power. In many ways we track Christ to heaven. We think we have disposed of the ascension when we say He rose and ascended; but you must track Him to the highest heavens in various characters: personally as with the Father — in His priestly character as making intercession in the sanctuary — as One whom earth has sent there, and whenever we get that form, we see Him ascending in judicial glory. That is presented here. He is not gone up to heaven as a sanctuary, but as being the place of power, waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. In that character we view Him here.

Now we see the way in which He was viewed by the Gentiles, by the ecclesiastical and civil powers, that every form of society might be brought in guilty before God. Pilate and Caiaphas might be amiable men, but, as touching God, one and all stand guilty in a common revolted nature. Do you and I realize that the blessed Lord consented to walk such a path for us? We may well say that such love as that “passeth

knowledge.” May the Lord give us to receive it by faith, and feed on it by communion. Amen.

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, "Looking Upon Jesus As He Walked": Luke 22:54-71

We now come to the little episode of Peter warming himself. He has sunk down into humanity, becoming, not the companion of Jesus of Gethsemane, but a poor man seeking to warm himself in the outer court of the palace.

There are two things brought to our attention here—the crow and the look. How do we interpret them? They are symbols of two very different things, but two things with which each of us have to do—conscience (the “crow”) and Christ (the “look”).

The crow awakened his conscience; the look placed him with Jesus. I want to have an awakened conscience and an eye by faith directed to Jesus. If we are not all conscious of the cock-crow and the look, we are not yet in the school of God.

My intellectual activity about the things of God will not do. Conscience must be occupied, and faith must be occupied. “Peter went out, and wept bitterly.” But his faith did not fail. He may be sent through sorrow and tears, but his faith does not fail.

Now we come to the council who ask Him, “Art Thou the Christ?” The Lord deals with their condition in answer to their question: “You will not deal with Me righteously, you are set on mischief, and mischief you will have. You are set on My blood, and My blood you will spill.”

Having convicted them, He rises up. “Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God.” This is the exhibition of Christ in judicial power. Here we see Him in judicial power.

We track Christ to the highest heaven in many characters: Personally as with the Father, His priestly character as making intercession in the sanctuary, and what is presented here—as the One whom earth has sent there. In this character He is waiting until His enemies be made His footstool.

We see here the way in which He was viewed by the Gentiles, by the ecclesiastical and civil powers, that every form of society might be brought in guilty before God. Pilate and Caiaphas might be amiable men, but, as touching God, one and all stand guilty in a common revolted nature.

Do you and I realize that the blessed Lord consented to walk such a path for us? We may well say that such love as that “passeth knowledge.”

J. G. Bellett (from Notes on the Gospel of Luke)

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, "Looking Upon Jesus As He Walked": Luke 22:39-53

The Lord leaves the supper table and goes to the Mount of Olives. We see the Lord in three conditions—going down the mount, ascending and on the hill. As His royal descent was refused, we see Him making a wearisome ascent, and in Zechariah we find Him again on the Mount, but there it will be split beneath His feet in judgment.

Once there, He leaves the disciples with these words: “Pray that ye enter not into temptation.” His business is now with the Father. And what is He saying? “If Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me.” Surely this was part of His moral perfection. His love made Him a willing victim, but it would have been a blot on the moral beauty of His journey if He did not deprecate such a relative position to God as that He was about to enter into on the cross. Since it cannot be disposed of except He drink it, “not My will, but Thine, be done.”

Then we read, “And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him.” He is strengthened for a fresh agony. When He rose, He came to His disciples and found them sleeping. They were His thought, not He theirs! He their thought? They could not watch with Him one hour. So it is now. He ever lives to make intercession for us. Do we live ever to love Him—serve Him? He ever lives for you. Do you ever live for Him?

Then He is plunged into the midst of His enemies. “While He yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas . . . drew near unto Jesus to kiss Him.” One of His disciples makes a mistake—a terrible mistake. It was a mistake arising from a wrong condition of heart. The disciples had not been in Christ’s company as they ought to have been.

Can you imagine, on His way to die—the just for the unjust—to see the ear of a poor sinner touched by a sword! Let us be careful and judge ourselves keenly for such mistakes.

“But this is your hour.” It was the hour of the bruising of the woman’s seed (Gen. 3:15) and He puts Himself into their hands, a willing captive now, as He was a willing victim on the cross.

Did you ever, in light of Scripture, consider what the heart of man is? Look at the priests in the temple in the presence of the rent veil—they plotted a lie. Look at the soldiers in the presence of the rent tomb—they consented to a lie. Now see man in sight of the healed ear. It is in the presence of that that they take Him—they take Him with murderous purpose, while He was performing a wondrous miracle of healing. Tell me what you can do with a heart such as that!

J. G. Bellett (adapted from Notes on the Gospel of Luke)

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, His Own Supper

Luke 22:7-20

The Lord institutes His own supper. He did not eat of this. He merely gave it to them. He could not take of it. He does not need redemption—purchase by blood. He says, “This do in remembrance of Me.” There is a deep and blessed secret in these words. That which in other days was anticipative is now retrospective.

The passover table anticipated the coming of the Lord to die. The Lord’s supper is a memorial. What has occasioned the change? “This is My body.” The Son from the bosom of the Father took a body: “A body hast Thou prepared Me.” Now we come in on the principle that sin has been remitted—put away; it is there no more.

Now He has spread a table at which I remember that I was once in my sins, but that sin has been put away. The body prepared of God has been broken (although a bone of Him was not broken—see John 19:36) on the accursed tree. Now sin is put away forever. The whole character of the feast turns on the victim and we see how the thoughts of all are on death. So are the Lord’s, but with this difference. They were thinking of Him as a martyr; He was thinking of a sacrifice—the victim character He was about to fulfill. The Lord died in two characters: a martyr at the hands of man and a victim at the hand of God. Yet in all this how sad to see the disciples now thinking of their own pride, rather than His death.

J. G. Bellett (from Notes on the Gospel of Luke)

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, "Looking Upon Jesus As He Walked": Luke 20:21-26

We will find that our Lord’s sorrows on the cross were the result of our sins; His sorrows through life, the result of the enmity of our hearts towards Him.

The three great representatives of the Jewish people now confront the Lord. The Herodians were political religionists, the Sadducees were freethinking religionists, while the Pharisees were legal religionists. They now all come to Him with a subtle question: “Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Cæsar, or no?” They thought they had Him with this subtle, sharp-sighted question. What enmity towards the Lord we see here! But He at once detects the moral of the occasion and says to them, “Why tempt ye Me? Show Me a penny.”

The Lord had no purse. When He wanted to preach on a penny, He had to ask to be shown one. The Lord had the wealthiest purse that anyone ever had in the world. But not a mite of all that was in that purse did He ever use on Himself.

He says to them, “Whose image and superscription hath it?” They answered, “Cæsar’s.” Very well. The Lord was not going to treat Cæsar as a usurper. He was the rod of God’s indignation in the land of Israel. Whether Chaldeans, Persians, Greeks or Romans, they were no usurpers.

So when the Lord saw Cæsar’s coin passing through the land, He saw in it Israel’s shame, not Cæsar’s usurpation. How beautifully He escapes the snare of the fowler! “Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which be Cæsar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s.” That was a golden rule ever since their captivity—the rule of the returned captives.

And so it is to be our rule. Do you treat the powers that are ordained of God as usurpers? Do not confound the rights of Cæsar and the rights of God. If there is a collision between them, say with Peter, “Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” This short statement is replete with divine wisdom for Israel’s condition at this moment.

J. G. Bellett (adapted from Notes on the Gospel of Luke)

The Evangelists: Meditations on the Four Gospels, Luke 19:28-Luke 23

Luke 19:28-Luke 20

Jesus enters the city with royal state. The fifth period of our Gospel begins with this action. The multitude take the tone of the occasion, and, by their welcome, their palm-branches, and their exultation, fill out the scene of this kingly procession. The shout of a King was among them. But the question still was, Would Zion rejoice? Would the children of Israel be joyful in their King? Would Jerusalem be glad because He was coming, meek and lowly, and riding upon an ass (Zech. 9:9)?

This was the inquisition now held. And we know the answer. In one language or another all the evangelists give it. “Ye would not,” is said to the children of Jerusalem. “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not,” is again the word upon Israel. And the whole course of the action here recorded gives the same answer. Jerusalem—that “favored seat of God on earth, that heaven below the sky”—had defiled itself. The temple is unclean; the elders of the people are unbelieving; hypocrisy and love of the world stain the priests and scribes and rulers; they challenge instead of accepting Jesus; and traps and snares are laid for His feet where the crown should have been prepared for His head.

The action of these chapters, in this way, joins in the universal testimony against Jerusalem; and Jesus has to weep over that “city of peace.” It had, of old, been His desire. “This is My rest,” He had said of it. And as the gifts and calling of God are without repentance, He seeks no relief from other cities here, but weeps over this faithless one. And, until Jerusalem be restored, the earth, from one end of it to the other, is a Bochim to the spirit of Jesus in His saints. Their joy is divine and heavenly until then; for the earth yields not joy to them, if Jerusalem is disobedient.

It is very blessed to see that the place which the Lord chose for His dwelling on earth was Salem, the city of peace. There, in very early time, His holy witness and minister showed himself (Gen. 14). And so, when He Himself really descended to the earth, He came as “the Prince of peace,” seeking Jerusalem; His heralds proclaiming “Peace on earth” (Luke 2). But man was not ready for this. Man had previously built a city of confusion (Gen. 11); and builders of Babel could scarcely be prepared for a king of Salem. “The son of peace” was not on earth to answer

the salutation of “the Prince of peace” from heaven. Jerusalem, in her day, knew not the things that belonged to her peace. He had, therefore, as we see here, only to weep over her. Her citizens had refused Him, had said He should not reign over them; and He has to return to the “far country” (the supreme seat and source of all power), to get His title to the kingdom sealed afresh.

All this, however, tells us that, when He returns, it must be in a new character. His return will be in “a day of vengeance,” seeing that this visitation in “peace” was refused. And, as promising Him this day of vengeance on the citizens, the Lord says to Him, on reaching that “far country,” “Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.” The Stone that was first offered as a foundation stone, sure and precious, was disallowed by the builders; and therefore now, before it can reach its destined place of honor (that is, fill, like a great mountain, the whole earth), it must first smite the image. The kingdom that is to be taken by the returned nobleman is first to have all things that offend taken out of it. The unbelief and rebellion of man have thus shaped the course of the Lord of heaven and earth; and He has now to travel up to His glory and kingdom through “a day of vengeance.” (This day of vengeance is to be on the Gentiles as well as on Israel; on “all nations” (Isa. 34, 63); for Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles, as well as Herod with the Jews, rejected the Chief Cornerstone (Acts 4:27).

But (let the earth be for a while never so angry), He will still take the city of peace for His dwelling, and Salem shall still be true to her name: as He says by His prophet Haggai, “And in this place will I give peace”; for that alone is His “strong city” (Isa. 26); its walls will be salvation, and its gates praise. Man’s “strong city” will then have been made a ruin (Psa. 108 Isa. 26). The day of vengeance will have accomplished that, for the city of confusion and the city of peace cannot stand together. And when He has thus, on the overthrow of man’s confusion, established His own peace, the earth will learn to answer the salutation of heaven, and to say, “Peace in heaven,” of which the acclamations here give us the pledge and sample. (See Luke 2:14; Luke 19:38).

It is easy to apprehend this, and the course of these two chapters presents it all to us very simply. Jerusalem being unprepared for Jesus of Nazareth, accounts for the need of two advents, and for the nobleman’s returning in a day of vengeance. But we may remark that, in the midst of all this, denied as He was everything for the present by the sons of men, still does He act in the consciousness of His lordship of everything. He claims the ass from the owner of it, because He could say, speaking of Himself, “The Lord hath need of him.” And it is very striking that, in the course of His life and ministry, though He was the rejected Galilean all the time, there was no form of the ancient glory that He did not assume. I have before observed how faith at times drew aside the veil, and disclosed His glory. But now I ask, What glory? All glories of Jehovah known and recorded of old—all glories which had taught Israel that their God was the one only Lord of heaven and earth. Thus: He healed leprosy, the well-known peculiar honor of God (2 Kings 5:7); He put away all sicknesses, as the ancient Jehovah-rophi of Israel (Ex. 15:26); He fed the multitudes in wildernesses again; He stilled the waves, as though He could again divide Jordan and the Red Sea; and He made the fish to bring Him tribute, as here He claims the ass, treating the earth and its fullness as all His own. The judicial glory of Jehovah He would also fill, when the occasion demanded it, pronouncing woe on the people, or leaving the city for desolation; as, of old, He had again and again judged and chastened His people, both in the wilderness and in Canaan. All the ancient forms of praise and honor known in Jehovah to Israel, He would thus put on; the Redeemer, the Leader, the Healer, the Feeder, and the Judge too, of His people. And, as led forth by the faith of a Gentile, He could show Himself one with Him who, at the beginning, by His word, had made the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them (Luke 7).

It may well be a happy service to gather up these fragments of His glory in the midst of His humiliation. But I may further observe, that the two parables which we listen to in the course of this action bear us very much through the whole of the divine dispensations. That of the Laborers in the Vineyard gives us the dealings of God with Israel, from the day when they were planted as His people in Canaan, to the time of the mission and rejection of Christ, the Heir of the vineyard. That of the Ten Pounds takes the divine economy up from that moment, and carries us through the present age, until the second coming, or kingdom, of Christ. And in each of them we read of the Lord’s going into a far country (Luke 19:12; Luke 20:9). The Lord of Israel did this. After He had left His people in their inheritance, in the days of Joshua, He withdrew in some sense, expecting that they would until the land He had given them, for His praise in the earth. But their history and this parable tell us the full disappointment of all such hopes. So Christ, the rejected Heir of the Jewish vineyard, has done this. Upon His rejection, He went into the same “far country” (heaven), leaving behind Him, not an earthly portion to the care of Jewish laborers, but talents, opportunities of serving Him, with His servants, under the promise of His return in the full title of the kingdom, then and there to reward them. And the parable tells us, as well as the history of our present age will tell us, the end of this. A very full view, after this manner, of God’s great plans these parables give, coming out here in the most artless and natural way, in the course of this action.

But is not that a tender thought which is suggested here—that the saints are, in this age, left to serve their Master in a place where, after fullest deliberation, He has been refused and cast out? The citizens of it have said they will not have Him; and service, therefore, to be fully of right character, should be rendered in the recollection of this rejection.

And again; if we thus learn the nature of service from this parable generally, from the history of the unprofitable servant we learn the spring of service. This man did not know grace. He feared; he judged Christ an austere man; his best calculation was to come off free in the day of reckoning; the bondage of the law filled his heart, and not the liberty of the truth. He was not a Zaccheus, who bore away in his soul, from the joy of communion with Jesus, and the certainty of His love, a readiness to give half his goods to the poor, and a purpose to restore to any he had wronged even more than the law exacted. But this man was no servant. He served himself, and not Christ. And so do all who do not begin with knowing that Christ has first served them, and that theirs is to be the service of grateful love. Grateful love! How happy the thought! Paul served in this spirit. The life that he lived, he lived by the faith of the Son of God, who loved him, and gave Himself for him. Grateful love, in the sense of forgiveness sealed and made sure to his soul, accounts (under the Spirit, surely) for fruitfulness in Paul; the want of that—ignorance and disesteem of it—in the unprofitable servant, accounts for his barrenness.

Luke 21

Thus have we seen it—the Lord of Israel, the Lord of the earth and its fullness, rejected by earth’s citizens; and He Who once visited them with a day of peace taking His seat at the right hand of power, waiting to visit them with a day of judgment (Luke 20:42). This was the bearing of the preceding chapter, and this present one shows us more fully all the results to Israel and Jerusalem of this rejection of their King; that is, “the times of the Gentiles,” the season of Jerusalem’s depression, with the close of those times in the return of the Son of Man.

This chapter corresponds, in its general purpose, with Matthew 24-25, and Mark 13. But, among other distinctions, we may observe the little circumstance which opens it. And it is very peculiarly in the way of Luke.

This poor widow stands in contrast with the nation generally. Our Lord gives her this place. At least, in contrast with those who may be judged a sample of the nation in its worldly wealth and religious self-importance. And as the Lord of Israel here looks at these two together, so had the prophets of Israel before Him. They see the nation in apostasy, and the remnant in the midst of it; like the two at the mill, or in the field, as we have already seen. For, in the last days, when the things of Israel become the subject of divine notice again, these two will once more be manifested.

It was easy for the blessed Lord to pass from the rich benefactors in this scene, to the widow with her two mites. We know His mind too well to think that it could have been otherwise. His Spirit in His prophet (Isa. 66:1-2) shows a wonderful thing, somewhat similar to this. He sees the contrite and broken-hearted man, and turns to such, rather than to all the gorgeous works of His own hand. The heavens and the earth are and were and shall be both His delight and His glory, but “to this man” will He rather look. The deepest affections are stirred there.

What comfort is this! And how easily do our own affections understand it? For that which sympathizes with our mind or taste is really nearer to us than that which serves our interest. The one who, abroad, in the affairs of life, promotes our advantage, is not so near to our hearts as the one who can sit with us, and enter into the enjoyments of our mind and taste. And so with our God. That which secures His glory, like the heavens and the earth, is passed by for the humbled sinner that trembles at His word. There the divine mind meets its dearer object.

Who would have it otherwise? But who can measure the consolation that comes to us from this?

It has often been observed with what propriety the Lord, when quoting Isaiah 61, breaks off with the words “to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:19-21); because the words which immediately follow in the prophet being, “and the day of vengeance of our God,” the Lord could not of them, as of the preceding words, say, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears,” His ministry being one of grace and not of judgment to Israel. But now, in this chapter, the Lord, as it were, continues His quotation from the prophet, and goes on to reveal “the day of vengeance,” in order, as He tells us in verse 22, “that all things” (not some merely, as before) “which are written may be fulfilled.”

This day of vengeance upon Israel as a nation extends, in some sense, all through these present “times of the Gentiles.” The crisis in the latter day is the character of the whole period. They are all “days of vengeance,” as the Lord here calls them, though there is to be a special season and visitation at the close—“the day of vengeance” as the prophet calls it (Isa. 34, Isa. 63). And it is the whole period which our Lord here, I judge (rather than in the corresponding chapters in Matthew or Mark) gives us to look at—that dreary and evil season, the portion of Jerusalem during “the days of vengeance,” or “the times of the Gentiles.” And accordingly, instead of pointing at “the abomination of desolation” (as is done in Matthew and Mark, and by which is described the last enemy of Jerusalem), our evangelist has the more general expression, “when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed about with armies”; introducing “all the trees,” in the parable, in connection with “the fig-tree”—these being still further marks of the more general character of this Gospel, and of the more extended view of Jerusalem’s sorrows which the Lord is here taking. Indeed, it is only Luke who has the expression, “the times of the Gentiles.”

And this being so, the Lord here looking through the long vista of Jerusalem’s griefs, the strong impression left on the mind, after reading this chapter, is this—that the Lord’s great purpose was to guard His saints against the thought that the kingdom of Israel was to be entered at once or in quietness. He tells them that they were to count on no such things at all, for before the kingdom could arise there were to be judgments and sorrows. “The time draweth near,” some would say; “I am Christ,” others would say”; or the same seducer might utter both (vs. 8); but the Lord here warns His disciples against such. The citizens had already hated their offered King; and, as enemies, they must be slain, before the kingdom could fully appear. And to leave on the hearts of the disciples the clear and full impression of all this, so that they might stand in an evil day, and not be seduced by any false prophet of peace, was the great purpose of the Lord in this discourse with them.

I believe that Daniel, in like manner, looks through the whole time, “the times of the Gentiles,” as being one and the same in character; and calls it “the war” (Dan. 9:26). The end, it is true, will be special, and will be manifested “with a flood,” as he speaks; but the whole is a war, and desolations are determined, until that which is also determined be poured upon the desolater.

But it is very significant, that, while Matthew and Mark give us more particularly the last great Jewish sorrow, or “Jacob’s trouble,” and Luke more widely the whole age of “the times of the Gentiles,” John does not notice this remarkable prophecy at all. The Lord’s solemn entry as the King into Jerusalem goes off quite in another direction from what it does in any of the previous Gospels. The Greeks, representing the attendant and obedient nations in the latter day, come desiring to see Him, and this leads Him out at once to other thoughts. His soul then passes through a trouble; and shortly afterwards He forebodes, not the judgment of Israel, according to this prophecy, but the judgment of the world and of the prince of the world. And at length, in the riches of His grace, as Saviour of the world, He tells of Himself being lifted up on the cross, and of His being the Light of the world, and the One who spoke according to that commandment which the Father had given Him, and which is life everlasting. (See John 12).

This is all strikingly characteristic of the four Gospels, and aids the conclusion that this prophecy, not found in John, is about Jewish matters, and connected with the return of “the Son of Man” to the earth. For that is not the Church’s prospect. The saints now wait for the descent of “the Son of God” from heaven to the air (1 Thess. 1). It is the Jewish election, who, by-and-by, will have to wait for the days of the Son of Man.

The Lamentations of Jeremiah are the proper utterances of the heart, in sympathy with Jerusalem and her children, all through these “times of the Gentiles.” The city still sits solitary. The mountain of Zion is still desolate. The crown is fallen, and the joy of the heart is gone. The punishment of iniquity is not yet accomplished in that land and among that people. Rachel still weeps. But the Lord will not cast off forever (Lam. 3:31), and Rachel has been told this, “Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy” (Jer. 31:16).

But there is another expression, also peculiar to our Gospel, which perhaps leads to other prospects. Speaking of the consummation of these Jewish sorrows, the Lord says, “When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”

To say, “The time draweth nigh,” before any trouble could come, would be deceit, as we have seen; but now when the day of vengeance is at its height, to say “Your redemption draweth nigh,” would be holy and seasonable comfort to the faithful. And, in like manner, the prophets connect “the day of vengeance” with the “year of My redeemed,” as the Lord here does (Isa. 63:4). Judgment on the apostate nation, deliverance and joy to the remnant, are both to be looked for. For though the Lord make a full end of all nations, yet will He not make a full

end of Israel. The promised “times of the restitution of all things” will surely follow the threatened “times of the Gentiles.” And those promised times of restitution, called here by the Lord “your redemption,” will be the true Jewish or earthly jubilee, which preeminently was the time of restitution or redemption. (See Lev. 25).

In Israel the land and the people both belonged to the Lord; and in the year of jubilee He dealt with them as His own. For forty-nine years He allowed confusion to prevail. Lands might be sold, and the people themselves go to the creditor. But this was to be only for a season, for God’s claim was paramount; and every fiftieth year He would assert it. Israelite might traffic with Israelite, and corrupt the primitive order, or God’s world, making the whole system man’s world; but all this corruption and disturbance was to have an end, and this end came in the returning year of jubilee. Then the Lord arose, as it were, to act on His own principles, and assert His own rights; to undo all the mischief which man’s trafficking had introduced, and to replant the land and the people according to their beginnings under His own hand. His hand was then uppermost, and His order and purpose would show themselves openly. And what joy it is to see this, that the moment we get things again under God’s hand, the moment we find ourselves in His world, it is a jubilee we are keeping, a season of joy, a time for the restoration of grace, a time for making a happy return, every one to his family, and every one to his possession.

How blessed (to speak according to the figure or symbol of this ordinance) it is to have the Lord the Landlord of the earth again. “Happy are the people that are in such a case.” And this jubilee was introduced by the day of atonement (Lev. 25:9). That was the day that was to open the millennial age. For it is nothing but the work of the Lamb of God that can lead to any joy or deliverance among us. The precious blood is all our title. And thus it is that the jubilee and redemption are connected; so that when the Lord here says, “Your redemption draweth nigh,” it was as looking out to this jubilee of Israel and the earth. The jubilee was God’s redemption of His land and people. Supposing that no kinsman could be found able or willing to do this previously, God Himself, in the fiftieth year, would exercise both His rights and His resources in behalf of His oppressed land and bondaged people. And thus this jubilee was “the year of My redeemed” (as spoke the Lord by the prophet), or, the season of “redemption,” towards which the eyes of the expectant, suffering remnant are here directed by their blessed Master.

We learn, then, that “these things shall come to pass”; these “days of vengeance,” these “times of the Gentiles,” will run their course, but “redemption” is to be behind them all. The “smoking furnace” will pass first, because the Lord’s rights and claims have been denied by the rebellious citizens of this world, because there was no “son of peace” in man’s “city of confusion”; but, as surely, the “burning lamp” will follow (Gen. 15). A cry from the citizens, that they would not have Him, followed the Lord; and on His return He must therefore visit them, in His sore displeasure, before He proclaims the jubilee. But the jubilee waits to crown and close the work.

This is food for hope; and God is the God of hope. To be without hope is to be without God (Eph. 2:12). We cannot have faith without having hope; because the truth we believe is God’s truth; and God, being Love, will not reveal truth to us without making that truth of such a character as will inspire hope in us. He must give this shape to His revelations. He who called Israel out of Egypt called them into Canaan. And so with us; “Being justified by faith, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2).

This is most sure. God is the God of hope as well as of salvation. But the style of this chapter suggests (what has struck me generally throughout Scripture) that the food which hope gets in Scripture is comparatively little—rich indeed, but small in quantity. This, however, is only a further witness of the perfection of the divine oracles. Because God Himself is our present lesson. We are called to learn Him first, and then the inheritance or glory He has to give. And this is so right. For when we thoroughly know the excellency or goodness of a person, we can easily assure ourselves that we shall be no losers by him. His character warrants our hope, and is the security of our expectations. No, we wrong Him, if we do not hope from Him. Had man, however, been the author of the Scriptures, they would have been very different from this. They would have been filled with descriptions of the promised joy. Just as touching the life and character of Christ: had man been the author of such a history, he would have dealt largely in description and encomium. But the way of those who have spoken of Him under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is the very opposite. So as to our prospects. Look at Job’s history. Long account we get of his sorrows and the exercise of his faith, but the joy and honor in which all those sorrows resulted are given us in one short chapter. Bright, to be sure, is the exhibition there of his final condition, but comparatively small, and soon disposed of. And in this manner, generally, the testimonies of God give us large and repeated account of the evil of this world, and of our consequent trial of faith in it, but feed the hopes of our hearts more sparingly. For, as I suggested before, it is rather Himself we are to know now, and on Himself to feed now.

Our present chapter is after this pattern. We have sorrow and trial occupying the scene largely, but the prospect at the end presented shortly, and soon filled up—“Lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”

Luke 22-23

These chapters find their likeness, to a general intent, in Matt. 26-27 and in Mark 14-15. But still, as ever, there are distinctive marks and notices.

In the opening of these solemn scenes the Spirit, in Luke, accounts for the act of Judas, as He does afterwards for the denial of Peter, by disclosing Satan as the source of both. Neither Matthew nor Mark do this; but John does it with even more exactness, noting the progress of the power of Satan over the traitor. And these distinctions are quite according to the mind of the Spirit in the different Gospels. Matthew and Mark do not touch the secret spring of wickedness, for it had not been much noticed in Israel; Luke does, for he was looking out to larger and deeper principles of truth; and John still more fully, because he reaches farther into divine things and spiritual power than any of them. And this might again give us some recollections of Job; for in his history the source of the trials of the saints is strikingly opened also, the accuser therefore appearing before God against the righteous man, as here he is shown desiring to sift the disciples like wheat. But here the sources of security are also opened, the Lord saying, “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.” This we have not in Job.

Again: I observe that the words with which the Lord seats Himself at the paschal table, the inquiry among the disciples at such a moment as this, as to which of them should be the greatest, and the marvelous grace of the Lord’s reply; the notice about buying a sword, or of the militant state into which the disciples were now to count on entering; the healing of the wounded ear; the look at Peter; and the reconciliation between Pilate and Herod—all these are peculiar to Luke, and quite of the character of his Gospel, giving us the exercise of the Lord’s grace, and also the workings and affections of nature in others.

So, as we advance still farther, it is here only that we see the affections of the “daughters of Jerusalem”—a sight quite within the Spirit’s proper vision in Luke. And this company of women hold a very peculiar place. They do not take part with the crucifiers, but at the same time

they are not of one rank with “the women of Galilee,” who, as disciples, left their distant homes and kindred to follow Jesus. They melt, as with human affections, at the sight of His sorrows, and return from it smiting their breasts; but they do not appear to receive Him as the Hope of their own souls or of the nation. And yet, in all grace, He appears to receive them as the sample of the righteous remnant in the latter day. But indeed, dear brethren, we may say, in connection with this little incident, that one feels too sadly, in one’s own heart, that it is one thing to render to Jesus the tribute of admiration, or even of tears, and another thing to join one’s self with Him for better or for worse, through good and through evil, in the face of this present world; one thing to speak well of Him, another thing to give up all for Him.

In like manner, it is only our evangelist who gives our Lord’s desire for Israel on the cross—“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” And so (as is well known amongst us), it is only here that the repentance and faith of one of the malefactors is recorded. And suited, characteristic expressions of grace these are. For as the exercises of the human heart are especially called forth in this Gospel, so are the ways of that divine goodness which had all their utterance and current in the midst of us through the Son of God’s love. It abounds with discoveries of man; but so does it with the gracious actings of the Lord; that the evil and the darkness of the one may find their blessed remedy in God Himself through the other.

This conversion of the dying malefactor was further refreshment for the heart of Jesus in these dark and lonely hours, as we observed on the case of the poor blind beggar and that of Zaccheus the publican. His faith, like theirs, was truly precious. What a ready Teacher the Spirit was to him! In the twinkling of an eye (to speak so) the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ sprang forth in his soul! He understands himself in his guilt and just desert of judgment; he understands Jesus in His faultlessness, and right possession of a kingdom! And he learns, in his conscience, that his only refuge is to pass over from his own state of guilt and exposure into the shelter and glory of Christ!

There was no fruit in this poor soul, it has been said. He never did anything for Christ. But where, we may ask, is such fruit to God as faith itself? There is no fruit of faith that glorifies God as faith itself does, faith in the gospel, in the sufficiency and worthiness of Christ. Because it receives a revelation which exalts and sets off everything that can be to God’s praise. It admits a report or declaration about the blessed One, which magnifies all the divine excellencies, and everything that is worthy of God.

And this is His own purpose in it. As the apostle says, “That He might show the exceeding riches of His grace” (Eph. 2:7). This is His purpose, to display Himself to let it be known abroad, through all His creation, Who He is and what He is, and thus make His own works again, but more gloriously than of old, utter His praise. And how blessedly was this purpose answered in the soul of this dying thief; and how is it to this day answered in the history of this glorious conversion! May we never, with some, stand to inquire about the fruit of faith in him, but read in his story the purpose of God in the gospel of His dear Son, to tell out His own doings “to the praise of the glory of His grace” forever. But this only as we pass by this little history, which is peculiar to Luke.

So, though they are but slight additions, Luke is the only one who calls Golgotha by its Greek or Gentile name, Calvary; and while in Matthew and Mark the centurion’s testimony is given to Jesus as “the Son of God,” here it is to Jesus as “a righteous Man.”

But beyond all that strikes me as characteristic in these chapters is that other utterance of the Lord on the cross— “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.” This is peculiar, and shows us that the Lord’s mind, while passing through His last hours, is not given to us in the same path in the different Gospels. In Matthew and Mark, we have the cry of conscious desertion: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”—the cry of the smitten and bruised Lamb. In John He passes on without reference to God or the Father at all, but simply, as with His own hand, seals the accomplished work in the words, “It is finished!” But here it is between these paths that His soul is kept. It is not the sense of desertion, and its due attendant, appeal to God; nor is it the sense of divine, personal authority; but it is communion with the Father, the utterance of a soul that depended on Him, and was sure of His support and acceptance. And this is quite according to our Gospel. It is that central path, so to speak, which the mind of the Lord has been taking all through it. It is God as absent from Him that He feels in Matthew and Mark; the Father as with Him that He knows here; Himself that He is divinely conscious of in John. All these Thoughts had their wondrous and holy course through the soul of the Lord in these hours. Perfect in every exercise of heart, though various; and none could trace them thus, by the pen of one evangelist after another, but the Spirit that awakened them. “When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then Thou knewest my path.”

By this cry the independent life of the spirit is fully and formally owned. The Lord, in dying, commends His “spirit” to the Father. Stephen afterwards, in dying, commends his to Jesus. A happy witness to us that both the Lord and His servant looked for something superior to, and independent of, the body. They looked to a condition of the spirit. This was not what the dying thief looked for, but what, through surpassing grace, he got. As a Jew he looked for a future kingdom; but his dying Lord promises him present life with Himself in paradise. For “life” as well as “immortality” (incorruption of the body) are brought to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1).

Death bounds the empire of sin and Satan. Sin reigns unto death. The judgment that follows death belongs to God. The enemy may follow up to that point, but he goes no farther.

“Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise” was the word here to one who was then just passing the gate of death. The kingdom that he looked for, and of which he spoke, was not yet; but the gracious hand of Christ was alone entitled to lead him; and though it will not lead directly and at once into the promised land, where the tribes of the Lord are to share their desired and abiding inheritances, yet it will lead in paths worthy of itself, paths of light and life; for He is the God of the living only, and in Him is no darkness at all. God is the “Father of spirits”; and the spirit given up, or death past, we are alone with the living God. The spirit returns to Him who gave it; and it is said to us, “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.”

Have we not the fullest testimony that it was so with the Lord? Did not the rent rocks, the opened grave, and the riven veil, tell that He was Conqueror on the other side of death? “In that He died, He died unto sin once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. And we may trust the single Hand that meets us there also. It may lead to paradise first, and not to the kingdom until the resurrection, but every path will be according to the Hand that opens it. It was to lead the dying thief that day—but where, except to paradise, the place where Paul had such visions and revelations as he could not utter when he returned to earth? And into that paradise a dying malefactor and the dying Lord of glory (wondrous company!) were to go that day.

Paul counted it better to depart, and be with Christ. He had, in some sense, already experienced paradise (2 Cor. 12). It may have been by a surprise that he was taken there. He had no time, it is likely, to prepare himself for such a journey and an untried journey, an untravelled road, it was to him. But there was a Hand that could conduct the spirit without amazement. And so with us. We hear of the sudden, unexpected death of saints. But He who is principal in the scene, and who holds the keys of hell and death, cannot be surprised. And, therefore, though we learn from the apostle that the visions and audiences which he got there filled him with an occasion for glorying, they were so exalted, yet never does he intimate that they were too great or too high for him. His spirit was attempered to them, for the One who had prepared the scenes in the third heaven for him, had, in the same moment, got him ready for them.

He that hath wrought us for the resurrection in glorious bodies is none less than God Himself, and He has given to us the earnest of the Spirit; “therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord…we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5).

And our meeting death (entrance to this paradise, as it is to us), is altogether different from Christ’s meeting it. We are to meet it as any pain or trouble in the flesh, the enemy using them all for our mischief, if he may, but God bringing blessing and praise. No three hours of darkness is there before us, but the sense of a love that is stronger than death. But He had to know that time as the hour of the power of darkness, as He speaks in this Gospel. And He had to know the full righteous exaction of that penalty (of old incurred by us), “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” That was the cup He drank—the bitter cup, tasted at Gethsemane, and exhausted at Calvary. Blessed for us who love Him to know, as He speaks in the Book of Psalms that “the cup of salvation” is also His. And He will take it, by-and-by, in the kingdom, leading the praises of the congregation in the sanctuary of glory.

And a thought full of joy (had we but hearts for it) arises here—that everything is heightened and honored by the hand of the Son of God. Everything that has been spoiled and broken by us is taken up by Him, and, in His hand, raised to a character which we could never have given it. The law broken by us has been magnified and made honorable by Him; all human grace, all fruit of human soil (as we see especially in this Gospel), has been presented to God by Him, and in Him, more fresh and lovely than we could ever have offered it; all service has been rendered to perfection, and all victory gained gloriously, by Him, to God’s praise forever. And so worship. What prayers and supplications were those which Jesus once made in the day of His grief and bruising; and what praise will that be which Jesus will hereafter lead, when He thus takes the “cup of salvation”! Where could have been the temples that would have been filled with such incense as the Son brings! What sacrifices has our God thus accepted in His sanctuary! Surely it is our comfort to know this; for it is in the midst of our ruins these temples are raised.

These thoughts arise while thinking on that cup which Jesus drank here, and on that other cup which He refused for the present, waiting to take it in the kingdom. But I will pass on, just again observing, that wherever we have noticed anything peculiar to our evangelist in this portion of his Gospel, it is still, as we have now seen, according to the design and manner of the Spirit by him. The great materials are, of course, the same in all, for all is fact and truth; but the Lord’s mind through it all is thus variously given out to us.

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, "Looking Upon Jesus As He Walked": Luke 18:15-43

We begin in Luke 18 with the case of those who brought young children to Him that He might touch them. But the disciples rebuke them. Here we must determine between the strangers and the disciples. We see (in the disciples) that those who are more familiar with the things of Christ may be less intimate. These strangers had a better understanding of the Lord’s mind than did the disciples.

And we also see that the Lord is better to us than our expectations. The strangers had said touch the little ones, but the Saviour took them into His arms and blessed them (Mark 10:16). How He exceeds all our thoughts!

Next, with the rich young ruler we have one with an uneasy conscience. He said, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He saw that the Lord was a good Man, as we speak, and having no peace, seeing the life of the Lord Jesus so displayed, he had no doubt that this Man must have the secret of peace. The Lord beautifully answers Him by asking him another question: “Why callest thou Me good?” You have no right to call Jesus good unless He is God over all.

The Lord tells the young man, “Sell all that thou hast . . . and come, follow Me.” He is saying, “If you put yourself in the track of Christ, you must be like Christ.” The Lord gave up everything and, as an emptied man, served others. If the young man were to be perfect, he must go and do likewise.

Alas, the young man could not give up everything for Christ and thus was unfit for the kingdom. Ah! worldliness and selfishness have no power to breathe the atmosphere of the kingdom of God.

Then the Lord is seen coming nigh to Jericho where there is a collision between the blind beggar and the multitude, and the Lord comes in to decide between the two. Are we not pleased with the decision He makes!

The blind man had called, “Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” He knew Him in His personal glory and in the boundlessness of His grace. “We beheld His glory . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). If we do not recognize the glory of His person, the grace of His work is worth nothing. We must connect His grace and His glory.

The confession of the blind beggar showed an apprehension of these two things. He did not submit to the rebuke of the crowd but “cried so much the more.” In beautiful dignity, the Lord stops on His way at the bidding of a poor, blind beggar. Joshua once bade the sun and moon to stand still—but here the Lord of the sun and moon and heavens stands still at the bidding of a blind beggar! That is the gospel—the glorious, gracious One dispensing the grace of eternal healings to meet our degradation. Do we not admire the determination of Bartimeus (even as we admire Jacob laying hold on the divine Stranger; Genesis 32:24)? He would not hold his tongue but cried out till Jesus stood and said, “What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?”

J. G. Bellett (adapted from Notes on the Gospel of Luke)

The Herodians sought to entangle Jesus, leading Him to commit Himself to the power of the state, then in the hand of the Romans, whose creature Herod, the patron of their party, was. They did this stealthily. They affected to know Him as One that regarded not the person of man, and they put a question to Him about which conscience might be uneasy, the conscience of a Jew, as though they craved instruction and guidance. (See Matt. 22.) This was hypocrisy; and so the Lord calls it.

The question was such as might easily lead to a perplexity. “Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?” There was great confusion in the land at that time; Caesar’s power was in the place and among the people that belonged to God. The question intimated that, and that was confusion. That was not as it ought to have been, or as it would have been, had God’s people been true to Him.

Jesus, however, did not reason upon this confusion, or contend with it; He taught, rather, that it was to be yielded to by the people; for Israel’s duty, taught them of old by His Spirit in their prophets, and now by His lips in the midst of them, in a day of bondage or captivity, is to accept the punishment of their sins; and if this present confusion in the land, Caesar’s power in God’s place, was, as it must have been, the fruit of their sin, they must now accept that state as their punishment, bow to it, and not resist it, or struggle with it. He only guards the application of this principle by a rehearsing of God’s claims also. “Render unto Caesar,” says the Lord, “the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things which are God’s.”

This reminds me of Numbers 14. If Israel have brought forty years’ pilgrimage upon themselves, it is not for them to seek to have it otherwise by a desperate effort on their own behalf, or a struggle to free themselves of the wages or penalty of their transgression. Let them rather bow their heads, and begin their pilgrimage humbled, and not go up the hill and seek to force the enemy.

Thus, on this occasion of the Herodians in Matthew 22, the Lord answers them, and the words of His lips now are in beautiful concord with the words of His Spirit in His prophets of old.

But here let me add, Jesus did not fear Herod. His enemies thought that He must either speak or act unworthy of Himself, by fearing Herod, or else commit Himself to Herod’s power by defying him. But He does neither the one nor the other. The snare is broken, as it had been in John 8. There, Jesus neither impugned the Law nor condemned the guilty. The snare was broken.

But Jesus, again I say, did not fear Herod. His words in Luke 13 let us know this, if we need a witness. Then He calls him “a fox,” a fitting title for him, as we read in Lamentations 5:18, “Because of the mountain of Zion which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.” Herod was one who had taken advantage of Zion’s sorrow. Israel was dethroned. Her enemies had got the upper hand; and Herod, the creature of the enemy, the ally and flatterer of Caesar, had made his gains by her misery. He was walking upon the mountain, or in the high places, of Zion, because of her desolations. He had played the fox, instead of mourning over the wastes of Israel: he had made his own gain out of their poverty.

The Lord did not fear him. He exposes him in the due time and place. But all with Him was beautiful in its season. He will own ‘Caesar’s place in the land, and Herod’s as under Cesar, in the day of Matthew 22; but if threatened, as by Herod’s name or power in Luke 13, He can and will let it be known, that He did not fear him.

But further as to Herod. He was at that moment also playing the fox; for, according to this same scripture, Luke 13, Jesus as the Heir would have gathered Israel; and Herod, seeking the death of such an One, may surely and rightly be named a fox.

Jesus was the feeder of the flock of slaughter; Herod a possessor, a slayer, a salesmaster, a shepherd that did not pity—in the language of another prophet, who thus strikingly, under the Holy Spirit, anticipated these days of Jesus and of Herod. (See Zech. 11:4-5.)

The Remembrancer: 1908, Peter

UK 5:1-11 OH 21:1-14The soul has its history as well as the body. The soul takes its journeys at times as well as the body. This we know and have experienced. Peter's spirit took a wondrous journey in Luke 5 He is there at first, in the place of nature–an easy, kind-hearted man as ever lived, earnest to love and to serve; and being such an one, he readily lent his boat to the wondrous Stranger who was there addressing the multitude on the shore of the sea of Gennesaret. And when the wants of this Stranger were over, at His bidding Peter put his boat further into the lake, and let down his net for a draft.

But this was nature still. He had not left the place of nature yet–his own place, the place where his natural friendliness and easiness of temper had put him all his life hitherto. "Master," said he to Jesus, "we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Thy, word I will let down the net."

But now the journey of his soul begins-a wondrous, distant journey, but performed as in a whirlwind. The chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof, in their way, were standing and waiting for him. The draft of fishes which came at the word of the Stranger surprised the soul of Peter, and at once bore him into the presence of God. The Stranger was transfigured before his soul as in the twinkling of an eye. He was the Lord of the fullness of the sea, who could command the draft, and Peter stood in the presence of God. The living God, the God of glory, was in the place, and Peter had not known it till now, and the sight overwhelms him. He learns himself there, and he is confounded. " Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." It is no more " Master" but " Lord." It is no more the fisherman Peter, who had been toiling all the night at his nets, but the sinner Peter. It is a new world to him, the brightness of which is too powerful. He is in God's presence, and it is too much for him. He learns himself where only we can duly learn ourselves, in the presence of the glory of God. We have all sinned, and come short of that glory, and that is discovered by our souls when that glory is reached for the first time.

This was a journey indeed! Peter was taken from the native land of his easy, kindly, but revolted nature (revolted, because it could not stand before God), to the dwelling-place of the glory of God; and he apprehends that place in the brightness of it, and is amazed.

But he must go still further into this new world. He must still travel; and the word, the further word of the Lord, the word of Him whose divine honor and rights had here been discovered to him, must lead him on. " Fear not," says Jesus to him; and when he obeys, and follows where those words lead him, his journey is ended. He may dwell forever in the place he has now reached. He has left the native land of nature for the presence of God, and found it the home of a poor, convicted, conscience-stricken sinner.

Many a journey, I am sure, the soul of Peter took in after days. He had to pass through the rebukes of the Lord; and they ever give the soul a chapter in its history, or take it some stage of that living way which the word of God has cast up before us, and along which the Spirit of God bears us. But I am thinking only of one other journey which this loved and earnest man had to perform under the hand of the Lord. I mean that which he takes in John 21:1-14.

Here we find him again at his fishing. Sweet, natural scene! It is given to us in all the artlessness of truth. He and some companions are again on the sea of Galilee, and again a Stranger addresses him. In like simplicity and friendship which gave him character at the first, he does as this Stranger bids him; and he is, in like grace, rewarded by another heavy draft of fishes. This was a token, It was symptomatic of who this Stranger was. The finger may not be sensitive enough to feel the pulse, or the eye keen enough to discover the mark. Peter fails in this faculty, and John sees for him. " It is the Lord," says he to him. The eye had seen for the body, and then the foot begins its service. Peter's second journey begins, as we tracked him first in Luke 5, with the speed of a single, devoted and loving heart. He is in the water at once to reach the Lord. He now knew Him as he had not when he began his first journey. He had already said to him, "Fear not." He now knew Him, and is not amazed. His presence is not that of a glory that was overwhelming, but of a glory that had already given his conscience a home; and though that conscience had every reason at that moment to be a coward, it is bold as a lion. The fisherman Peter, when introduced at first to the presence of God, had become, in his experience, the sinner Peter; but now the fisherman Peter becomes, in his experience, the loved, saved, accepted Peter. He will tread softly, surely he will, for he worships in the presence of God; but he treads confidently, for he is accepted in that presence, and courts it with all speed and all certainty. Right it was at first that in that presence he should be convicted and discover his sin; right it is now that in that presence he should be a worshipper, a consciously accepted worshipper, for that glory had already spoken comfortably to him.

What two drafts of fishes these were! What two journeys for the soul to take! How Peter's spirit was called to penetrate the new world where the glory and the grace of Christ so shine; and in the display of the grace that is there, I discover the same character after as before the resurrection. A blessed discovery for the soul. In other days, as in Mark 4, the Lord has to rebuke the disciples for their little faith, fearing as they had done when the storm rose on the lake. But ere He rebuked their unbelief He allayed their tremblings. He said, "Peace, be still " to the waves ere He said to the disciples, " How is it that ye have no faith?" And so now with Peter. He sits with Peter, He dines with Peter. The full, free fellowship of his heart with his loved One is made sure to Peter's spirit ere his Lord addresses Himself to his conscience, and brings his ways to remembrance. The Jesus who had once calmed the sea ere He rebuked the disciples, now gives Peter an unbroken net full of fishes, and dines with him, ere He says to him, "Lovest thou me?" Oh, the secrets of that land which Peter had entered!

Bible Treasury: Volume 16, Queen of Sheba, The

“The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn theme for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here."-Luke 11:31

This “elect lady” stands in a line of loved and honored women, who, now and again, from the beginning to the end, appear in the varied and wonderful action of the Book of God. We shall find in what is said of her, not only historic information, but both moral and typical instruction. And this is common in the inspired narratives; so that the soul is edified and the mind furnished from the same page.

As to her country or kingdom, I would just observe that we read of several Shebas. One was grandson of Abraham by Keturah (Gen. 25:1-3); another was of the family of Shem, being grandson of Eber (Gen. 10:21-28); another was great grandson of Ham, and nephew of Seba (Gen. 10:7). The Sheba, of which this history speaks, must have been connected with the last of these, the descendant of Ham, because the Lord speaks of the queen as being from “the south,” and “from the utmost parts of the earth,” while Keturah's family was sent to the east, and Shem's portion was more at home or central.

As to herself, we may presume, she had never heard the voice of a prophet, or seen the oracles of God. She had no advantages (as we speak) from education, and was a perfect stranger to the God of Israel. Her soul had, therefore, but a slender stock to trade with. She had simply, in her own land, heard of Solomon, his acts and his wisdom. This was all she had; but, with such small provisions, she was ready to take a long untried journey.

There is something admirable in this. The state of the soul itself was tested. It proved the love of wisdom to be in her heart; since a mere distant report about it so moves her. As the common saying is, “a word to the wise is sufficient.” This is the admirable feature in her which the Lord notices. “A reproof enters more into a wise man, than a hundred stripes into a fool.” It is the faculty within, the sense or taste of the soul, that is approved by this, and that is indeed the important thing after all. “Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom;” while, on the other hand, “a fool hath no delight in understanding” (Prov. 18:1, 2). Here are two different sources discovered to us by the Spirit; and the first of these was that which rose in the breast of this “queen of Sheba.” Her heart was right. She had a “desire” towards wisdom, and, through that desire, could separate herself from her home and her kingdom, to seek it at the distant feet of Solomon.

This is the admirable thing in her, which drew forth the notice of the Lord.

The Pharisees had asked for a sign, the sure witness of a bad state of mind. The Lord “sighed deeply in His spirit” as He heard this, we read in another evangelist (Mark 8:12), and also with such a mind contrasted the mind that was in this “queen of Sheba “; showed her to be one that was because her heart was in it; while these Pharisees moved by a little to do a great deal, just of course were starving in a land of plenty, just of course because they had no desire. They were asking for signs in the very midst of the wonders of the hand of Christ. She took a long journey from a barren land, at the mere report of God's provisions in a distant country. With a true thirst of soul she used what she had,

though it was but little. They were reproaching the Lord, as though He had given them nothing, while they were in the thick of His bounties. Here was the mighty moral distance between them. And the Lord notices it. That which was shining on her table was but a taper (according to the Lord's figure in this passage); but the eye of her body was so single, that it gave light enough for her. Their table was bright with a number of brilliant lamps! but the eye of their body was evil, and they stumbled at noon-day, as in the night.

Here lay the difference. And on this all depends. There is no straitness in God, no lack or indistinctness in the testimony. The candle is not under the bushel, but on a candlestick, and needs nothing in size or brilliancy. Even one raised from the dead could add nothing to Moses and the Prophets. The “signs of the times” for Jesus are as clear as the ordinances of the heavens, as the morning end evening sky. But the question is, what is the state of our vision? Are we willing to do His will? Is the love of God in us, or the love of the honor of man? (John 5, 7.) Is the eye single? Is the body full of light? If so, the whole region around us will be full of light also. Every saying of God, every doing of God, will be approved then: all in Jesus, and about Jesus, and from Jesus, will shine before us then. We shall justify wisdom in all her ways. The whole atmosphere which the Lord spreads will be resplendent, the path which faith takes will be lightsome; “the whole shall be full of light as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.” It was so with this honored woman. She does not complain that her taper was small. It gave some light, and this she followed. She followed a distant report with a wishful desirous heart, and she had neither time, nor taste to complain that her journey was darksome. It was “full of light” under her “single eye.”

This was the admiration of the Lord! Gracious Master! If we did but value His smile, if we did but prize our power and opportunity to refresh His spirit! This was the excellency of her spirit, by which, in the judgment, she condemns the evil-eyed Pharisee.1

In this way our souls receive a very important lesson. We may desire for ourselves, though in a land of Goshen, and not in the utmost Sheba, that we may have like hearty value for everything of God. This is the most excellent condition. “To love what is good is better than knowing much about it.” Better to desire wisdom, than to have gathered a large store of knowledge, or of information—better to have the spiritual tastes and senses quick and vigorous, than great provision to feed them with.

We know this in human things. How many may be listening to the same music, or gazing on the same scenery, and yet how various the hidden motion that is produced. The materials have been common to all who have formed the crowd of listeners or spectators. Yes—but the effects have been infinitely various, because the faculty of delight, in each, has been various, the senses have been of a finer, or coarser mold (perhaps too, in a thousand gradations) and in that lies the reason of all this diversity in the impulse or influence produced.

And so I am sure it is in the ways of the Spirit. The Lord can give the faculty within us an improved or a finer tone. And this is excellent praise. We honor Him by this acknowledgment, that He has our spirits within His reach, and that He can sweep the chords there, or quicken the senses there. That is His glorious power. He can impart, it is true, further knowledge, and let in the brighter light of new mysteries; but is it not more blessed (may I ask) when He gives new energy to the understanding itself, or a more delicate tone to the sensibilities of the spiritual mind?

That is, indeed, I believe, the brightest dearest hour of the soul. And how constantly this may be seen; how constantly do we find that many, who know less, have more fervency! And why? Because, as I have been saying, the faculty within, the spiritual powers of the saint, have been retouched, as it were, by the finger of God. Mary Magdalene, for instance, had but small materials. Her knowledge was not only narrow, but clouded. She ignorantly sought the sepulcher with her spices. But her heart was alive. The faculty, or sensibilities, had been awakened, and her fervent spirit expresses itself in strong, though irregular, action. There was no great entrance of light into the minds of the thousands who were joined together in the day of Pentecost. But there was a fresh visitation to the soul itself. They received the Holy Ghost. And what gladness and what singleness of heart! What victory over the world, and what conscious possession of a kingdom within, is seen in them!

Sure I am that our real power depends on the state of the faculty itself, than on the provision for its exercise, on the “eye” being “unclouded,” than on the extent of the field of vision. It is hearts we want, and then we shall feel the captivating power of Christ. For there is plenty of that in Him, we could but get in contact with it. But there is the mischief. The light that is in as is clouded. Many an attraction finds its way to our minds, which would not dare to show itself there, if Jesus were enthroned already, if our sight of Him had been so vivid as to leave His loved and worshipped image there continually.

It is so; and may our hearts increasingly experience it. And this lesson and these encouragements we gather from the history before us. The moral of a story is always the deepest part of it. There may be the three things, as in this story—

lst.—The event, or historic circumstances;

2ndly.—The type;

3rdly.—The moral.

The moral lies the most within, and it was the glory of the mind of Christ to, draw it forth.

The story is, originally, given to us in 1 Kings 10 and in 2 Chron. 9 She appears at the beginning of it in the character which the Lord, as we have seen, so beautifully and profitably noticed. She trafficked for wisdom, and the Lord's anointed king in Jerusalem was her merchant. With him, and for it, she bartered gold, and spice, and precious stones. So true a disciple of that word was she, in the spirit of her mind (though she knew nothing of it in the book of God), that “the merchandise of wisdom is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.” And the Lord will not be her debtor. He gives her far more than she had bargained for. Solomon, His servant and prophet, does more than answer her questions; he gives her such a sight of his magnificence, that she is “satisfied with fatness.” “There was left no more spirit in her;” and “blessed” was she that hungered and thirsted, for she was filled. And blessed surely it ever is, when our hunger and thirst are of that fine and heavenly quality, that we can bring them into God's presence, when they are such as bear, their own necessary witness with them, that none can answer them but the Lord Himself, His storehouse and fountains.

This was a sister and co-heir of Solomon. Solomon had desired wisdom, and, with it, he had inherited all things. The “queen of Sheba” had desired wisdom, and in like manner, with it, was given all things. They must have understood one another. She came from amid the dark and distant Gentiles, children of Ham; he had been reared in the city of solemnities, in the Goshen of wisdom, and knowledge, and truth; but the spirit in each was the same, and natural distances, and human diversities, are thoroughly lost in the commanding light and energy of the

Spirit who knit them with one mind together.

Precious and interesting is the moral of all this simple and unvarnished tale of other days—other, it is true, as to time and place, but the same with our own in the grace and power of the same Spirit. It was the moral of it, which at this time chiefly attracted me. But I would just add, that in this distinguished Gentile we have a sample, or type, of the nations by and by. For as she, in the days of Solomon, the son of David (which were the days of the typical glory), went up to Jerusalem, seeking for the wisdom that was in the anointed of the Lord, so, in the age of the real glory, the millennial ago of the true Solomon, the nations will wait in the acme city, with the same desire, and purpose, of heart. They will say one to the other, “come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths.”

J.G.B.

Christian Truth: Volume 10, Intelligent Service

"He that gathereth not with Me scattereth" (Luke 11:23); that is, he that does not work according to Christ's purpose is really making bad worse. It is not enough to work with the name of Christ; no saint would consent to work without that, but if he does not work according to the purpose of Christ, he is scattering abroad. Many a saint is now engaged in rectifying and adorning the world—getting Christendom as a swept and garnished house. But, this not being Christ's purpose, it is aiding and furthering the advance of evil. Christ has not expelled the unclean spirit out of the world. He has no such present purpose. The enemy may change his way but he is as much "the god" and "prince of this world" as ever he was. The house is his still, as in the parable (see Luke 11:24-26). The unclean spirit has gone out; that was all; he had not been sent out by the stronger man, so that his title to it is clear; and he returns, and all that he finds there had only made it more an object with him. He finds it clean and ornamented, so that he returns with many a kindred spirit and thus makes its last state worse that its first.

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, "Looking Upon Jesus as He Walked": Luke 11:31-54

In Luke 11, the Lord Jesus gives the beautiful instance of the Queen of Sheba. Her conscience and affections were stirred when hearing that Solomon had the knowledge of God. “When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord” (1 Kings 10:1), she took the long journey to Jerusalem, just to find out God.

What stirred the conscience of the men of Nineveh? Jonah’s words. “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). The result of this was that the king clothed himself with sackcloth. Even the horses and sheep were so clothed. What a ridiculous thing to put animals in sackcloth! Yet, who can measure the agony and impulses of an awakened conscience? Analyzing and criticizing can give no account of such soul work. It is blessed to see, as in the stricken cases today, that the convicted conscience cannot stand upon measure. Send us a sign, they said. No, says the Lord. You must believe on Me with your conscience.

While the Lord was about to answer the second of these questions (vss. 15-16), there was a woman in the company whose affection was stirred. Human affections are often stirred under the cross. The daughters of Jerusalem took their places apart from the prosecutors. While I do not trust this excitement of nature, I do not treat it as vile. There may have been a crop for Jesus in it—a blessing in the cluster.

You may be prepared for a variety of moral activities nowadays, but the Lord says, as it were, to this poor woman, “There is a mistake in your judgment, because, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.”

Connection with Christ is to be spiritual and not fleshly, divine and not human. Do you not delight to know that nothing less than your necessity as a sinner is to form the link between you and Jesus? Anything else would snap asunder like the withes that bound Samson.

J. G. Bellett (adapted from Notes on the Gospel of Luke)

The Christian Shepherd: 2001, "Looking Upon Jesus As He Walked": Luke 11:21-30

In chapter 11:21 the Lord indites the parable of the strong man to show that it was by the finger of God He cast out devils. The strong man only gets his house rifled by a stronger than himself. God alone is stronger than Satan. We have already been conquered and made slaves by the devil, so that when we get him bound in this world, God alone has done it, for no child of man could. If I see anyone stronger than Satan in this world, I have a witness that God is here.

The Lord shows that what Satan is doing, he is doing in collision with God—that his bruiser has appeared. That is what He taught Satan in the wilderness. Satan is not afraid of us, but he has more than his match in the Son of God. He is bold as a lion when he comes to you and me, but he trembles in the presence of Christ.

In chapter 11:23 the Lord Jesus draws a very solemn conclusion. The battle is proclaimed and there is no neutrality. God has made the world the scene of the conflict in which the question between Himself and Satan is to be decided, the fruit of which is to occupy eternity.

The voice goes forth: “He that is not with Me is against Me.” Then when the Lord had thus solemnly sounded the voice of the trumpet across the field—the blast of the silver trumpet proclaiming war in verse 24—He sketches a very solemn sight.

It is an awful picture—one which has already been illustrated in Israel, and which, I believe, will be illustrated in Christendom too. The besom (broom) of Babylon may have swept the house of Israel, and to this day they may abominate idols, but a clean house may be just as fit for Satan as an unclean one. So it is with Christendom. Reformation will not do.

We are thankful for the privilege of meeting together in peace, but mere Protestantism will not do. The Lord teaches us that the swept and garnished house may be worse than before. What has taken the place of idols in reformed Christendom? Is it the knowledge of Jesus? Yes, in His own elect, but human vanities have conducted man in Christendom by the same path as the Jew. It is only hurrying on to a matured form of apostate iniquity.

Then He turns to those requiring a sign, telling them such should not be given (vs. 29). Worldliness dictated their desire for a sign from heaven. They wanted a Christ that would astonish the world. The Lord would not and could not answer that. If you and I could not accept our Jesus in rejection, we shall never have Him in glory.

Shall I think to see my Lord glorified in a defiled world, in the midst of such moral elements as fill it? He will give no sign here. If He is accepted, it must be under the sign of the prophet Jonas—not with a crown of glory on His head, but a crown of thorns. He was buffeted and spit upon, rather than worshipped and adored. Instead of giving a sign from heaven, He gives one from the bowels of the earth, in death and humiliation.

J. G. Bellett (adapted from Notes on the Gospel of Luke)

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, "Looking Upon Jesus As He Walked": Luke 11:1-23

Luke 11:1-23

Prayer is the expression of dependence. As the perfect minister of the disciples' souls, Christ sets Himself to teach them, and you find a form of prayer presented. The Lord suits His words to their then condition. Prayer is the expression of the heart in its present condition.

The Lord then speaks of a man going to a friend at midnight and asking for three loaves. "And he from within"—these are striking words. Are you within? It is a dangerous condition in this world. What I mean by that is losing your sympathies with the joys and sorrows around you.

Here, the Lord shows out God's grace on the dark ground of that man's selfishness. Believers have not to ask and seek and knock; that is importunity. But "ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." See the divine readiness in answer to human necessities. Never say importunity is needed to move God.

Remember Daniel (Dan. 10). For three full weeks Daniel was chastening his heart before God, and no answer was given. At the end of that time the answer came. The angel told him that as soon as ever he began to pray, he was heard. However, a certain transaction that was going on in heaven hindered the answer. He went on in importunity for three weeks, but as soon as ever he had prayed, he was heard. So you may have been praying for a long time and getting no answer, but be sure the interval has been well employed, if not in heaven, then in the chastening of your spirit.

There is no reluctance in God—not that selfishness to be overcome that there was in the man at midnight—but there may be reasons to delay the answer. Then, when it does come, it may be in a way you are little prepared for. Paul prayed three times, and the thorn was not taken away, but the answer came at last, and in a way he had not expected. The thorn was left until the day of his death, but he was given grace by which he could triumph in it.

After commenting on prayer the Lord enters (vs. 14) on a solemn scene. Two antagonist thoughts come up to Christ—He who was constantly enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself.

The first, representing a perverted religion, was set of the people come to charge Him with casting out devils by Beelzebub. The second, representing infidelity, tempted Him, seeking a sign from heaven.

The Lord takes up the first of these by asking in exquisite beauty, "If Satan . . . be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand?" In answering this contradiction, He begins by showing them the folly of their thought. Would Satan be so foolish? Why are you so senseless? Then He presses in on their consciences: "By whom do your sons cast them out?" No doubt the kingdom of God had come unto them. Therefore they were to take care what they were about—take care, He says, for your faithless reasoning has put you on dangerous ground.

J. G. Bellett (adapted from Notes on the Gospel of Luke)

The Evangelists: Meditations on the Four Gospels, Luke 9:51-19:27

Luke 9:51-62

At this place, what has been suggested as the fourth part of our Gospel begins. The Lord, having ended His more formal ministry in Galilee, begins His journey to Jerusalem. (vs. 51.)

Our evangelist is the only one who notices the circumstances with which this journey opens. And there is something of his moral arrangement of incidents to be noticed here. As has been observed by another, commenting on this part of Luke, "this passage of history seems to come in here for the sake of its affinity with the text before (the Lord's rebuke of John for forbidding the man who followed not with them); for there, under color of zeal for Christ, the disciples were for silencing and restraining separatists; here, under the same color, they were for putting infidels to death; but, as for that, so also for this, Christ reprimanded them."

The moral order in our evangelist's narrative is, I believe, thus exhibited in this place of his Gospel. But it introduces a very peculiar path of the Lord.

The recent vision on the mount may have led to it; but whether that is so or not, we find our Lord here addressing Himself to His journey, in the consciousness of its leading Him to glory. The time had come, we read, when He was to be “received up”—words which express His ascension to glory. And He seems to act according to this consciousness, sending messengers before His face, as though it were to prepare for Him a way suited to this anticipated glory. The chariot of God would be in readiness to attend Him from Jerusalem upwards (Luke 24:51); but it was now for the children of men to prepare His previous way from the place where He then was to that city. And He was thus, as it were, trying whether the world would own His claim to be “received up,” as afterwards He tried whether Israel would own His royal place in Zion (Luke 19:28). But neither would the world know Him, nor Israel receive Him. The world was not ready for His claims, as is here expressed by the conduct of the Samaritan villagers. The earth did not care for His heavenly glory. “Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head,” an infidel world was again, in the spirit of it, saying.

The disciples, who had, it may be, caught the tone of their Lord’s mind on this striking occasion, look on Him as another Elijah travelling on to meet the chariot of Israel, and they move Him to do what Elijah had done, by resenting this indignity of the Samaritan villagers, as of the captains and their fifties. But the way of the Son of Man, for the present, must be different. He will pass to glory rather through sorrow of His own than through judgment of the world. He “will suffer thus far”; and therefore He here restrains this motion of His disciples, bows His head to this scorn of men by seeking another village, and that, too, not with preparation before His face, but as the rejected Christ of God.

In such a character, He accordingly resumes His journey. No sense of glory fills His soul, as it had done when He set out. The Samaritans had changed its current, and He goes on, consciously despised and rejected of men, who had now in full deliberation hid their faces from, and shut their doors upon, Him. And if, beloved, it is to the praise of grace in Paul, that he had learned how to be abased and how to abound, how to be full and how to be hungry, do we not see all this to perfection in our blessed Master? He knew how one moment to act in the perfect sense of His fullness of glory, and the next to become the despised Son of Man. He takes the place which the scornful villagers of Samaria give Him, without an effort or a murmur. Perfect Master, as well as gracious Deliverer!

And in this place of rejection we see certain ones brought into intercourse with Him, that we through them may have some good lessons read to our souls. Two of them are introduced in Matthew 8, but not in the same moral connection as here.

The Lord speaks on each case in the full sense of His present place of rejection in the earth. The whole bearing of the instruction proceeds from that. It is the Lord’s rejection that has given His saints a new place, new duties, and new attachments; and these are here brought out for our contemplation, that we may count the cost of being His. Nothing brings the saints into these new things but the total rejection of their Lord by the world; but let the Lord be apprehended in His rejection, and then these things will be entered into by the soul at once. No “looking back,” no knowing of man “after the flesh,” by those who have gone forth to the Son of God without the camp; and it is only when we, in spirit, stand there with Him, that we understand Him rightly.

These holy and solemn lessons are read to our souls by our divine Teacher from His present place—“despised and rejected of men.” He would still teach us, even through His own sorrows, that we might be kept in company with Himself and His thoughts, as we pass on from scene to scene across this evil world. (In answering the third of these persons, our Lord seems to refer to the call of Elisha, to which the recent mention of Elijah by His disciples may naturally have turned His mind. His little analogy and instruction taken from a plowman, seems to have been suggested by Elisha’s history. (See 1 Kings 19:21.)

Luke 10

This chapter gives us in order the mission of the Seventy. But it is only here that we get this; for the Lord, as I have already observed, in this Gospel looks out to man beyond the Jewish boundary; and thus we are given to see a ministry more extended in its character than that which properly suited itself to Jewish arrangements. It intimated a departure from strict primitive order in Israel, as did a similar appointment of seventy elders in the days of Moses (Num. 11). But this is all according to Luke.

This mission is sent forth with a message of peace from God to every city and every house; but, withal, no man was to be saluted by the way. This has great value in it. Jesus proposes, beloved, to settle not the mere intercourses of men in their social order, but the connection between God and sinners. That is the great circumstance, and which the Lord must first provide for. So with our apostle afterwards. With Paul it mattered little whether the saints were bond or free; for if bond, they were still the Lord’s freemen, if free, they were still the Lord’s servants. Their relation to the Lord was the great thing (1 Cor. 7); as here, we see it was so in the judgment of the Son of God. There was to be no saluting of any man, while there was to be the publishing of peace to every city and every house. It was not the courtesies of human life the Lord’s messengers were to bear on their lips, but a happy, holy, and weighty message from God to sinners.

This was the mind of the blessed Lord on now sending out His messengers; and on their return with a report of their labors, He anticipates the fall of Satan. A little sample of power in the hands of the Seventy hints this result to Him. But, after expressing it, He turns to check in His disciples the looking chiefly at power, telling them there was something for them richer than that, even a name in heaven, a memorial with a Father there; and however excellent authority over devils might be, or power in the earth, yet that memorial was happier still. It is not that He undervalues power, or withdraws it from them. Nay, He rather rejoices in it, and confirms it in their hands, saying, “I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions.” But the home in heaven of the children is to be still more precious than the power on earth of the heirs of God.

And it has interested me much to observe, that it is just here (and in the corresponding place in Matt. 11), that the mind of the Lord in those Gospels approaches the most nearly to what it afterwards is in John. In John the Lord is in connection with the Father and the heavenly family, and it is just in this place of our Gospel that He looks out to those objects beyond all that was then surrounding Him in the apostate cities of Israel. It is as though our evangelist had just laid hold on the skirts of John; or rather, as though this mantle of our prophet, that energy of the Spirit which clothes him here, were taken up by that other prophet to do by it greater wonders, and bring out richer revelations still. The Father, the Son, the headship of all things in Himself, and the family who have their names written in heaven (Heb. 12:23), these are the objects which are here present to the thoughts of the Lord, as He looks onward to what none saw but Himself, through the unbelief of the Jewish cities, and this little sample of power in the hands of the Seventy. And, in spirit, He rejoices in all this, and takes afresh His complacency in the person and the purpose of the Father, Lord of heaven and earth, and also in His own place in the blessed mystery; turning, too, in all personal intimacy towards His disciples, as meaning to identify them with this blessedness which passes before His mind, and which prophets and kings of old had not attained.

We have here, however, a painful instance of the way in which the Lord was liable to be intruded on, in this lowthoughted world. He was at this moment, as we have seen, happy in thoughts of heavenly things, when a lawyer proposes an inquiry which comes from other sources and springs altogether. But He bows His head to the intrusion, and comes down to man's level. And in many other places, as here, we may notice the ease and patience with which He ever turned Himself towards man. I have already noticed the way in which He occasionally comes forth in divine glory at the bidding of faith (Luke 7); but His ease as a Teacher or a Healer coming forth at the call of man's ignorance or need, is equally lovely in its place. Nothing was too glorious in God for Jesus to assume, when faith unveiled Him; and nothing too little in man for Him to wait on, when necessity or ignorance appealed to Him. And in all this He was never in haste, as though He felt He was meeting a difficulty, but always turns in the graceful as well as gracious ease of conscious power, telling the occasion, let it be what it may, that He was equal to it.

But this is only by the way, if perhaps the Spirit would give us some delight in marking the ways of Jesus.

This inquiry of the lawyer leads the Lord to the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is peculiar to our evangelist. The purpose of it was to show this lawyer who his neighbor was: but in the usual way of the Lord, this instruction is conveyed in a body of larger doctrine; so that we get not only an answer to the inquiry, but other principles of truth. I see the same in the character of the apostles' teaching afterwards. And this is always the way of power, and the way of God. God, in His dispensations, has done this. He does not merely restore what we had lost, but He brings in other glories and blessings which also carry with them the full restoration. And God, in His instructions, has done this. The Spirit of revelation not only answers the anxiety of an inquirer, but conveys that answer through truths and principles which unfold wider thoughts still. As here; the law of neighborly love is taught and illustrated by a beauteous exhibition of the grace of the gospel of the Son of God, brought in upon the complete inadequacy of everything else to answer the need of sinners.

The case which the Lord suggests in this parable was a defiling of the land; and all that the law could do in it, was to find out the wrong-doer, and exact eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. Nor could the ministers of the altar under the law provide for the case. They had their service elsewhere. But a stranger, in the liberty of his own love, may attend to it if he please. And so with us sinners. God must come forth in the activities of His own love to meet our sad condition, for it lies beyond all other help. The services of a temple will not do for those who have no cleanness fit for a temple. Man is not there by nature; his heart is no sanctuary for God; but he lies in an unclean place, defiled in his blood; and what he wants is to be sought out and brought home. Man has been made the prey of a strong and cruel enemy, and it is that love which will go, and, at a great cost, bind him up, that he needs. And such a one has met him in the person of the Son of God in the gospel. Under the law, God was in the holy place, and the unclean must be removed, and the priest and the Levite attend that sanctuary. But in the gospel, God is in the unclean place, seeking the ruined ones; Jesus is going about doing good, the Stranger from heaven has come where man lay in his blood, and has looked on him and had compassion, has gone and had to do with all that pollution, untouched by it, washed the wounded sinner from his blood, and anointed him with oil (Ezek. 16). All this He has done, and changed places with the wounded sinner also. For, though rich, He became poor, that we, through His poverty, might be made rich—though without sin, He was made sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him—as the Good Samaritan changes places with the wounded traveler, getting down from his own beast and setting him on it. And He has done more than this; for He has told us that He has His eye upon us forever, that whether present or absent He thinks of us; as the stranger charges the host to take care of the poor, helpless man, and that when he comes that way again, as surely he will, he will repay him.

All this love, this costly and needed love, we have in the Son of God, the Stranger from heaven, the True Good Samaritan. He kept the law of love to His neighbor, but only He; and we must go to learn the way from Him, do "likewise," kindle our heart at His heart, if in any way we hope to answer that end of the law. This lawyer was making his boast in the law, but he had evidently reduced and qualified it, as every one must, who seeks, like him, to be justified by it. "Who is my neighbor?" said he; little judging that he was about to hear such a tale of love to one's neighbor as was coming forth. The law was too high, too noble for this man's thoughts. And so is it for us all. We see nothing worthy of that word, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart;...and thy neighbor as thyself," until we trace the well-spent life of Jesus. The lawyer would have stood on the law, and refused Jesus; but he has to learn, if his ears could hear it, that Jesus alone upheld the law, or gave it efficacy on the minds and consciences of others.

It is our salvation to know Jesus as the Stranger that met us in our wounds with His oil and wine. Luke alone gives us this parable, but this is quite according to the largeness of the spirit of grace which fills his Gospel throughout.

The little scene which then closes this chapter is also peculiar to Luke, serving his general purpose of instructing us in great principles of truth. The two sisters here introduced were differently minded and being brought to the trial of the mind of Christ, we get the judgment of God on matters of much value to us.

The house which we now enter was Martha's. The Spirit of God tells us this, as being characteristic of Martha; and into her house, with all readiness of heart, she receives the Lord, and prepares for Him the very best provision it had. His labors and fatigue called for this. Martha well knew that His ways abroad were the ways of the Good Samaritan, who would go on foot that others might ride, and she loves Him too well not to observe and provide for His weariness. But Mary had no house for Him. She was, in spirit, a stranger like Himself; but she opens a sanctuary for Him, and seats Him there, the Lord of her humble temple. She takes her place at His feet, and hears His words. She knows, as well as Martha, that He was wearied, but she knows also that there was a fullness in Him that could afford to be more wearied still. Her ear and her heart, therefore, still use Him, instead of her hand or her foot ministering to Him. And in these things lay the difference between the sisters—Martha's eye saw His weariness, and would give to Him; Mary's faith apprehended His fullness underneath His weariness, and would draw from Him.

This brings out the mind of the Son of God. The Lord accepts the care of Martha, as long as it is simple care and diligence about His present need; but, the moment she brings her mind into competition with Mary's, she learns His judgment, and is taught to know that Mary, by her faith, was refreshing Him with a sweeter feast than all her care and the provision of her house could possibly have supplied. Mary's faith gave Jesus a sense of His own divine glory. It told Him, that Though He was the wearied One, He could still feed and refresh her. She was at His feet, hearing His words. There was no temple there, or light of the sun (Rev. 22:22-23), but the Son of God was there, and He was everything to her. This was the honor He prized; and blessedly, indeed, was she in His secret. When He was thirsty and tired at Jacob's well, He forgot it all in giving out other waters, which no pitcher could have held, or well beside His own supplied; and here, Mary brings her soul to the same well, knowing that, in spite of all His weariness, it was as full as ever for her use.

And oh dear brethren, what principles are here disclosed to us! Our God is asserting for Himself the place of supreme power and supreme goodness, and He will have us debtors to Him. Our sense of His fullness is more precious to Him than all the service we can render Him. Entitled, as He is, to more than all creation could give Him, yet above all things does He desire that we should use His love, and draw from His treasures. The honor which our confidence puts upon Him is His highest honor; for it is the divine glory to be still giving, still blessing, still pouring forth from unexhausted fullness. Under the law He had to receive from us, but in the gospel He is giving to us; and the words of the Lord Jesus are these—"It is more blessed to give than to receive." And this place He will fill forever; for, "without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better." Praise shall, it is true, arise to Him from everything that has breath; but comes from Himself, and from the seat of His glory, shall go the constant flow of blessing the light to cheer, the waters to refresh, and the leaves of the tree to heal; and our God shall have His own joy, and display His own glory, in being a Giver forever.

Luke 11:1-13

It is the Lord's way in this Gospel, as I have already noticed, to bring His mind into contact with all the exercises of the hearts and consciences of men, that we may get the judgment of God (for that He ever carried in Him) on ourselves. These verses illustrate this. And the subject is prayer; one of deep interest to our souls. May the Lord guide the counsels of our hearts upon it!

The law, generally, did not require prayer, for the law was testing man, and calling on him to use his strength, if he had any; while prayer, on the other hand, comes forth on the sense of our weakness and dependence. I remember, however, two forms of prayer, provided by the law; but one is on the ground of innocency, the other on that of obedience; and thus both were suited to the dispensation with which they were associated (Deut. 21,26). John's ministry advanced beyond the law, convicting flesh of being but grass; and as we learn here, that he had taught his disciples to pray, we cannot doubt but that, like the law, he provided an utterance for their hearts, suited to the standing up to which his ministry was leading them. So in the same wisdom here with the Lord. He provides a prayer for them suited to the condition of faith and hope to which He had conducted them. And all this is perfect, because seasonable, because suited to them who had just said, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

But it would not have been thus perfect or seasonable had it been an utterance altogether according to the increased light into which the Church has been since brought. The Lord had not then entered, as the High Priest of our profession, into His heavenly sanctuary, nor was the Holy Spirit then given. His own name, therefore, is not pleaded here; as the Lord Himself says after this, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name." But shortly after saying that, He adds, "At that day ye shall ask in My name"—thus plainly telling us that there would be an advance in the character of the worship of the saints. And so indeed we find it. The prayers which the apostles, through the Spirit, make for the saints, entertain higher thoughts and deeper desires than what this prayer (perfect, doubtless, in its place) of our Lord expresses. (See Eph. 1, 3; Col. 1; and so forth.)

And, from all this, I do indeed judge, that we may easily admit the perfectness, because of the seasonableness of this holy form of prayer, and discern spiritually that the Lord was not providing it as the utterance of the Church. I do not at all say that the soul may not still use it, and find its desire at times expressed by it. But I believe the soul, fully aware of its new place under the Holy Spirit with Jesus ascended on high, is doing no despite to the Lord's holy furniture of His own sanctuary, if it do not use it. He is the Lord of the temple, and it is surely our joy to own Him thus; but He has now given the Holy Spirit to be the living power there, and He fills it with true and spiritual worship, with groanings which cannot be uttered, with supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, with the spirit of adoption which ever cries, "Abba, Father." For the same Lord of the temple has now ordained it thus, and it is obedience to walk onward with Him. What once constituted the beauty of His house are now "beggarly elements," because the Lord has gone onward, leaving Jerusalem and its worship behind; and it does not become us to look back on the goodly stones with admiration, if Jesus has gone forth to the Mount of Olives.

But these things, beloved, I rather suggest in connection with this scripture. He Himself further shows to us here, in the parable of the friend asking for the loaves at midnight, the value or success of prayer; and then, in His contrast between the human and heavenly Father, the warrant or securities of prayer. And these securities are twofold—one drawn from the love of the relationship, the other from the positive goodness of God Himself, that we may have strong assurance of heart, when we seek the Lord and His blessing.

I cannot, however, pass on from this without asking, Does not the little expression "from within" carry much moral value with it? I think it does. It seems to tell us that being "within" has a necessary tendency to indispose us to enter into those sympathies into which we should at all times allow ourselves to be called. Moses, it is true, though in the midst of Egypt, went out to look on the burdens of his brethren; and Nehemiah, though in the Persian palace, wept over the desolations of the city of his father's sepulchres. They were both "within," but faith thrust them out. Their circumstances made this trial of faith the severer, and its victory more excellent and unusual. For it is dangerous to get much or far "within," lest the soul, surveying its condition, should say, "My children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee"—then the need of a brother "without" will scarcely be heard, the burdens of Israel or the desolations of Zion will scarcely be looked at or inquired after. (As a distinctive mark of this Gospel I would observe that, in the corresponding place in Matthew, the Lord says that the Father will give "good things" to them that ask Him, but here it is the "Holy Spirit." And again, in contrast with John, the Lord here says that the Holy Spirit will be given on our asking, but there on His asking (John 14:16). But this distinction is also very characteristic of the two Gospels; for here, the Lord is teaching His disciples, training them, and calling their hearts and consciences, as I have said, into exercise; but in John, He is presenting Himself, and revealing Himself; and, therefore, in that Gospel, He speaks of His place and ministry in the great matter of the grant of the Holy Spirit to the Church.

Luke 11:14-54

These verses give us other scenes, still illustrating, according to the way of our evangelist, matter of value to us.

The Lord listens to two challenges from His enemies; for, in this world of ours, reproach was ever breaking His heart. But in the holy power of a great Teacher, as He was, He returns both these challenges on the head, or rather on the conscience, of His accusers. One said that He was allied to Satan in what He was doing; another, that at any rate He had not sufficiently proved that He was allied to God in it: "He casts out devils by Beelzebub," said the one; "Show us a sign from heaven," said the other. The Lord exposes such thoughts, and then lays open to them their condition, that they might learn that it was not in Him, but in themselves, this evil and this obscurity were to be found; for that He was the "Finger of God," and the "Candle set on the candlestick."

The Lord's reasoning here is beautifully simple and powerful. But I may observe, contrasting verse 26 with Matthew 12:45, that He does not here, as there, expressly apply the lesson of "the unclean spirit" to the state of Israel. And this difference is quite in keeping with the stricter Jewish nature of Matthew's Gospel. So, His sentence upon the state of that generation is here delivered in the house, in one of the social hours of the Son of Man; in Matthew a like sentence is pronounced from the seat of judgment in the authority of the Son of Man (Matt. 23); a difference which vividly illustrates the style of the two Gospels.

The Lord, in His answer to the challenges of His enemies, leads to these thoughts. In the progress, however, of this scene, we have to notice an interruption. What He was saying seems to have borne, with moral power, on the heart of one who was listening; so that, "as He spake," she lifted up her voice, and said, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked." This was a testimony to the power of the words of our divine Teacher, which is His glory in this Gospel. And a like testimony is given to Him in the next stage of this same scene, for again, "as He spake," a Pharisee who was present "besought Him to dine with him." That man had evidently been moved by the power of His words, but not perhaps with the same affection as the poor woman, and he invites Him to his house. And so again, when He enters the house, He continues to act as the Great Teacher still, rebuking the religious pride and dark hypocrisy which He found there, until a lawyer, who was present, feeling the righteous rebukes, interrupts Him in like manner, and says to Him, "Master, thus saying Thou reproachest us also." But the light abides faithful to its work, and goes on, still making manifest the darkness that was surrounding it, until the enmity of that darkness is fully raised, and scribes and Pharisees together begin so to urge Him, that He has to withdraw the light, the power of which had become intolerable.

Luke 12

It is, however, to pursue His way as a Teacher, though in other places, that the Lord thus retires from among the scribes, the lawyers, and the Pharisees. He enters the multitude, and at once resumes His teaching, taking for His subject what was suggested to Him in the house of the Pharisee-hypocrisy, and the persecution which a righteous remnant had to count upon.

Thus we have the Light here, the Great Teacher, as in the preceding chapter, doing His holy work. But I observe, that though much of the matter of this chapter is found in Matthew, it is given to us in a different manner. There it is simply as a discourse of the Lord, but here it comes forth as reply to others. But this distinction is still in the character of this Gospel; because in it, as I have already noticed, the Lord is dealing with man, and drawing forth his thoughts and conscience and affections into exercise, that they may be corrected, and formed by the mind of Christ according to God. The Lord's teaching, therefore, is of ten, as in this chapter, in the way of answer to the inquiries and thoughts of others. And, as I observed at the close of the preceding chapter, that much which is delivered in Matthew, as from a judgment-seat, comes forth in Luke at a supper table, so I may say here, that that which had been as a sermon from an elevated place or pulpit in Matthew 5-7, comes forth here as words spoken in the heart of a multitude that were thronging about Him. There was more of the ease and relaxation of social life here.

And here again, as in the previous chapter, we have a testimony to the power of His words, for "one of the company," judging, as it seems, from the current of the Lord's discourse, that He was set against oppression, and the assumptions of the rich, seeks Him to entertain his charge against a wrongful and injurious brother of his. But the Lord has only to act as the light that rebukes darkness wherever it finds it, and He now among the multitude addresses a word against covetousness, as just before, among the rulers, He had been addressing another word against religious pride and hypocrisy.

On such a subject we might well pause for a little. And specially here, because, after this interruption, it seems to lead our Lord's thoughts to nearly the end of His present speaking.

The love of having, of acquiring and possessing, which is covetousness is, as we know, one of the great principles which form the course of this evil world: "the lust of the eyes," as John calls it. The great contradiction of it, as of every other principle that animates "the old man," was expressed in the life as well as in the teaching of Jesus. In Him to perfection we see that description of the apostle made good—in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of His joy and His deep poverty abounded unto the riches of His liberality. His poverty was deep. He had not where to lay His head. And when He wanted a penny, in order to say a word on the image and superscription which it bore, He had to ask to be shown one. And surely His liberality was rich. He had a big purse, so to speak, but He never opened it except for others. He had the resources of all creation to draw upon. He could command bread for thousands out of a few loaves, and gather fragments by basketfuls afterwards. He could turn water into wine. He could summon a piece of money up from the sea, and, as the Lord of the earth, claim the beast of a stranger. This was surely a large purse. But He did not open it for His own use. He would rather go afoot, and be thirsty, and a hungered. And even out of His own slender store—the few loaves and fishes which He had for Himself and His disciples, He would still spare something for others (John 13:29).

Where are riches of liberality like this? What was all this in the constant daily life of Jesus, but the contradiction of the covetous course of the world? Men could not praise Him because He did well to Himself (Psa. 49). With what decision of heart was He always forgetting Himself, and with what holy, conscious authority might He resist the motion of that one who, on the occasion of this chapter, covetously desired a share of the inheritance. He deals with the interruption thus occasioned as if a subject had been suggested to Him which was too weighty to be quickly laid down. He goes on with it, in the hearing of His disciples, until He shows them how this principle, this desire of having, this concern to acquire and to possess, must keep us unready for His coming—a subject which He then deeply and beautifully opens to our hearts and consciences. He aims to bring it morally very near to us showing that there are three different ways in which the soul is to entertain that object, or have communion with the great fact of the Lord's second advent—(the Lord's coming is the saint's proper hope; His coming as a thief is to the world)—as the coming of a thief in the night to surprise the house; of a lord to reward his faithful stewards; and of a loved master, to make his watchful servants happy by his restored presence.

Matthew suggests the same in Matthew 24-25; only with this difference, that the figure of watching, desirous servants, is changed for that of virgins waiting for the bridegroom. But the moral is the same. And the variety of these figures has a great lesson for us; because it tells us, that Jesus seeks to range far and wide over our hearts. Presenting His return to our hearts under such different forms—a thief in the night, a master, and a bridegroom—He claims to be the Object, the Supreme Object, of the different passions of our souls. Fear, hope, and joy respectively would rise in the breast of the good man of the house, the stewards, and the watchful servants or virgins, in commanding power. The fear of the thief, the hope of sharing the rewards, or the joy of the bridegroom's presence, would be supreme in the heart for the time.

And this is happy, though it may be serious. It is happy to know that our Lord claims our affections. He knows that He has a right to be our Supreme Object. And the passion that does not render Him its highest exercise is not a worshipping passion.

This is holy and serious. For we may ask, Is it so with us? Is the seat of our affections a place of worship? Is Jesus there in the chief room? “He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me,” He says; and again, and that too in this very chapter, “Be not afraid of them that kill the body….But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear; Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell.” The watchfulness of fear, and the watchfulness of desire are both called forth. Every motion in the heart is only fully right, when it is making confession to the lordship or supremacy of Jesus.

The interruption given to our Lord led Him this way. In this manner the light in Him broke forth. For this world was but the place of man’s darkness; the light of heaven was, therefore, in all places where it entered, a reproving light (Eph. 5:13). The rich and the poor, the rulers and the multitudes, were alike exposed by it. As Jeremiah, in his day, visited “the poor,” and found that they knew not the way of the Lord, and “the great ones,” and found that they had altogether broken the bonds (Jer. 5:1-5). And so here with Jeremiah’s Lord. Jesus had been in the midst of the accomplished scribes and Pharisees, and among the multitude, but all was out of order.

The most solemn impressions were left on His mind (vss. 49-59). He would have healed men. He came preaching peace, and had sent forth the Twelve and the Seventy, with peace to every city and house. But the peace had to return to Him and them. Division now, and judgment by fire by-and-by, were the portion of the earth. There was both intelligence and contention about the present things, but the testimony of God was not discerned, and man was satisfied with himself.

Luke 13

The teaching of the previous chapter was all very important to our souls; and now, at the opening of this, we are in the same season as we read, and so I believe upon the same truth also. The man who had accused his brother to the Lord learned from the Lord that he himself was on the way, with another accuser, to another Judge; for those words, in verses 58-59, were, as I understand them, addressed to him. So here, some tell our Lord of the special sufferings of certain Galileans, as though they must have been sinners above others (John 9:2), and thus they were, in like manner, bringing up their brethren for judgment. But the Lord would have them also know that they were in the same condemnation, and, if they repented not, would all likewise perish. (It has been observed by others that this occurrence may have taken place in connection with the faction of Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37), in which there were Galileans who refused Caesar’s authority, and who would, therefore, of course, provoke Pilate. But the Galileans were Herod’s subjects (Luke 3:1). It has been, therefore, supposed also, that this interference of Pilate occasioned the quarrel between him and Herod, of which we read in chapter 23:12. Josephus mentions Pilate’s killing some Samaritans on their way to their own temple on Mount Gerizim.)

With the same thoughts of the sin of Israel upon His mind, the whole nation being ripe for the judgment of a mightier slaughter than that of the Galileans, the Lord indites the parable of the barren fig-tree.

This fig-tree was planted in a vineyard, as Israel was set in God’s vineyard, in the midst of ordinances and privileges, watered and tended with all diligence and care; but without fruit. Israel had no root in itself to yield God anything; and the ministry of Jesus, the patient Dresser of this vineyard, had now nearly proved this. By that ministry the goodness of God had been leading them to repentance (Rom. 2); it had been the digging about and dunging of this barren tree, but, with all this there was no fruit. And we then see, in the next little scene, that there was no sense in Israel of their real state. The sick were there, and thus the need of a physician; but they seem unconscious of it. A daughter of Abraham is found to be in disease, but the rulers of Abraham’s house reject with pride the attendance of the Good Physician.

In all this way, the corrupted state of the nation passes before the mind of the Lord, and He seems to utter thoughts according to all this, reflecting on the great tree where the unclean had found their rest, and on the whole lump which had now felt the leaven. And in this mind He enters on His journey. The proved sin and the coming judgment of Israel being before Him, He pursues His way to the city.

But here let me notice that, in John, the Lord is seen frequently at Jerusalem, for Jerusalem had no higher character, in the esteem of the Stranger from heaven, than any other spot on the earth. But in the other Gospels the Lord is not seen to enter that city, which was the ordained seat of His government as Son of David, until He enters it, when His ministry was closing, in royal state, offering the kingdom to the daughter of Zion, and when He is fully and formally rejected by her. In this Gospel by Luke His gradual approach to the city for this purpose is more distinctly traced than in either Matthew or Mark. (See Luke 9:51; Luke 13:22,33; Luke 17:11; Luke 18:31; Luke 19:1,11,28). He seems to linger, as it were, from stage to stage, not willing to hasten the doom of the nation, because what was to happen to Him there was to fill up their sin, and leave them for judgment. He was waiting to be gracious, as now in this age, the long-suffering of God in not sending Jesus is salvation, not willing that any should perish. And this reserve in His movement towards the city reminds me of the departure from it of the glory in Ezekiel. (See Ezek. 1-11). The glory there lingers from stage to stage, as loath to depart, though the pollution in the city would not allow it to stay. And so here; the Lord lingers, in the same way, delaying the hour of Jerusalem’s judgment, journeying still towards it throughout the Gospel, but not reaching it until His ministry was closing.

It is with strong and clear thoughts upon His heart that He makes these approaches to the city, and eyes it in the distance. In Luke 9:51, as I have observed already, He moved onward as though His journey were conducting Him to glory. In Luke 18:31, He has the city before Him as the place of His suffering. But here, in Luke 13:22, He is looking toward it as though His presence there was to close “the day of salvation” to Israel, and bring forth the judgment of God. It was this thought that was now on His mind. All the previous scenes of this chapter, the report of the Galileans, the parable of the fig-tree, and the hypocrisy of the rulers in Abraham’s house, with the disease of Abraham’s daughter, all led Him to these thoughts as He is now approaching the city. And it may be that this mind is so expressed in His whole manner that one who was observing Him, as somewhat understanding His thoughts, says, “Lord, are there few that be saved?” A moment, however, of interest to our souls this was, and I would for a little pause over it.

It suggests to us this: that the Lord had a method—perfect, I need not say, like everything else with Him—in answering questions. He never aims at merely conveying information, as we speak, but seeks to affect the heart or the conscience. It is not so much the inquiry, but the inquirer, that He deals with. Perhaps every case would show this; but I would instance it shortly. Thus: when asked as to the time when His word against the temple should be accomplished, He does not satisfy that, but leads the disciples’ thoughts into large and serious matters, sealing His instructions on their souls by the weighty parables of the ten virgins and the talents (Matt. 24-25). In answer to John, “Art Thou He

that should come, or do we look for another?" He does not say, "I am He, and ye need not look for another," but shows John's disciples those objects which were fitted to carry the answer home to them in real, living power (Matt. 11). And so here: "Lord, are there few that be saved?" was not answered formally, but morally, or in such a way as was suited to the man himself, giving him matter for serious self-inquiry and self-application.

A method, we may surely say, that bespeaks His wisdom and His goodness, and that He was indeed dealing with man; not displaying His own resources of knowledge, but, in good earnest, seeking and saving the lost. Man's method is a poor thing. For look at Jesus in contrast with the learned men, or (as Paul speaks), "the princes of this world." When they were asked where Christ should be born, they answered formally—truly, it is true, but formally—not seeking to stir the conscience of the king on the occasion thus offered them. Matthew 2. But when Jesus was asked of Whom He was born—"Where is Thy Father?"—His answer comes not merely to their ears, but with all serious and solemn power to their consciences (John 8).

He needs not our commendation, beloved; but it should be happy to any of us to ponder His perfections, and admire His beauty. And I am sure that these reflections are of value nowadays. For the present is a time when many are running to and fro, and knowledge is increasing. And this should be a caution to our souls; for the saint has always to watch against what is called the spirit of the times. Paul, when he prays for the saints, that they may grow in knowledge, first desires that they might have the spiritual understanding (Eph. 1:17-18; Col. 1:9). For the mere intellect is not valued. Rather let us lay our inquiries aside, than follow them in the acuteness of human ability. And is it, beloved, out of season to recur to the thought of one who lived to Christ in days before ours—that the desire to know much even in spiritual things may be the witness that God Himself is not known in reality? To know Himself is life eternal. And as another of our own day has most profitably observed—"The natural man often receives truth more quickly than the saint, because the saint has to learn it in his conscience, to have that exercised before God by what he is learning." Most needful is this admonition. We may hasten to be wise and full of knowledge in this busy age, and the soul be injured, deeply injured, all the while. But this only by the way.

In this reply of the Lord to the question now put to Him I apprehend that the "striving" and the "seeking" are not merely different measures of intensity in the same action, but morally different actions. The "seeking" comes upon the alarm of the Master's rising, and it is fear that awakens it; the "striving" is an action of the heart and conscience before God, before the Master of the house had risen up; an action, therefore, not resulting simply from the fear of being left on the outside. And how often is this description of "seeking" exhibited among ourselves. Sudden alarm will call forth religious affections; but they live only while the danger passes. As saith the Lord by the prophet, "O inhabitant of Lebanon, that makest thy nest in the cedars, how gracious shalt thou be when pangs come upon thee, the pain as of a woman in travail...Yet...I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life" (Jer. 22).

This passage in our chapter is, thus, one of very important admonition to all. But as the Lord pursues His way, it is still not of Himself, either in His suffering or glory, that He is thinking, but of Jerusalem, and her sin and her judgment. Some tell Him of Herod, and his purposes against Him; but the Lord simply tells them that Herod and all his purposes could not prevail against Him; for that, unimpeded by him and everything else, He must walk on until He reached Jerusalem; which, as eminent in privilege under God, was eminent in wickedness against Him also; and had to fill up the measure of her guilt, by slaying the last and chiefest of the prophets. Herod's rage was not, therefore, to be considered, for Jesus must walk through his jurisdiction. And thus it is, that Jerusalem is the object which the blessed Lord still has on His mind, as intimated in verse 22. And to all this, with which His soul had in this way been laboring, He gives expression, saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." Jerusalem "would not." The care of the hen was refused, but the fox was already within; and, therefore, there is to be nothing but present scattering instead of gathering. Herod and Rome were boasted in, and God and His Christ refused. "Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it." And the Son of God has but to leave His mountain for the present in their possession, until, in the spirit of repentance and faith, the people should welcome Him back, and say, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

(This Herod was the fourth son of the Herod who, in Matthew 2, is called "Herod the king." From Luke 3:1 we learn that Galilee was the scene of his government, as may also be drawn from this passage. Some have judged that he desired to get the Lord out of his dominions, because the Lord had a great and growing interest there, and because he hated Him for His righteousness and His testimony. Not daring, however, to put Him to death, because of the people, he seeks to drive Him out, or frighten Him away. He would have Him, perhaps, act the part of a fearful one, and thus act unworthily of Himself; as Nehemiah's enemies sought to ensnare that dear and simple man in his day. See Nehemiah 6:10-14.)

Luke 14-16

In these chapters we have the Lord's characteristic way in this Gospel very strongly marked. Throughout them He is the teacher, the social Son of Man addressing Himself to all around Him, whether in the power of One Who was convicting the conscience or in the grace of One Who could bind up the heart.

The contents of these chapters are very generally peculiar to this Gospel. Several parables are delivered which we find nowhere else. And I may here observe that there are more parables in Luke than in any of the other evangelists; and this still shows the special mind and action of the Lord in this Gospel.

As we pass along the pages of the evangelic narrative, or along the ways of the Lord Jesus Christ in this world, what a character do we see gradually unfolded. And what a simple piece of truth-telling are we listening to! In every page (to use the language of another) we are struck with a candor, a simplicity, and a naturalness not to be found in the same degree in any other book; and as to its great Subject, Jesus, who, save by admitting their inspiration, can explain the fact that a few fishermen should have conceived the idea of a character of such perfection as no author, even in the most enlightened age or country, ever equalled? "The gospel bears an imprint of truth so great, so striking, so inimitable, that its inventor would have been more wonderful than its Hero is." And, as has been often said, there is no repose for reason but in faith; for the existence of the Bible cannot be accounted for without bringing God in.

There is no moment or passage in His history at which we might not have paused to listen to all this. But I observe it here, as we enter on a portion of our Gospel, in which the blessed Jesus has to do with men in great variety of character; and while the evangelist is bearing Him along the checkered scene, the naturalness of the story, and the perfection of Him Who is the great Subject of it, may be easily noticed by us

all.

The first scene is laid in a Pharisee's house, where, as His custom was, He had come, upon invitation, to dine. The principals of the company, as we may judge them to be, watch Him to entangle Him just as He enters the house. He shortly answers their thoughts, making them their own judges and witnesses.

On His being free, if I may so say, to look round Him, after He had entered, the object that He first looks at is, the guests taking their seats at the table.

He is offended. The old mind of Adam, and not the mind according to God, formed this circumstance, simple as it was. They chose the chief rooms. This was Adam. This was according to that desire to be something, which, of old, grafted itself on the heart of man. Jesus could not but be offended. In Him, from the beginning hitherto, and down to the death of the cross, there had been, and was to be, the full contradiction of this. Adam was nothing—a creature of the dust—and he sought to be everything. Jesus was everything, but emptied Himself of all. He became a Man, and, in that form, humbled Himself in every way. In the person He assumed, or the station in life that He filled—in the testimony which He bore to Himself, or the cloud with which He veiled His glory—in all this He ever took the lowest room. But here, in the Pharisee's house, He finds Himself in the midst of those who were choosing the chiefest. How could He but be offended? Such guests were not to His mind.

Then the host who bids them becomes His object. But there was no relief for Him there. Selfishness in another form shows itself to Him. The host's board was not such a one as He had been spreading in this world, since He came into it. For He had been feeding multitudes who had nothing to give Him in return. The selfishness of the "old man" grieved Him now, as his pride had just before. The host is not after the mind of this perfect Witness of the mind of God, any more than the guests.

Then, after the guests are seated, and the feast proceeds, the conversation at table leads Jesus to other sorrows.

I believe it was a gracious motion that had come over the heart of one of the company, when he said, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." He was, I doubt not, attracted by the Lord. But this matters not. It directed the Lord's mind to sad thoughts on the whole scene which was at that moment under His eye. He saw a well-filled table. Guests in numbers were there—as many as had been invited. But the thought seems to arise in His mind—If God had spread this table, He would not have gathered His guests so easily. And this reflection gives occasion to the parable of the Marriage Supper.

It was a painful thought to Jesus—and so will it be to those who have His mind. There is relief for it surely in the knowledge of this, that "the foundation of God standeth sure"—and that the unbelief of man shall never touch the purposes of God. But to think that, when man spreads a table, guests will be found there, as many as are bidden; but that when the living God makes a feast, not one that is merely bidden eats of His supper! A mess of their own pottage is preferred. A piece of ground, a yoke of oxen, or a wife, will estrange the affections of the very best of us—and no one guest at His costly board would the Lord of life and glory find, if He Himself did not compel them and bring them in. Mere bidding would never do. It was tried, but it failed—and He who—was at the cost of spreading the table must be at the trouble of gathering the company. His oxen and His fatlings shall load the board, and His servants shall visit the lanes and alleys, the highways and hedges, to get some to eat of them.

Was ever a feast treated so? The present scene answers that, as the sorrowing heart of Jesus mused upon it.

Surely He came into the world to be thoroughly wearied, as one has said. How could He but be a Man of sorrows in a place fashioned and filled, throughout all its order, by the pride of life and the lust of the eyes? He did not wait for His darkest hours to make Him "acquainted with grief." The most promising moments, the social hours of human friendliness, brought their sorrow with them to the heart of this blessed Stranger. And this parable tells us so. (In Matthew, this parable stands in another connection, having more direct reference to what was Jewish. (See Matt. 22).)

We have not, however, followed our Lord through the whole journey yet. We have seen Him grieved and offended on entering the house, and while in the house; but we have now to watch Him on leaving it.

The multitude follow Him. But this will not do. This was done every day. Thousands waited on Him continually, thronging and pressing Him along the streets or highways. But that will not reach the heart of Christ (Luke 8:45). Neither does this action of the multitude; for it does not bespeak their conscious need of Him as a Saviour. It is rather their adoption of Him as a Teacher or a Pattern. And that, as the first thing, will not do. He turns to address this crowd with words of solemn warning. His soul is not at that ease in the midst of them, which speaks their full welcome to Him; for they had not come to Him in character. Nicodemus would have honored Him as a Rabbi, or a Scholar—the people at the lake of Galilee as a King—the multitude here as a Pattern or Forerunner; but He is not at home in such company—not fully at home. He is not grieved in the same measure, perhaps, that He had been in the house which He had just left, but there was no rest nor joy for His spirit here. He must go onward before He reachs His rest, as His words to the multitude tell us.

When we think of this for a moment or two, we may well say, we know not how sufficiently to bless God for it. Let us give to Him in what shape or way we please, it will not do; we must receive from Him. The Pharisee gives Him a feast inside the house, and the multitude give Him their respect and admiration outside; but He is either grieved, or, at the most, unsatisfied. He passes on through all this until "publicans and sinners" draw near to hear Him. They do not come to give Him anything, but to get something from Him (Luke 15:1). Then did He in spirit rejoice; His heart tasted the desired fruit of its journey, and was satisfied.

What can surpass this in consolation to us? These poor publicans, these tainted ones of the city, would have no business in the Pharisee's house; nor did they affect to follow the Lord with the multitude, for they are unworthy, and know that they are so. But they can go and touch the hem of His garment, or take their pitchers to the Fountain, and there "in shame and poverty sit down." And so they do; and so they are welcome to do. He is happier to give to them, than they are to receive. Jesus had now travelled far—far in the spirit, I mean. He had come to, and through, and from the house of the Pharisee, and along the road with admiring crowds; but it was wearisome to Him. He found no rest, until now that the sinner came to get from Him. For the joy that fills this chapter tells us that His weariness was now over. The fold that had received the lost sheep, the house that witnessed the recovered piece of money, and the home of the father that had entertained the returned prodigal, set off, as in figures, the Saviour's joy now in the midst of publicans and sinners.

This is beyond expression—wonderful to tell it; but this to Jesus was the house of God—this to Him was the gate of heaven.

He had been charged by the Pharisee with receiving sinners, as though His ministry did not secure righteousness, but gave liberty to evil. Of course He might have pleaded various answers to this. He might have defended His grace to sinners, on the ground of the necessity of the case, or on the ground of God's glory. But in this chapter, from beginning to end, in each of the lovely parables, He vindicates it simply on the ground of the joy that He, and the Father, and all heaven itself, were finding in it.

Only think of that, beloved! If the Lord God is asked a reason for His ways of salvation with you and me, He says that He takes delight in them—they make Him and His glorious habitation to rejoice. What assurance, what consolation, spring from that! Would his neighbors, think you, murmur at the shepherd's joy over his lost sheep now found by him; or the woman's friends grudge her pleasure, as she swept her piece of money into her lap? And so it is with God. It is His own joy in the salvation of sinners that Jesus proposes as His warrant or vindication. And why should man either murmur or disbelieve? May not the Lord prepare joy for Himself, as well as the shepherd? Who dare deny our hearts the assurance and consolation of this! Let us cherish the thought deeply in our souls that the gospel of our peace is a spring of joy to Him Who planned and accomplished it; that our God has done nothing less than this, laid the scene of His own happiness in our salvation, as these parables testify to us.

This chapter is, in this way, a gate of heaven to us, as it was to the wearied feet of Jesus. He had travelled, as we have seen, past Pharisees, guests, host, and crowds of attendants; and was now sitting with sinners who knew their need of Him, and came to get what they wanted. Heaven, in one sense, is but this spot stretched out—the habitation of saved sinners and of a rejoicing Saviour.

The Lord, as we shall now find as we still pass on with Him, has, however, others to converse with still. He has to meet disciples, after all this variety at which we have been looking. And accordingly, at the opening of Luke 16, He does meet them. He gives them a word to stir their diligence, and encourage their hopes. He tells them to aim high in their expectations, and to lay out their energies to sure and eternal profit. Being disciples, they are to be regarded as having already come back like prodigals, and their business now was to value the hopes which grace had set before them, and to "make to themselves friends" of every talent and opportunity, as knowing that their labor should not be in vain in the Lord.

A word in season to disciples was this, enforced on them in the parable of the Unjust Steward. For our great Teacher had chosen words—words seven times refined in the fire; and He rightly divides them among all. And this we may now still further see; for the Pharisees are to close these scenes, as they opened them.

The heavenly principles with which the Lord had just exhorted His disciples these men deride; for they were covetous. They were everything which the world could esteem—and this estimation they sought and served for; and, of course, they could not but deride the heavenly principles of the Son of God. But He exposes their moral state; and then, in a parable, the doom of that state. He convicts them of having been false to that very law in which they boasted; and also of having refused that word of the kingdom which the God of the law had sent forth to succeed it. Their whole moral condition might, thus, in a sentence or two, be exposed and rebuked. But this was nothing to them; they were served in the world; their principles fed them sumptuously, and clothed them in fine linen and purple; and in this they were satisfied, though upon this lay the judgment of God.

This was the closing solemn word, addressed to "the accomplished religionists" (as the Pharisees have been called) of that day. The mind of the Lord makes this its last disclosure on this great moral occasion. It had dealt with guests, and host, and multitudes, and disciples, and Pharisees. It had divided the word of truth among them. And if we prize the thoughts of God on all we see around us, we shall study such exercises of the mind of Christ as these. His candle, in this way, should shine on our head, and by His light we should walk through all the darkness which so thickly and variously surrounds us.

I know of nothing as a grand display of divine morals beyond this. The soul, in going through these chapters, should be lost in admiration. The style of the Lord here illustrates what another has said of Him—"He watched His opportunity of instructing; it was brought out on the suitable occasion. Hence the danger of systematizing, Christianity; for it was not so introduced. The law was an ordered system, but grace and truth were incapable of being exhibited at once (save in His person), but required to be unfolded gradually, as man's necessities discovered themselves." This is very just. And from this it is gathered, most justly also, "that it is of no small importance to notice attentively, not only the matter, but the manner, of the Lord's discourses; that which led to them, as well as the point to which they tend."

But there is another thing to be observed here, and it turns to us for searching and warning. Jesus judged righteous judgment. He was not to be flattered. He did not try either persons or circumstances in reference to Himself. That is where we so commonly fail in all our judgments. We see objects, whether persons or things, so much in our own light. How have these circumstances affected ourselves? How have these people treated us? These are the inquiries of the heart; and in the answer they get the judgment is too commonly formed. We are flattered into good thoughts of people, and slighted into hard ones. Jesus was not such a one. The Pharisee's compliment and good fare did not affect His judgment on the whole scene in his house. The friendliness of a social hour could not relax the rightness of His sense of things; as Peter's recent confession, on another occasion, did not hinder the rebuke that Peter's worldliness deserved. Jesus was not to be flattered. Like the God of Israel in old times, His ark may be boasted in, and brought into the battle with a shout; but He is not to be flattered by this. Israel shall fall for their unrighteousness (1 Sam. 4).

What a lesson for us! What reason have we to guard against the judgments of self-love! against the trying and weighing of things or persons in relation to ourselves! This firm, unswerving mind of Jesus, may be our encouragement, as well as our pattern, in this; and we may pray, that neither "this world's flattery nor spite" move us from having our thoughts as before the Lord all the day!

The sense, however, of God's way, as being so above ours, and of the perfections of Jesus as only serving to expose our many errors, must not be allowed to swallow us up with overmuch sorrow (2 Cor. 2:7). We are disposed often so to consider and mourn over experiences, as to get below the place where faith would put us. This, however, must not be. Faith must prevail. And faith, as well as conviction, has a separating power. Conviction of sin separates to the place of sorrow, as it did Nathanael to the shade of the fig-tree, and as it will the repentant Israel by-and-by, "every family apart, and their wives apart" (Zech. 12:14). But so faith. It concentrates the power of seeing and hearing upon its object, opening the ear of a prodigal to the music which the Father had commanded, but closing it to even the recollection of past follies, and to the murmurs of present, conscious coldness.

Precious faith! It deals with God. The prodigal was silent. He did not stay his father's hand, as though he was doing too much for him. That might have appeared modest and humble, but it would not have been so—for true humbleness forgets ourselves. His silence at the table was faith. And it had a rich feast before it. Among other things, it might have fed on the well-known truth, that the ascending affections are never equal to the descending. A child never loves a parent with the intensity with which a parent loves his child. Yes, and more than this—the parent is satisfied to have it so. A father is satisfied to know that his love will never get its "recompense in the same" from the bosom of the child.

These thoughts might have fed the heart of the prodigal, as he ate in silence of the fatted calf. And they should be our thoughts towards our heavenly Father. Not that He is indifferent to the state of our hearts towards Him. That would be neither His glory nor our joy. But He knows that His love will ever be the larger. He will ever be the One to "exceed" as David with Jonathan. For He is in the higher place; and that place will maintain its rights and attributes. And it is among the attributes of the descending affection (which comes out of the higher place), as I have said, to flow with the richer and more generous current; and all that faith has to do is to allow this, and to rejoice that it is so. Faith ascends to God, and makes that journey in silence. Not even the complaints and confessions of a righteous, self-judging spirit are to be heard. But nothing, except that "light that no man can approach unto," can transcend the elevation of that rest and dwelling-place up to which it bears the heart in triumph. "Lord, increase our faith!"

Luke 17:1-10

The reflection with which the Lord opens these verses appears to have been suggested to His mind by these scenes of Luke 14-16. All that had been passing under His eye and ear led Him to thoughts of offences; and such thoughts find their utterances here, in secret with His elect. He found hindrances to the display and settlement of His kingdom in the place where all should have been prepared for it; and He is led to pronounce woe on the offender.

Offences are those principles which are inconsistent. with the nature of His kingdom, and hinder its exhibition— "obstructions and oppositions given to faith and holiness." And in order, it may be, the more carefully to guard His disciples against offending, the Lord gives them two admonitions, according to which two essential virtues of His kingdom were to be preserved—its purity and its graciousness. If there were trespass, He requires rebuke; for this would maintain, His house in pure or holy order; if there were repentance, He commands forgiveness; for this would maintain His house in loving, gracious order.

But these demands which He makes on the hearts of His disciples they find to be quite beyond them, and lead them to know that they must needs get strength out of Another for them. Under this consciousness they say, "Increase our faith"—faith being that which takes us into the resources of One Who is greater than ourselves, and draws virtue out of that which has been divinely ordained to meet our necessity.

For, in addition to our previous meditations on faith, I might say that, considered as that by which a sinner is justified, faith is simply the believing of a testimony, that testimony being the gospel; our justification being "by faith, that it might be by grace." This intimates that work must be excluded. And this the fourth chapter of Romans discusses and teaches. But Scripture also speaks of faith as the principle which animates the life of a saint. This the eleventh chapter of Hebrews presents to us. And, in this character, it is a growing virtue or principle in the soul. It may be either weak or strong, great or little. As we read here, "Lord, increase our faith"; and as we elsewhere read, "O ye of little faith"; and again, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed"; and again, "Your faith groweth exceedingly."

In this sense Scripture considers it, as I before said, a growing principle in the soul. It is our entrance into the power of the testimony which is believed; "the substance [confidence] of things hoped for, the evidence [conviction] of things not seen." It is, we may say, the power of divine life in the soul, and may be in health and vigor there, or the contrary. It stands for the energy of the kingdom of God within us. Scripture mentions it as that which apprehends God, waits on Him, walks with Him. So that if faith is strong, those, and the like graces and actions, are fresh and lively. And being this, it should be with real, unfeigned humiliation we speak, when we confess that our faith is weak; for this, if made in spiritual intelligence, is a confession of how little our souls are alive to God.

Scripture, I need not say, abounds with notices of this great principle. It considers it in its source, its actings, its qualities, and its value with God, and the like. And the Lord here, in answer to the desire of His apostles for an increase of it, describes it to them in its two chief attributes—its sovereignty, so to speak, and its self-renunciation—being that which can command the sycamore-tree into the sea, but then will come back to God and say, that all is nothing. These are its necessary excellencies. It takes all blessing from God, but leaves all glory with God (Rom. 4).

Luke 17:11-19

These few verses form another distinct portion of our Gospel. The Lord is again looked at on His way to Jerusalem, passing through Samaria and Galilee; and in this scene— simple in its materials as it is—He takes a place before us which may well fill our souls with joy and praise—the place of the altar, God's ordained place of sacrifice and worship. This suggests a subject of deep interest to our souls, which I would follow for a little.

All knowledge of God must flow from revelation, for man by wisdom knows not God (1 Cor. 1:21). True worship has the same source. Each of these—knowledge of God and worship—is always to be according to such revelation as He has at the time, or in the dispensation, given of Himself.

Understanding this, I might instance shortly a line of true worshippers from the beginning.

Abel was a true worshipper; for he worshipped in faith, or according to revelation (Heb. 11). The firstling of the flock was according to the promise of the bruised Seed of the woman, and according to the coats of skin, with which the Lord God had covered his parents.

Noah followed Abel, and worshipped in the faith of the woman's bruised Seed. He took the new inheritance only in virtue of blood (Gen. 8:20). He was therefore a true worshipper also.

Abraham was a true worshipper, worshipping God as He had revealed Himself to him (Gen. 7:7).

Isaac, precisely in the track of Abraham, worshipped the God who had appeared unto him; not affecting to be wise, but, like Abraham, raising his altar to the revealed God (Gen. 26:24-25).

Jacob was a true worshipper. The Lord appears to him in his sorrow and degradation, in the misery to which his own sin had reduced him, revealing Himself as the One in whom “mercy rejoiceth against judgment”; and he at once owns God as thus revealed to him; and this revealed God of Bethel was his God to the end (Gen. 28, 35). Here was enlarged revelation of God, and worship following such revelation; and that is true worship.

The nation of Israel was a true worshipper; for God had revealed Himself to that nation, and established His memorial in the midst of them. They knew what they worshipped. John 4:22. But in the midst of this worshipping nation there might still be true worshippers who did not conform to the divinely established order, provided their departure from it was also according to new revelation from God. As, for example, Gideon, Manoah, David, who were all true worshippers, though they offered sacrifices on rocks or in threshing-floors, and not in the appointed national place; just because, by a new and special revelation, the Lord had consecrated those new altars. (See Judges 6, 13; 1 Chron. 22). The healed leper, in this passage of our Gospel, exactly on this principle, was a true worshipper, though, like Gideon, Manoah, and David, he departed from the usual order; just because he apprehended God in a new revelation of Himself. The healing which he had felt in his body had a voice in the ear of faith, it being only God who could heal a leper (2 Kings 5:7).

The Church of God is now, in this dispensation, a true worshipper on exactly the same around; worshipping according to enlarged revelation, having fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And this is still, like the other cases, worship “in truth,” because according to revelation. But it is “in spirit” also; because the Holy Spirit has now been given as the power to worship, enabling the saints to call God “Father,” and Jesus Christ “Lord” (1 Cor. 8:6). There is now communicated power, as well as revelation, for the purpose of worship.

This subject of worship is indeed a blessed one for further meditation for us all. The faith of the Samaritan leper, who turned from the priest at Jerusalem to lay his offering at the feet of Jesus, thus using Him as God’s anointed altar, has suggested it. He heard the voice of healing—he owned the God of Israel in the mercy that had met him. This was revelation to him, and he believed it, and was led by it into the sanctuary. And this that had happened to him is the only ground of worship from creatures such as we have been, live we in what age or under what economy we may. He had been healed, and he knew that he had been healed. On what ground can we stand to worship but this? We may cry out in the bitterness of a surprised conscience; but that is not worship. It may be the way of the drawing of the Father, and end in the sanctuary; but it is not worship. The blood of Christ purging the conscience from dead works alone leads to the service or worship of the living God (Heb. 9:14). As in the very heavens, and so forever, the saints, in their glories, worship while standing on this ground, as the floor of their temple (Rev. 5:9). “Our calling,” as one has beautifully said, “is to consecrate our life as a sacrifice of thanksgiving for the mercy of God’s redemption—our whole life is to be a continued priesthood, a spiritual serving of God, proceeding from the affections of a faith working by love, and a continued witness of our Redeemer.” It is mercy, as the Spirit Himself teaches, that opens the temple doors, and leads us in to exercise our priesthood before God (Rom. 12:1). And that mercy is ours, we know, only by the hands of our wounded, stricken Redeemer. As that fervent hymn tells it out:

We must, after this manner, take our own part in the worship. As the psalmist, after calling on all creation to praise, says, “Praise the Lord, O my soul.”

Luke 17:20-18:8

In this portion we again get another subject for our thoughts, as disciples of the Great Teacher, who was ordering all for our edification. “The kingdom of God” is here treated by the Lord, in answer to an inquiry from the Pharisees. We do not learn the circumstances of this scene where it was, or when it was; such notices are beside the purpose of the Spirit in our evangelist, as I have said; but we have largely our Lord’s teaching upon the matter itself. (Luke 18:1 ought rather to be, “to the end that they ought always”; and so forth; thus linking this parable with the previous discourse.)

His manner here illustrates what I have already said on His answering questions. He addresses the conscience, giving a word suited to the moral state of the inquirer, rather than to his question.

With this view He here rightly divides the word between different hearers; for, in verse 22, He turns from the Pharisees to the disciples, giving different views of the kingdom of God to each: that given to the Pharisee being faithful to his condition of soul; and that given to the disciples being seasonable food for the renewed mind, according to its growing capacity. As He says in another place, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” And so, in the wisdom of the Spirit of Christ, when Paul was met by the inquisitive Athenians, he did not answer them according to their inquisitiveness, but declared to them the serious things of God, of judgment, and of repentance.

The subject of this short discourse is “the kingdom of God.” That expression indicates a dispensation in which divine power is brought in. As the apostle says, “The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.” It is, I judge, as another has said, “The exercise or exhibition of the ruling power of God under any circumstances.”

It has different exhibitions; and it is this truth which our Lord opens to us in this place. He teaches us that this kingdom of God is “not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”—but, by-and-by, it is to be “the days of the Son of Man,” or manifest, glorious power. In John also the Lord speaks of these two forms of the kingdom, only under different expressions from those which we have here. I mean in His confession to Pilate, where He owns Himself “King of the Jews,” but lets the Roman know also, that that character of His power could not then be manifested; but that, for the present, it was to take another form under Him as the “witness unto the truth” (John 18). So here; it is now the kingdom “within”; and, by-and-by, it will be the kingdom of “the days of the Son of Man.” The glories belong to the same Jesus, but they are diverse. It is hidden glory now— glory within, in the Holy Spirit, the glory of a sanctuary known only to God and the worshippers. It will be displayed glory by-and-by, or glory in the world, known from one end of the heaven to the other.

Having thus testified these two forms of the kingdom, the Lord goes on to teach what was to take place before it could pass into its second form. He tells the disciples that He Himself was to “suffer many things”; that they were to be in “desire”; to always pray and not faint; and to dwell in the separated places, the house-top and the field, the places of prayer and desire, as Isaac and Peter witness (Gen. 24, Acts 10). And then, as to all beside, He further tells them, that just on the eve of the kingdom’s taking its manifested form, or when “the days of the Son of

Man” should begin, the world would be found in all the surfeit and intoxication of the times of Noah or Lot; and that, consequently, those “days of the Son of Man” would break in upon them with the surprise of lightning, but with a just discerning also between man and man—between those who are in the appointed desire and prayer, and those who have found in planting and building, in buying and selling, the spoil of their hand, and are satisfied.

Isaiah appears to see those two in the bed, at the mill, and in the field, in this day of the Lord (Isa. 3:10-11; Isa. 33:14-16). Malachi, also, looks at them in the day of discerning, when the same Sun, which rises with healing in His wings on the one, will burn as an oven for the other (Mal. 3-4). For this day of the Lord will act with discerning, or in judgment. One shall be taken, and the other left.

There was, however, a third object. In the history of the times of Lot there was not only Lot himself, and the people of Sodom, but also Lot’s wife. She perished not in Sodom, but between Sodom and Zoar. To her the departure from Sodom was exile, not deliverance. Many of the camp in the wilderness treated separation from Egypt with the same mind. And this yields a solemn, practical question for us. How do our souls entertain the thought of separation from the world? In the esteem of our hearts is it exile or redemption? Are we singing over that thought, like Israel at the Red Sea; or, like Israel afterwards, are we remembering the fish of Egypt, its onions, its leeks, and its cucumbers? Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. She sighed as an exile from Sodom. Do we sing, as the ransomed of the Lord, out of it?

“Remember Lot’s wife,” was the Saviour’s weighty word in the midst of this discourse on the kingdom of God. And it is a weighty and serious word to lie on our hearts.

And the Lord further teaches us that, in neither form, is this kingdom of God subject to the “Lo, here” or the “Lo, there” of man. It makes itself known. It is the property of power to do so. Whether the kingdom be within, or abroad in the world, it will make itself known. As the Lord says of the Comforter within, “But ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” And I may instance Paul as being thus conscious of its presence. As soon as it filled his soul, as soon as he had the Son revealed in him (and that was the kingdom within) it had power at once to separate him to God. With this new and wondrous joy in him, he could go forth, like Abraham, from home and kindred. He did not want man’s seal to be set on his title, nor man’s supplies to be opened for his happiness. He neither conferred with flesh and blood, nor did he go up to Jerusalem, to them that were apostles before him, as though he needed their countenance. He went down to Arabia, where sands and solitude awaited him, instead of to the pillars in the Church, and to the city of solemnities. For the Son was revealed within—his title was sealed, and his resources were opened there, by the hand of God Himself— and he was independent of man’s sanction and man’s supplies. God was both his Witness and his Portion (Gal. 1).

But this may well humble us, beloved. For how little have we learned this divine independency of the creature! Even to look to Arabia with our back upon Jerusalem, would it not be something too much for us? Have we such a kingdom within, such light and strength and joy in God, that “flesh and blood” are no longer our resources? What would our hearts feel if only sands and deserts were before us? But the first joy of adoption in Paul gave every place on earth the same character to him, and that first joy should be ours to the end.

The parable of the Importunate Widow closes this discourse. It may raise the question with us, Whence comes this cry, this day-and-night cry, of the elect? The saints now being gathered are to rejoice in the delay of the Lord as salvation to others (2 Peter 3). But the Jewish election of the latter day are often presented as crying on the Lord, the righteous Judge, to show Himself. And the Lord appears to have them, the rather, in His view, as He uses this parable. Notwithstanding, there is a cry from the saints, in some sense, unceasingly heard of God. There was a cry from Abel’s blood. There was, we also learn, a cry from Sodom (Gen. 4,18). There is a cry from the unpaid wages of the hireling (James 5). Even stones may have a voice in the ear of the Lord (Hab. 2:11; Luke 19:40).

But after the Lord had given His elect this high place with God, this place of interest and prevalency, He closes with words fitted to put a holy reserve upon their hearts, and to make them look to themselves rather than to their privileges and powers. “Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?” Surely this was the way of a perfect Master, mingling the chastened and the brilliant lights together, giving a character of holiness to our dignities, and, in respect to the exercise of our highest functions and powers, imparting a modest estimate of ourselves.

Luke 18:9-30

Here we find another subject in like manner distinctly considered.

There are three scenes in this portion of our Gospel, two of which we have in Matthew and in Mark. Our evangelist does not notice their circumstances in time or place, but appears to present them together for the purpose of illustrating one great moral subject, according to his usual manner.

The subject is our approach to God, or way of entrance into the kingdom; and it fitly follows the previous scene, in which the nature of the kingdom was considered and taught; as we saw. In the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, in the case of the little children, and that of the young ruler, we are taught what are the characteristics of those who enter, and have their welcome in, the kingdom.

It is the renouncing of self in every form. This is our calling, our perfection; to forsake all that is of man, or of the flesh, or of the world—that we may be established certainly and happily in God Himself, and in His rich provision for us.

These three cases set forth this self-renouncing. The poor, broken-hearted publican did so; the little child does so; the young ruler, had he become the Lord’s follower, would have done so. By these instances, and His reflections upon them, the Lord opens this doctrine. The apostles, afterwards, under the Holy Spirit, go on with it more fully. For the thorough emptying of the creature, or the renunciation of the flesh, is, we need not say, essential to the obedience of faith.

The law had previously come seeking for good in the flesh, or fruit of it unto God. But it found none. The Son of God, on the contrary, came in such a way as condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3). Paul accordingly, in his doctrine, has done with the flesh altogether. He saw it to be a mighty wreck— not as yet fully out of sight, or gone to the bottom, but left by him to perish in its own corruption. He had been cast on a new world, in a new creation, with the risen Son of God.

It is edifying to mark the fervency and decision with which, in every shape and pretence of the flesh, he either escapes from it, or renounces it. Is it subject to condemnation? Yes, but Christ has borne the judgment of it, and he, a believer in Christ, is free. Has the flesh its religion? He counts it all as loss and dung; its ordinances and observances, its bondage and fear, he disclaims and refuses, glorying in the righteousness of God by faith. Has it wisdom? Yes; the world has its princes—the wise, the scribe, and the disputer; but Paul insists that God has made all this as foolishness, and covets only that wisdom which the Spirit searches out and reveals. He escapes from all that it was exposed to; he renounces all that it could pretend to. He was not in it, but in Christ raised from the dead for him. And this is glorious faith, which, after this manner, leaves the flesh in its condemnation, on the one hand, and, on the other, in its endowments—whether of wisdom or of righteousness or of anything else—far away and forever behind us.

Paul had been specially gifted of God to be a witness of the worthlessness of man or of the flesh in its best estate. For if any other might have had confidence in it, he more; as he tells us (Phil. 3). But his renunciation of it exposes its utter vanity, as being the act of one who had made the fairest and most flattering attainments in it.

And it is faith alone that does this. That is the transcendent excellency of faith—doing what nothing else can do. Love is exalted among the virtues to the chief place (1 Cor. 13). But faith does what it was never committed to love to do. It is that which lays hold on God's salvation for the sinner. And until we get to God, our best thing only keeps us the farther from Him. Paul's zeal, a good thing in the flesh, led him to persecute the Church. The wisdom of the princes of this world led them into darkness and ignorance of the mystery of God (1 Cor. 2). They were princes, it is true, the most exalted of their generation, but they were princes of this world; and their being princes there only strengthened them against the Lord of the true glory. For with such the world is the object; with God the world is judged.

Returning, however, for another moment, to our evangelist, I might observe that, in the midst of all this teaching on self-renunciation, in the cases of the publican, the little child, and the young ruler, the Great Teacher Himself practises His own lesson. Jesus renounces Himself. "Why callest thou Me good? none is good, save One, that is, God." He was good, but He would not look on His goodness. This was self-renouncing. What He renounces bespeaks His personal and moral glory; what we have to renounce betrays our shame and depravity; but still, He practises the lesson He teaches, and goes before as our Pattern. We have this again shown us by the apostle in Philippians 2. There he presents the Lord Jesus emptying Himself. It was, surely, of that which was infinitely or divinely glorious; yet He emptied Himself; and upon this He exhorts us to empty ourselves of all spirit of strife and vainglory. Thus there is sympathy; but such sympathy as, while He and we are found exercising ourselves—to speak in this manner—in the same lessons, yet does it bespeak His perfectness in everything, and our state of dishonor; so that we may assert the sympathy, but by that is only speaking to His praise and our own shame. And when, not merely our sympathy, but our oneness with Him is declared by the apostle, the same is made to appear; for though one, He is the Sanctifier, and we the sanctified (Heb. 2:11), characters which tell out loudly and clearly the infinite moral distance that there is personally between us, though one in the purpose of God.

May the gracious Hand that has redeemed us as sinners, beloved, still lead us safely onward as saints; and the Good Shepherd, Who once laid down His life for us, feed us in the pastures of His holy Word for His name's sake!

Luke 18:31-43

In this portion of our Gospel, which I separate to itself, there is nothing, perhaps, characteristic. The Lord here, as in the corresponding places in both Matthew and Mark, addresses Himself to His journey, in the full anticipation of the sorrows and death in which it was shortly to end.

But there is in Him, all through this journey, the expression of a greatness of soul that is perfectly wonderful and blessed. He has Jerusalem, and His cup of sorrow there, full before Him. He finds no sympathy from those who were His own. He gathers no admiration from the world. It is the cross, and the shame of it too, that He is called to sustain— all human countenance and support being denied Him. Yet He goes on without the least possible abatement of His energy in thoughts and services for others. We deem ourselves entitled to think of ourselves, when trouble comes upon us, and to expect that others will think of us also. But this perfect Sufferer was thoughtful of others as He was going onward, though every step of His way only conducted Him to still deeper sorrows; and He had reason to judge that not one step of it all would be cheered by man in return. His own little band, even, understood not the sorrows about which He was speaking to them.

And here let me observe, that while, through this Gospel, we have been noticing our Lord as the Teacher, dealing with the thoughts, the hearts, and the consciences of men, we cannot but have observed the great ignorance of Scripture which even the apostles themselves betray continually. It does not appear that it was acquaintance with the prophets which had beforehand prepared them for the claims of Jesus of Nazareth; nor afterwards, in their intercourse with Him, do they seem to grow in knowledge. They wonder at one thing after another which He was constantly either doing or saying, though all was "according to the Scriptures," or "that the scripture might be fulfilled."

Their hearts, as Lydia's afterwards, had been opened. The attractions that were in Jesus, had entered, and separated them from their fishing nets, and kinsfolk, and publican's tables. So their consciences, more or less, like Peter's, may have been visited by a convicting ray of His glory. But their understandings had remained but little affected.

That grace and blessing, however, came in due season. After He rose from the dead, when all the comforts of His own personal intercourse with them were about to cease, "then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45); and the first chapter of the Acts, before the Holy Spirit was given, affords a sample of the fruit of this new endowment—this opened understanding to understand the Scriptures. A great comfort all this was in the increasing sorrow and darkness of their condition. Their Lord had gone, and the enemy was still alive and in power, therefore the light of God now began to shed its beams on opened eyes, that thus, by nothing less than God's light, they might walk through the world's darkness. Their gracious Teacher was personally withdrawn, and their understandings were, accordingly, opened to know the treasures, the comforts, and the strengthenings of His Word.

But as yet it was not so, as we gather from this passage. The Lord addresses Himself to His journey, in the anticipation of the sorrow and shame in which it was to end; but He gets no sympathy from those who had been His care and the objects of His teaching. "Uncheered by earthly smiles," we may surely say, His lonely journey was.

We are, however, to witness refreshment and cheer for His spirit, provided by the unseen hand of the Father. For that hand draws a few sinners to Him; and, under that power (John 6:44), they come in faith to Him, as He now repairs to that guilty city, where the prophets had

perished. He has not to spend any toil of His own upon them. This beautifully distinguishes these cases. They are made ready for His enjoyment, as by the teaching and drawing of the Father in secret and alone. And, as the joy of a harvest, they are brought to Jesus in these dark and lonely hours: the blind beggar, whose faith we see here; Zaccheus, who meets Him in the next stage of the way; and the dying thief, who calls on Him just at the end of the way. These are His good cheer during His journey. They had cost Him no care or toil, as those who were daily His companions had. He was not tried by the slowness of their hearts, or the dimness of their faith; but they were as the joy of harvest to the reaper.

The strong decision and intelligence of faith which appears in these cases is exceedingly blessed. The blind beggar whom we have here is not to be put off by the religious ceremoniousness of the multitude who would not have “Jesus of Nazareth” intruded on, but he urges his case on the ear and the heart of “Jesus, the Son of David.” Here was faith in its decisiveness and intelligence. He knew what and Who Jesus was. And Jesus owns the good cheer and refreshment which this faith yields Him. For He stands at once at the bidding of this faith, and entirely commits Himself to it, saying to the poor man, “What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?”

Thus did the God of grace cheer the way of this toiling, travelling Minister of grace. What will His satisfaction be when He sees the full fruit of the travail of His soul!

Luke 19:1-27

The stages of the Lord’s journey are here very distinctly marked. He is seen, as in the preceding chapter, approaching Jericho, and now passing through it. Then on His road from Jericho to Jerusalem, just outside of which He pauses for a moment, and then formally enters it. And here, as also in Matthew and Mark, the closing scenes in the trial and conviction of the city are also very exactly noticed, this being the subject of these two chapters, like Matthew 21-23, and Mark 11-12.

But they have their peculiarities. The conversion of Zaccheus, a little narrative that strikingly exhibits the work of God in the soul of man, is peculiar to Luke. And the parable of the Talents, or of the Nobleman who went into a Far Country, here follows that little narrative, though given by Matthew in another connection; for, here, these two scenes are made to illustrate the several purposes of the first and the second comings of the Lord; it being the way of the Spirit in our evangelist, as I have noticed, so to combine circumstances and matters of instruction, that moral ends may be answered to the heart and conscience, and that principles and truths of the kingdom may stand illustrated before us. But the parable of the Marriage of the King’s Son is omitted here, being introduced, more suitably with the design of the Gospel, in Luke 14. For there it takes a general or moral character; whereas, had it been introduced here, it would have had a stricter application to the Jews. So the curse on the barren fig-tree is not here, nor is the sentence on Jerusalem largely and fully pronounced.

(I have observed throughout these meditations (as well as here, concerning the parable of the Talents or Ten Pounds), that Luke does not strictly observe circumstances and sayings in order of time, because his purpose is moral. In Psalms 105 and 106 we may observe just the same. The purpose of the Spirit there being moral and not historical; that is, to vindicate Jehovah in His dealings with Israel, and to convict Israel in their dealings with Jehovah; the psalmist does not give the events to which he refers in their succession, or order of time. He speaks of the plague of darkness before that of flies, and of Korah’s rebellion before the making of the golden calf. This is precisely according to what strikes the mind in Luke.)

Zaccheus, as I observed on the preceding meditation, was one of the refreshments provided, through the grace of the Father, for the wearied soul of Christ, as He was travelling His present way to the city. And the Lord owns this refreshment; for He says of the conversion of this publican, that it was answering the purpose of His coming: and, therefore, He must have tasted in it something of the fruit of the travail of His soul. The character of this conversion is simple and comforting. The boldness of faith is remarkable here, as in the preceding case; Zaccheus being deaf to the injurious observations of the righteous or moral world, as the poor blind beggar had been to its religious formality and reserve. And the fruit of communion with Christ, in the place where He was giving the convicted sinner the pledges of His favor, is brought forth very fresh and abundant.

The parable which follows this happy history, as we see plainly, and as I have shortly noticed before, illustrates the great end of the Lord’s second coming. The prophets had not distinguished the two comings so clearly. Thoughts both of grace and glory arise at once and together from what they say of the advent of Messiah. Isaiah 61, to which our evangelist has already led us, instances this. (See Luke 4.) The grace, the vengeance, and the kingdom, appear there in unbroken order and succession. So the praise and prophetic words which attended the birth of Jesus in this Gospel rehearse the same. (See Luke 1-2.) But the need of two advents comes out formally upon the unbelief of Israel, and their rejection of their King I say formally, because, of course, “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.” And the history of Christ under the figure of “the stone,” to which allusion is here made, gives us these two advents exactly on this principle, and the consequent vengeance which is now to accompany the second.

The Christian Shepherd: 2000, "Looking Upon Jesus As He Walked": Luke 10:25-42

Luke 10:25 shows a precious thing. We never touch the borders of neighborly love but in the perfect life of Jesus. “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.” Leaving him half dead—there was our condition. He was ruined, but his life was still in him. How well for us that our life was still in us when we met Jesus!

Here we see the striking impotency of the law to take up our condition, but the Lord also shows that the representatives of the law did not keep what they taught. I learn here, to the eternal confusion of all lawyers, priests and Levites, that they have never kept what they set forth. Were they authorized to pass by on the other side? The law will never do for me, a sinner, or make its abettors and assertors the thing it would have them to be.

Why is the blessed Lord of glory called a Samaritan? Because He was a stranger. A stranger from heaven has come down to show neighborly love on earth. He has come to exhibit to earth what earth never could exhibit to itself. And how did He do it? First, “He . . . came where he was.” Who could unfold such a thought in its fullness! Did not the Lord do so with you?

And when he saw him he had compassion. What is the source of all the salvation found in Him? Was there anything in you to draw it out or provoke it? No! Something in Him suggested it. The poor waylaid man was silent from first to last. Was not the poor prodigal silent when they clothed him with the best robe, and Joshua, too, when they clothed him with garments in Zechariah?

There is no more blessed answer to the grace of God than the stillness of faith. Poor waylaid man! Let Him do to you as He will. The Lord acts from Himself—at the suggestion of His own compassion. And he poured in oil and wine. He had with him the very wealth that was suited to the man that lay in the road. The Lord Jesus came with the very fullness that was fitted to your condition.

“And set him on his own beast.” He exchanged places with us. He was rich, and we were poor. He became poor that we might be rich.

Next, He had made Himself responsible for the man, and He would look after him. That is the gospel, and that is neighborly love. Again I say, the blessed Lord was forced on a picture of Himself when He was asked, “Who is my neighbor?” And now, how are we to act the part of the Samaritan? We must begin by being debtors to Jesus before we can follow Him in neighborly love. We must be the waylaid man before we can be the Samaritan. How simply He unfolds the story of our necessity and His fullness.

The chapter (Luke 10) ends with the scene in the house of Martha and Mary—the richest table at which we have seen Him. Here He is seen as an intimate family friend. We shall have this by and by in heaven. May we ever desire it.

J. G. Bellett (adapted from Notes on the Gospel of Luke)

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The faith of the laborer is the means of blessing to souls.

(Luke 10:38-42.) Martha, though preparing for the Lord, which was right surely, yet shows how much self is inherent in this kind of care, for she did not like to have all the trouble of it.

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