# Luke - Commentaries by Walter Thomas Prideaux Wolston

Simon Peter: His Life and Letters, Consecration

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Luke 5:1-11

The events recorded in our first chapter evidently precede by some apace of time what we find here. Although a man be converted, he does not, alas! always begin to follow the Lord. It would appear to have been so in Peter's case. Whether he accompanied the Lord in any of His journeyings between John 1 and Luke 5 we know not; at any rate, if he did so, he had resiled, gone back into the old groove, and was settling down to life, just as before the Lord first met him. This is often noticed in the history of young converts, unless the work of conviction of sin in their souls has been deep, and the sense of deliverance correspondingly great; then immediate devotedness to the Lord is usually apparent.

For a time, then, we hear no more of Peter, he had evidently gone back to his earthly calling; but now we turn to the next eventful day in his history. We find it in Luke 5, where you get what I may call his CONSECRATION. In this chapter he sets out to follow Jesus; yes, forsakes all, and follows Him; and it is a happy moment for us when we forsake all and follow Jesus. The Lord goes down to Peter in the very midst of his business. He Himself was, as ever, going on with His mission of grace, and mercy to souls, and in order to more advantageously speak to the multitudes, who were thronging to hear Him, He uses Peter's boat as a pulpit.

It must have been a lovely and impressive scene. One can picture the panorama, and the blessed Lord's appearance, as the Spirit says, "It came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret." A multitude in such a place can easily be accounted for. The scene is laid in one of the most populous parts of Palestine. Looking landward from the lake, far away to the right lay Capernaum, His "own city"; while Chorazin, Bethsaida, Magdala and Tiberias, in close contiguity, successively dot the western shore of the deep blue lake, whose waters are sparkling beneath the beams of the morning sun. The fishing fleet has made for its port — Bethsaida (which means, the house of fish). There Peter, in partnership with James and John, and probably his own brother Andrew, was carrying on a considerable business, as "hired servants" remain to Zebedee, when these four have all followed the Lord's call (see Mark 1:10-20). All is therefore stir and activity in the things that concern human life when the Lord appears on the scene.

The language here used by Luke makes one incline to think that the occasion may have been the same as that recorded by Matthew, where he says, "And great multitudes were gathered together unto Him, so that He went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore" (Matt 13:2). Be this as it may, the Lord's action is significant, as "He entered one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed Him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And He sat down, and taught the people out of the ship" (Luke 5:3).

The Lord's object in this step is plain. He desired that those to whom He spoke might easily hear Him. He was a model preacher in every way, whether matter, manner, or method be considered. All who preach should seek only to imitate Him. Did they, I believe all listeners would hear, and more be profited.

We are not informed of the subject of the Lord's discourse by Luke, but if the suggestion be correct that Matthew 13 supplies this information, what wondrous tidings of God's activity in grace fell on the ears of landsmen, and fisher-folk, alike that day Further, I am inclined to think that the ministry which Peter heard that morning — as, dropping his net-mending, he listened to the Lord — had much to do with what followed. The Son of Man, as the Sower, was bounteously scattering the seed. He tells us "the seed is the word of God." The soil is the heart of man, and into Peter's heart that day fell seed that brought forth eventually fruit a hundredfold. The effect of God's Word is ever far-reaching, though the fruit may be slow of appearing.

His sermon over, the Lord now turns to Peter personally, with intent to richly bless him.

In John 1 He sought to teach Peter one lesson, namely this, "Peter, you belong to Me," though evidently Peter did not then fully learn it. Now He teaches him another lesson, namely, "Peter, you, and all that you have, belong to Me." He had stepped into Peter's boat, without asking for it, because it belonged to Him; and now He says, "Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draft." He will not be beholden to any man, so He is going to pay Peter for the use of his boat. Peter says, "Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net." Peter obeys, for he knows now something of who He is who speaks, and, as a result, finds that he never had taken such a haul of fish in all his days.

His answer is at once a confession of failure, and of faith. Failure as regards his own efforts, and faith in the One who now bids him lower his nets. Daylight is not the time when fish enter a net, hence the man who would catch them goes out by night. Reason would have said, If there were none to be got last night, there are sure to be none caught in broad daylight. But reason is of no avail in nearing God. Faith alone understands Him; and "the obedience of faith," as well as its confidence, is manifest in the utterance, "Nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net."

At once it is filled to breakage, and Simon's partners have to be summoned to help to secure the catch, two ships filled to the gunwale, "so that they began to sink," being the result. Thoroughly "astonished" thereat, and awakened thereby to a sense of hit; sin, Peter "fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He saw now not two boatloads of fish, but the Godhead glory of the Son of Man, the Messiah, the more than Man, Son of God. He saw the application of Psalm 8:4-8 to his Master as the fish obey Him. He is convicted about his sin, his guilt. He had never had the truth of his sinful state raised before. He had to learn what he was. He had learned something of what Jesus was in John 1, and something more of what He was in this scene. Now he had to learn his own good-for-nothingness, his guiltiness; but he felt too, I cannot do without Thee, O Lord, and he gets as close as he can to Jesus' knees, while he says, "Depart from me: for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

The experience in the soul which this passage in Peter's history illustrates is most important. In John 1 no question of Peter's guilty state had been raised. There it was simply the absoluteness of sovereign grace blessing him. Here the Lord purposely lets the question of his state as a sinner be raised. His conscience is profoundly aroused. His heart had been attracted in John 1 by the grace of the Lord's person; here a ray of divine glory from that same person illumines the dark chambers of that heart. The effect is electric. All his life is flung into deepest shade. "Sinful" he judged himself to be all along the line, but chiefly, I opine, in that he had not followed the Lord from the time when He first spoke to him.

There is a real and deep work of grace here. He is spiritually convicted — morally broken up, and brought in self-judgment on his face before the Lord. He is joining company with Job, as he says, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye meth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). He is side by side, morally, with Isaiah, as he exclaims, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seem the King, the Lord of Hosts" (Isa. 6:5).

The stalwart fisherman of Galileo joins the patriarch, and the prophet, in the unspeakably blessed pathway of deep self-judgment, and self-repudiation, as out of the depths of a broken heart he cries, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

The importance of this process in the soul cannot be over-estimated. In the lack of it is found the secret of so much of the slipshod profession that abounds around us. The seed gets no deep root in unbroken ground. The deeper the furrow produced by the plowshare of conviction, the deeper the root, and the more abundant the fruit in later days. One longs to see more of this sort of work where the gospel is proclaimed. Only where deep, genuine, Holy Spirit-wrought repentance, and self-judgment are produced, will there be the gladsome hundred-fold harvest which the Lord so delights to garner.

May I inquire, my reader, what you know of all this? If you have never passed through something akin to this, I think it is high time you carefully, and prayerfully examined the foundations of your soul's relationship with God. John Bunyan said, "When religion goes in silver slippers, there are plenty found to put them on." This witness is true. Profession of Christ is easy enough nowadays. Possession of Christ is another thing altogether, and I doubt if any heart really possesses Him until, like Peter, it feels that it is utterly unfit for Him.

Peter felt he was utterly unfit to be near Him, yet he could not do without Him. His actions and his words are strangely contradictory. "He fell down at Jesus' knees," — that is, got as close to Him as he could — and then said, "Depart from me, O Lord." I do not believe he thought the Lord would depart from him, but nevertheless he was morally right in his utterance. He felt profoundly how unfit he was for Jesus, but could not do without Him, and so it has been with every divinely-awakened soul from that day to this.

Jesus sweetly calms his troubled conscience, as He says unto him, "Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch men." His troubled soul is sweetly calmed by the Lord's own blessed ministry, "Fear not"; and to every troubled soul, in this our day, He says now, "Fear not."

" And when they had brought their ships to laud, they forsook all, and followed him." No doubt most people would have thought Peter a most improvident man — would have said he had better go to market with his fish first; but Peter, heeding the call "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19; Mark 1:17), gave up all that had hitherto entranced him, in the day when it was most bright and prosperous. He had a heart to be for the Lord, and the Lord only. Christ eclipsed everything in his soul, and he leaves all to be near that Saviour, to be His companion, and His servant, as He passes through this scene. Happy choice, blessed submission of faith, and answer of affection

We are not all called, as Peter was here, to abandon an earthly calling to follow the Lord, but the principle is the same. When grace is known, and peace and joy fill the heart, as the fruit of hearing the divine words, "Fear not" — which always come to the soul after honest confession — then to follow the Lord fully is the only safe and right path, for the new-born soul. We must make a clean break with the world if we are going to have the enjoyment of the Lord's favor. Out-and-out decision for Christ is of the last possible importance.

Peter turned his back upon his world when it was most attractive, and he most successful in it. This is particularly fine. Many a man has turned to the Lord when all has gone dead against him, and his earthly history has been, so to speak, a huge failure. Peter consecrated himself to the Lord, and His service when everything was most flourishing, and all combined to keep him where his heart had hitherto found all its springs of joy. The fact is, an eclipse had occurred. He has been introduced really to the Lord of glory, and from that moment everything else was hidden from has view, and paled into utter insignificance, compared with the blessedness of being in the company of, and near to the One who had said to him, "Follow me."

Now, my reader, if Jesus says to you today, "Follow thou me," what will you say? Let your answer be, "Lord, from this day forth my heart is Thine!" The Lord grant it.

Seekers for Light, Fisherman's Discovery or Finding and Following, A

(John 1:35-42; Luke 5:1-11)

I propose, dear friends, with the Lord's help, in this course of meetings to speak a little to you on Light, and to show in the history of the various men that will pass before us, the different ways in which the soul gets into light; because no two persons, I believe, get it by the same road. That is what makes Scripture so interesting. It shows us all kinds and sorts of people, describing them exactly as they are. It shows us different classes, and different conditions of soul, all passing through different exercises, and eventually, it shows us how grace leads each soul into the light.

It is impossible to over-estimate the value of light. It is a wonderful thing light. Scripture says, "Whatsoever doth make manifest is light" (Eph. 5:13). The light shows exactly what the true state of affairs is; and, therefore, until a man is in the light he does not know what he is; and he does not know God. In fact, until a soul is brought into the light it really does not understand its true state before God.

Now, in the scripture before us you see this brought out. We have elsewhere the wonderful statement, that, "Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil"(John 3:19). Light comes first of all, in the Person of Christ, for, "In him

was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not" (John 1:4-5). Now, that is a very remarkable statement. You see if you bring in what we call natural light, or physical light into darkness, out goes the darkness. If this room were in darkness at this moment, and some one turned on an electric light, the darkness would vanish at once. If you were in a coal-pit, and your light went out, you would be in darkness, and you could not estimate the relation of things. What would be the natural way of letting you see where you were, and what your surroundings were? Bring in the light; for, when the light comes in, away goes the darkness. That is the truth regarding natural things; but in divine things the solemn thing is this, that although light comes, the darkness remains; for the darkness does not comprehend the light.

But I hear you say, What is the Light? God — "God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). And what is the darkness? Man. Oh, no! you say; you mean he was in the darkness. No, I do not. Man makes the darkness; the darkness is what his own state as a sinner is. That constitutes the darkness, as we read, "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). It is a wonderful moment when a man gets into the light, and becomes "light in the Lord." I do not know how many of you have got into the light; but, if you never have got into the light hitherto, remember, you may get into the light tonight, and I will say this to you at the outset, you will never get into the light, until you get to Christ.

Remember, then, the light has come. In the Old Testament, I read, "God said, Let there be light, and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). And I also read that "God divided the light from the darkness" (Gen. 1:4). It is a wonderful moment in man's history when God says, "Let there be light." I do not mean to say that every man is groping after light, or that every sinner is creeping towards the light. I wish it were so. When God works in the soul, it is always light that the soul craves for. If there is an anxious man here this evening, he wants light. He is looking for light, and would like to get light. He longs for it then. I am in the dark, he cries; I would like to see. He is just like a young man I saw the other Sunday night, when I came home from a big meeting. When I reached my house, there was a young man waiting for me. He was a most exemplary fellow, so far as walk and conversation went. His greeting was, "May I have a word with you?" "Certainly," I said; and he came into my private room. A minute afterward he burst into tears. "Oh, pray to the Lord for me," he said. "What is the matter?" I asked. "Oh! I am just a wicked boy; I am such a wicked lad; pray to the Lord to have mercy on me." Thank God! the Lord did have mercy on him. The Lord saved him, but he said he was afraid he would never be able to confess

Christ, yet he made a splendid confession. To the first person he met on Monday morning, he confessed the fact that Christ had saved him; and in the workshop, to a man who was thoroughly godless, the first thing he said was, "I have received Christ." You see, my friends, when the light gets into a man's heart, it is a wonderful thing. Let the light into your hearts!

Well, the light has come, in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. "God is light" — bear that in mind — and "in Him is no darkness at all." But, since God is light, the light reveals the true relation of things. Light first of all shows where man is, and for that purpose Light came into the world. "That was the true Light, which coming into the world lightens every man" (John 1:9). You must not understand by that statement that every man was converted. Oh, no The Light was there, and was for everybody, but alas, nobody had eyes to see it, until God had wrought in the heart and opened the eyes; that is the solemn side of the truth, Sin has plunged us in such a condition of distance from God, that really we do not see who Christ is, or what He is, until God opens our eyes. When Paul appears before Agrippa he says, that the Lord had commissioned him to go to "the Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in Me" (Acts 26:17-18).

Now would you like to have light? Would you like to have peace? Light will discover to you your lost condition; for it exposes you. Yes, but I will tell you what takes place after the light makes manifest to you that you are a poor, wretched, hell-deserving sinner. The next thing that light will do, is to reveal that "God is love," and that He has given His blessed Son for your salvation. Light will reveal your guilt, and love will blot it all out. Light will make manifest your lost condition, and love will meet it. God is light, and God is love. Both are seen in Jesus.

In the Gospel of John of which I have read a few verses, you see that before the Lord Jesus came out in His public ministry, God sent out a man called John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, to bear witness of Him. "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe" (John 1:6-7). Do you not think it is a wonderful thing that God should send a person to bear witness about light? I think if you will reflect, my friends, you will see what an awful state man was in, when it required that somebody should, so to speak, come and say, "I bare witness to the Light." If a man came into this town, and went down Princes Street, pointing, as he did so, to the sun, and crying, "Look up there!" "What is it, man?" the people would say. "Look," he says, "there is the sun, and light coming from the sun," and he keeps on saying that. Why, you would think the fellow was fit for a lunatic asylum. Yes, I hear everybody say, that man has gone off his head. Think of it! There was the Light in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, "and the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." So God sent a man to bear witness to the Light. "John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This is He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me; for he was before me" (John 1:15). Further, the One who is the Light is the Son of God, and He is the Lamb of God. He is the One, who alone can meet the needs of man.

That is what came out in John's ministry, as he pointed to Jesus. A remarkable man was John; he was a little bit of the ascetic, a man sojourning in the wilderness, and living simply on locusts and wild honey. He was a downright, sterling, intensely devoted man. From one end of the land to the other he goes; he has but one message, one word to deliver, and he rings it out all over Israel. What is it? Repent! "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). I tell you what it is, men, God bids you repent. Ah! sinner! if you have never repented yet, it is high time you did. Why did John say, "Repent"? Because he saw the end of things coming, when "the ax is laid unto the root of the trees" (Matt. 3:10). If you lay an ax at the root of the tree, what is the next thing? Down comes the tree. The tree may have been good to look at outside, but when it comes down, what is often found then-that it is rotten inside.

That is a picture of man, who is very nice outside, but, at heart, he is at enmity to God; he is rotten inside. I tell you what man is like. I have sometimes gone into a shop, and purchased a beautiful pear. I have taken it away, thinking that it was beautiful, and when I got home I began to pare the skin off, and there was a little bit of a spot in it. Paring it still further, the spot got bigger still. I cut another piece off, it was more rotten still. Ah! you say, it is rotten to the core. Yes, and you, sinner, are the pear; you are the man. You are rotten to the very core; there is not a good thing in you. I know that man says, I will try and do good, but the Holy Spirit says, "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12). You will have to learn that there is no good thing in you, and that nothing good can come out of you.

It is a grand thing when a man gets down on his knees in real repentance. Some, of those who heard John, “were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.” Others, self-righteous people, rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. At length, when John was upon the banks of Jordan, one day, he sees Jesus coming towards him, his heart swells, his tongue is loosed, and out comes the blessed truth, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

In pressing upon sinners to get down and own their sins, John had never told them how they could get rid of those sins. But, when he sees Jesus coming, he proclaims these beautiful words, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” The first man brought sin into the world, and this man, God’s Lamb, was to take away sin. Have you ever had to do with Him? Have you ever come into contact with Him? This was His character; He was the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. And then the Baptist reiterates his witness, “This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me” (John 1:30). He was an eternal Being; He was the Son of God. “And I knew Him not: but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:31-34). He saw Jesus, and, as we read elsewhere, baptized Him, and then saw the Holy Spirit coming down like a dove, and abiding upon Him.

You remember in the days of Noah, when the flood was upon the earth, Noah sent out a dove in order to see what was the state of matters, and in a short time the dove came back, for she found no resting-place. He sent her out seven days after, and again she came back, but this time with an olive leaf in her mouth. When she was sent forth the third time, she did not return, she had whereon to rest. When the Holy Spirit fell upon the blessed Lord Jesus Christ in the form of a dove, what had happened? For over four thousand years the Holy Spirit had been searching in vain over this earth to find a holy, sinless, spotless man on whom to come and abide. At length here was the One upon whom He could rest. He, so to speak, like the dove, had not found any place whereon to rest. And why did not Noah’s dove rest? Were there not plenty of bodies upon which it might alight? Yes, the water was, so to speak, alive with carrion; corpses floated upon the water everywhere, but these afforded no resting-place. And the Holy Spirit had brooded over the world all these years, and had seen but moral carrion-man, a wretched, ruined, godless, sinful creature in himself. True He had come upon men like Balaam or Saul, but He left them. He had come upon men like David and Isaiah, but He left them. But here was a holy, spotless man, and He came and abode upon Him. Because Jesus was perfect, sinless, and holy, the Holy Spirit came and dwelt in Him. He was in His moral perfection the delight of the Father, the Lamb of God, the Son of God; and, more than that, He who received the Holy Spirit would baptize with the Holy Spirit. That is, He takes your sins away and gives you the Holy Spirit. What a wonderful thing! The One who can take away the sins of men can also give them the Holy Spirit; can give them the needed power for the enjoyment of His life dwelling in their souls.

John gives this testimony to Jesus, and what takes place? Nobody followed Jesus that day, but on the next day John lost two of his disciples. Then, as he contemplated the Lord, he said, “Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36.) He does not add, “which taketh away the sin of the world.” In contemplative delight, as his eyes fell upon Jesus, his heart meditated upon the precious Person of the Lamb of God, and he simply says, “Behold the Lamb of God!” He had learned to look upon the glory of the Lord. And what now? Two of his disciples left John, and began to follow Jesus. It was the right kind of ministry that; what I call the ministry of a Person. It is that which will lead souls to follow Jesus, and Jesus only. The ministry that attracts men to itself is not what is wanted. What is wanted is the ministry that attracts men’s hearts to Christ, and Christ only. That is the finest ministry of all, and I have no doubt John was delighted when he saw the disciples leaving him, and following Jesus.

“Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye?” Is not that striking? Now, I do not doubt, but that from glory tonight, Jesus is saying to each heart in this hall, “What seek ye?” Come now, answer it! What seek ye? What is your great object in life? Is it money? Is it pleasure? Is it fame, or is it Christ? What seek ye? What were they seeking? It was Jesus, nothing but Jesus. “They said unto him, Master, where dwellest thou?” Think! What is the meaning of that? He said, “What seek ye?” They reply, “Master, where dwellest thou?” Jesus’ dwelling-place was at Capernaum, a very ungodly city. It is called “his own city” in the ninth of Matthew. What did they want? They wanted to know the spot where they would be sure of finding Him. What does He say? “Come and see” (John 1:39). “They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.” They spent with Him about two hours. Honestly, now, did ever you spend two solid hours with Jesus? Did you? Then I will guarantee that if you spent two hours with Jesus, when you came out you wanted somebody else to do the same. I never knew a man yet that really enjoyed the presence of the Lord that did not want somebody else to enjoy it as well.

That is the peculiar beauty of Christianity. You want to get others to share in its joy. The more you give away the more you get; the more you scatter, the more you receive. You cannot be large-hearted without gaining. Why, those who do not give, have not got much enjoyment themselves. I find people say to me, We never speak about these things. They have, so to say, got their coats buttoned; I know the reason why. There is nothing inside. If they had plenty inside, it would soon come out. The moment you get your heart full of Christ, you cannot keep it to yourself; you must tell it to every one else. If a man tries to keep it dark, then be sure the light is very feeble. The man who gets right into contact with Christ goes at once to tell others, his nearest friend perhaps, his father, mother, sister, or brother. It is always the same story. You always find the heart that has got hold of Christ wants other people to know Jesus too. I am not addressing you as a preacher, for I do not profess to be a preacher, but I speak to you because I enjoy the presence and love of the Lord myself, and I want others to enjoy the same privilege. It will do you good and will not do me any harm, but give me great joy, if you get to know the blessed Saviour I know.

What took place in our chapter? “One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon,” and what does he say? “We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ” (John 1:41). We have found Him; come along and get to know Him too. I do not know that he got Peter to go right away; how long he took about the job I do not know, but this I know, he never gave it up until he got him. Have you been converted? Yes. Well, have you a brother who is not? Then start tonight to bring him to Jesus, and give him no peace until you bring him to Jesus. “And he brought him to Jesus” (John 1:42) is what we read of Andrew. I never heard of Andrew preaching, and you hear little more of Andrew in the Gospels-he knew the lad who had the five loaves and two fishes (John 6:9) — but when you get up into the glory by-and-by, and see the Lord giving the rewards, I think you will find that a big reward will be Andrew’s. Do you not see that he was the means of the conversion of the man most used of God in those early gospel days, in bringing blessing to others. Look at it! I think I see Andrew on the day of Pentecost, when Peter is preaching, and the Lord using him to the blessing of three thousand souls, and getting them converted to God. I conclude Andrew would be rejoicing that he was the means of

bringing Peter to Jesus. I cannot preach, he might say, but Peter can, and I was the means of bringing him to Jesus. Ah! think of that. Fellow-believer, you might be the means of bringing a great preacher to the Saviour. It was the word of a poor old shoemaker that led Spurgeon to Christ.

I was traveling in the West of England last year, and in the corner of the carriage there was a very distinguished looking English clergyman, with a book in his hands. I soon saw that it was the Bible. Presently the train stopped at a station, and the man sitting beside him got out. In a minute, in got a sweep, fresh from his morning's work, with his brush and bag, and as black as a chimney himself. He hesitated, as he noticed that there was room only for one, and said he would stand. "Sit down, my friend," said the parson, and the sweep sat down between me and the clergyman. The train went on, and at the next station the sweep got out. A man in the carriage grumbled out that it was a shame to let a man like that into the carriage; it was against the bye-laws and rules of the company, and they ought to be prosecuted for allowing it. "Oh," said I, "there is nothing in a little clean soot; there are worse things in the world than that," "Indeed there are," said the clergyman, "there is far greater dirt and degradation than that." "What may that be?" said I. "It is the degradation of man's state as a sinner." "And how do you propose to meet that?" I asked. "There is only one way in which it can be met; it is by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ." So the poor sweep was the means of bringing the gospel into that carriage, and it came out splendidly. We talked on, and presently the clergyman said: "I will tell you how I was converted. I was a midshipman on board a ship, and when rounding Cape Horn on a very stormy night, a godly mate on board, in the same watch as myself, took me quietly alone, and spoke to me about Jesus. God blessed the words of the mate, and I was turned to the Lord through his testimony to Christ, on board that ship that night." "Thank God!" I said. "What happened then?" "I came home as soon as I could, for I had a brother here. I told him the gospel as clearly as I could, and, thank God! he too was converted. You perhaps would not recognize my brother, but he has been the means of sending eight hundred missionaries to heathen lands since that day."

At the time I thought that was just like Andrew. That is just the way the gospel spreads. If you enjoy Jesus, you will want somebody else to get to know Him. It does not need great preaching, or brilliant eloquent preachers to get people converted. I have heard of an infidel who was converted most simply. Perhaps you have heard of him. He did not believe in the Lord at all; and he lived in the West Indies. Sunday was a very miserable day with him; it is ever so with the unconverted. It is always a dismal day for them. Why, it is the happiest day of the week for me; the other six days are uncommonly happy, but Sunday beats them all, I find, for one is usually freer to worship, and work for, the Lord. Not so did the infidel find his Sundays, for there was no racing, no theater, or anything of that kind going on. Now there happened to be a godly minister preaching in a chapel nearby, and some of the man's family went there. One Sunday he resolved to go to hear him; not exactly to listen to, but to criticize the preacher. It is the fashion; I do not mind if you do it; you are welcome to criticize me. I am here to warn you to flee from the damnation of hell, and the judgment of God. The infidel came every Sunday afterward, and the minister thought, I must try to reach him, so he prepared a most wonderful set of sermons. When they were all delivered, lo, and behold! the infidel was converted, and made a happy confession of Christ. Well, thought the minister, he will be sure to come to tell me about it; but day by day went by, and he never came. The parson then resolved to go and see him. He called at the infidel's house, or rather, at the house of the man who had been an infidel, and was received most courteously. "I have heard good news of you," said the preacher. "It is quite true, thank God," was the man's answer, "I have got to know that my sins are forgiven," and he made a most happy confession of Christ. "I am so glad," said the preacher, "pray tell me which of the sermons was instrumental in causing this change?" "The sermons," said the man, "made not a bit of difference. They went over me like water off a duck's back." "Tell me, then, what has wrought the change?" "It happened one night while leaving your chapel. An old negress slipped, and fell upon the steps, and I just put out my hand and picked the old woman up. Oh I thank you, Massa,' she said; 'you love Jesus, don't you, my blessed Jesus?' These words went to my heart like an arrow, for I felt that this old black woman knew a Being, a Saviour, of whom I was totally ignorant." "You love Jesus, my blessed Jesus!" was what converted him. That is what will win souls for Christ.

The words, "We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus," tell us Andrew's sermon, and its effect. What a discovery these fishermen made. Andrew discovered the Messiah, and Simon discovered his Lord. I do not think he was easily brought to Jesus. He was a wonderfully natural man, Peter; and hence it is very likely that he was slow to go to Jesus. The last thing a man does is to go to Jesus. But Andrew somehow constrained him, and "he brought him to Jesus." That is just what I want to do tonight; I want to bring you to Jesus. "And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (John 1:42). Very simple words these! But that change of his name was, I doubt not, the moment of his conversion, the moment of his salvation.

I have no doubt Peter thought it was an extraordinary thing for the Lord to change his name. I have always been known by the name of Simon, and He has taken upon Him to change my name. "Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." Let us see, then, the Lord's meaning. The changing of a name always implied that the one whose name was changed was subject to him who changed his name (see Gen. 17:5-15; 32:28, 35:10; 41:45; Dan. 1:7; 5:12). At that moment the Lord told Simon, You belong to Me; from this minute you are Mine. I do not think Peter forgot it, though he did not take in the truth fully. It was sovereign love that spoke there; and it was a divine Person who spoke to him. He knew what He was saying, and He changed Peter's name. That is what takes place when the Lord meets the sinner. You pass from being a sinner to being a saint. You pass through a change of name, just as Jacob, which means "supplanter," had his name changed to Israel, "a prince with God." What does the Lord say here? "Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." And what is a stone? A bit of a rock! And who was the rock? Christ. Did Peter understand that? Perhaps not then; but you remember afterward, when Jesus asked, "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" that presently "Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I also say unto thee, That thou art Peter" [He confirms his name], "and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:13-18).

What is the rock? Peter? Not a bit of it! Christ is the rock, and Peter is the stone put on the rock. That is a very good place to be. I never knew a stone yet that sunk through a rock. And I never knew anybody that was resting on the Rock of Ages, resting on Jesus, that was lost. Have you become a stone? How do you become a stone? Peter tells us: "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious; ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5). From that moment when Simon came to Jesus, and had his name changed to Peter, he became a stone. Though he did not then know what it was to be built in, he learned he was a stone, and soon after he knew what the building was of which he became an integral part. That, he learned, was the house of God, built upon the rock Christ. Peter was a stone, and so is every converted soul in this house tonight. My brother in Christ, you are a stone; and Christ would like you to know what it is to be a stone in

His building. “To whom coming, as unto a living stone...ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house.”

We become living stones as soon as we come in contact with Christ, who is the Living Stone. This moment the blessed Lord speaks of when He says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live” (John 5:25). The voice of the Son of God went down into the heart of Simon, the son of Bar-Jona, quickening him, and I think Peter became acquainted with a change within himself, though I do not judge he quite understood what was wrapped up in the Lord’s enigmatical expression. Indeed, he was like many a person whom the gospel reaches. He knows a change has come over him, but he cannot explain it. He becomes an altered man, though he cannot tell what has taken place. I think at that moment when Simon found Jesus, he apprehended that there was a tie between his soul and the Saviour. The voice of the Son of God entered into the heart of Peter, and what he heard was this, “Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.” You and I are stones from the time we derive from Christ. Do you know what a Christian is? He is a little bit of Christ. The Christian derives his life, his righteousness, his grace, and his sanctification from Him. He lives in the life of Christ, before God. I do not think Peter learned all that at that moment, but he learned it afterward. It was, notwithstanding, a wonderful moment in his history; but he did not follow Jesus straight off.

What we read just now, in the fifth of Luke, showed that the Lord had gone on His way preaching the Word, but I do not think Peter, followed Him then. He was like many souls, perhaps there are some here tonight, who though converted have not at once confessed Christ. I trust God’s grace will touch their hearts, and lead them to boldly confess, and then fully follow the Lord.

Six months ago a young man came to me and said, “I want to thank you.” “What for?” I said. “For the influence you have had on my life,” he rejoined. “My dear fellow,” I replied, “I never saw you before.” “All the same, you have had an influence on my life. You remember sending me a book six months ago.” “Oh,” I said, “you are a student, and received my book, Young Men of Scripture. Did you attend the students’ meetings?” “Yes.” “And were you converted then?” “I believe I was; but I made a great mistake — I did not confess Christ. Last night I heard a servant of God preaching, and he pressed upon us the necessity of confession, and I have come to see you about it.” He did not follow outright at first, but now, he is a devoted servant of Christ. There are many cases like that.

But now let us look at the way in which the Lord leads Peter more fully to see the light, as recorded in the fifth of Luke. He was busy ministering the Word of God. “And it came to pass, that as the people pressed round upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret” (Luke 5:1). Christ was a wonderful minister of the word. He always spoke so that the people could hear Him. He wanted now to address this large company, and He looked round for a place where they could see Him and heal. Him; in plain language, He looked for a pulpit. I do not mean a pulpit, as we know such. A platform does as well, so long as the speaker can see the people, and they can hear him. That is the point. And He “saw two ships standing by the lake; but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship” (Luke 5:2-3). It was a wonderful scene, by the side of Galilee’s blue lake at Bethsaida, “The House of Fish,” or as others put it, “The Place of Nets”; where Simon and Andrew resided (John 1:44), and with their partners James and John, and their father Zebedee, plied their calling along with their hired servants (see Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:10). Evidently, they had a good large fishing business.

They were at that moment mending their nets, when Jesus “entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land” (Luke 5:3). He does not say, Peter, lend me your boat He took it. What did He teach by His action? Simon, you and all that you have belong to Me; I taught you in the first of John that you belonged to Me. I changed your name, now I must teach you something else — that all you have belongs to Me. Then, “He sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.”

I think, if you take the trouble to trace out the gospel narrative, you will find, that what the Lord ministered, was what we have related in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew; the seven parables, beginning with the sower, who went out to sow his seed. That seed fell, some by the wayside, some on a rock, some among thorns, while other seed fell on good ground, bringing forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred fold. As the Lord poured forth that wonderful ministry, Peter was listening; and doubtless some of that beautiful stream of precious truth went down into the fisherman’s heart. It was a lovely scene. Picture the blue waters of the lake of Gennesaret, the surrounding ships, and the “great multitudes who stood on the shore” (Matt. 13:2), listening eagerly to this Prince of preachers. This was the most populous part of all Israel at the time, and along the western coast of the Sea of Galilee, and specially at Bethsaida, the fishing population was very large. True, they were a simple people, and I wish you were just as simple in heart as they.

Well, the Lord ministered to these poor simple folk, and when it was all over, He, as it were, said, “I am going to pay you, Peter, for the loan of your boat.” “Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draft” (Luke 5:4). And what does Simon say? “Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing.” That was experience speaking, and what would reason add? When no fish could be taken by us in the night-time, it is not likely they will be taken in the daylight. There were no fish taken there in the night, how then could you expect to catch them in broad daylight? That is what reason would say; but do you know what faith said? Faith is always obedient. Peter illustrates faith in his answer: “Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes; and their net brake.” Now some of you here tonight may say, I have been letting down the net for a long time, and yet I do not seem to get anything in it; I do not get a blessing. Never mind, let down the net again tonight. And if you let down your net at the voice of Jesus, there will happen in your case just what happened with Simon — you will get such a blessing you will not be able to hold it.

But see what happens now in Simon’s history. To him this large haul of fish revealed the hand and presence of God. There was no room in Simon’s boat for all the fish, and he is about to make another grand discovery as he sees the fish hauled over the boat’s side. I think his eye would brighten at the sight, and doubtless his first thought be, What a grand day’s fishing is this; this is the best haul we have ever had, for “they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.” Then, as Simon stands in his boat, he forgets all about the fish, and all about his business; he thinks only of Jesus and himself. “When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). What a strange scene! What led that man to go down before Jesus in that way? Why fell he at Jesus’ knees? I will tell you. It was the light which burst into his soul, the light from God, which entered his heart. As he saw that wonderful catch of fish, the truth flashed into his soul. The light of God went anew into Peter’s soul, and the deepest chambers of his heart were made manifest. He learns that he is in the presence of God. He learns his own sinfulness, though not a word was said about it, and he falls at Jesus’ knees a repentant, self-judged, self-condemned man; and, I think, above all, self-condemned for this — I heard his voice months ago: He changed my name, but I never began to follow Him. Alas! I have never followed Him. He felt the sin of his soul doubly. He was in the power of real repentance and self-judgment.

Let me ask, Have you ever gone through a crisis like this? Have you ever got down at the feet of Jesus, confessing your guilt? If not, friend, you must. Peter was in his right place. Every Spirit-born soul goes through similar exercises. Scripture abounds in instances. Look at Job. Like all the rest of us, he was self-righteous, and self-complacent, till the light of God shone on him, and then see the change. For the first forty chapters of the book he is as busy as he can be justifying himself, but then he sees God, and collapses, saying, “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6). Down comes the patriarch, and down comes this stalwart fisherman. It reminds me of another scene, in Isaiah’s history, where he says: “I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa. 6:1-3). And when Isaiah saw and heard all this, he cried, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts” (Isa. 6:5). The glory of the Lord’s presence broke Isaiah down, even as it did Job, and where the patriarch and the prophet were we now behold Simon, the stalwart Galilean fisherman. Where is he? Down in the dust before Jesus.

My friend, have you ever been brought down there? Thank God if you have. I have been down there, and felt Jesus lift me up. I have known, too, what God said to Job in his day, and what he said to Isaiah. And what was that? Just what Jesus says to Simon here — “Fear not!” Jesus said to him, as it were, I am enough for you. That is what Simon got. He found that he could not do without the Lord, all unworthy and sinful, as he learned himself to be. When down in the depths of repentance, and self-judgment, and utterly broken down before the Lord, he learned His grace in a very special way, as Jesus said to him, “Simon, fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men” (Luke 5:10). In effect He said, “I changed your name last time; I shall change your occupation now,” When Simon first met the Lord his name was changed. Before that moment he was a sinner going about in this scene only anxious to catch fish, but now Jesus says to him, “Henceforth thou shalt catch men.” Blessed, joyful mission!

But, perhaps you say to me, Have we all to give up our business to become Christians? Certainly not. That is not at all necessary, nor is it the point here. The picture before us here is of one who turns his back upon what was his world. I read now that, “When they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him” (Luke 5:11). They feel compelled to follow Jesus now. It is not a question of, must I give up my business, nor was it simply a question of turning the back upon the ordinary occupation. Peter, I have no doubt, says, I have done with the fish; I am going to follow the Lord. I am going to catch men. And he began to follow Him, although at that time his trade was more prosperous than ever.

When are you going to begin to follow the Lord? Do I hear you say, I should like to come to Jesus when I am getting near death? You only want to give Him then the remnant of a badly spent life. No, that is not what I care to see; I like when a young man comes to Christ, at the outset of his life, when he is fresh, and when he can give the greater part of his days to the service of the Lord. I sometimes see, as I go down a street, a placard with the words, “Retiring from business.” I know what that means. The business is retiring from the man. A man never retires from business when it is prospering. When he thinks of retiring, he sells out. He is not such a fool as to give it up when it is prosperous. If on the wane, most likely he cannot sell it, so he then puts his notice, “Retiring from business,” in the window. Business was not retiring from Peter the day he gave it up. Never was it so bright as when he turned his back upon it, and went out to follow the Lord.

There are some here perhaps who have never been the Lord’s before. Now, I beseech you, yield Him your heart, your life, your whole strength — yourself — spirit, soul, and body. Was it not a proper, and a beautiful thing, in this case that Peter followed Him? I think I can see him go home, and, meeting his wife, tell her, that he means to follow the Master. Possibly she inquired, Have you caught any fish? Yes! Never had such a catch. And, where are they? I left them on the shore; I am going to follow the Master. And who is to keep us if you do that? How are we to be sustained if you have given up fishing, and are going to follow Him? “Come ye after Me” were his words (Mark 1:17), says Peter; He told me to follow Him, and I am now going to obey Him. It must have been a testing time for Peter as well as his wife, for at this moment in his own house “Simon’s wife’s mother lay sick of a fever” (Mark 1:30). You see Peter was a nice, kind-hearted man; he took his mother-in-law into his house. Not many young men take their mothers-in-law in; they are often regarded as rather a doubtful blessing. That is the way of the world, my friend. But there she was, sick, and Jesus, going in, cured her, so that the fever left her, and she was able to minister unto them. It is wonderful to see the ways the Lord takes of putting the soul right with Him. Do you think that when Peter started to follow Jesus after this, his wife would raise any objections? I trow not. The Lord had by the saving of her mother’s life won her heart. I think she would say, It is all right now. Stick to Him, cleave to Him, follow Him; do not keep any distance from Him, for I can trust Him now. He has shown me that He has an interest in me. That is the way God often works. The Lord came into Peter’s house, and the wife’s heart became assured of His deep interest in all that concerned the house. This fisherman is called to follow Jesus, and to make his home circumstances easy, confidence is begotten in the wife’s heart by His care of those at home.

Friends, He is a wonderful Lord you and I are called to follow. The Lord give you grace to follow Him. Who will start? But to find Him is one thing; to follow Him is another. You learn what it is to become “a living stone” as you come in contact with Christ, and you learn to follow Him when He eclipses everything else in your soul’s vision. Possibly you say, If I were in different circumstances I would follow Christ. No, you would not. Your circumstances are the best if only you knew it. You know what reins are for; you know what they are to the horse. They keep the creature in order, and so do your circumstances. They keep you in order. If the banks are broken down, out comes the river, and spoils everything. If the reins break, what happens? There is generally a smash. Do you see? Do not you be troubled about your circumstances. You will find that the Lord will sustain you in any circumstances, and even make them the channels of His grace. Cleave to the Lord, and be devoted to the Lord. Give Him the right place in your heart here, and He will sustain you. “FOLLOW THOU ME” would seem to be His last word to Peter (John 21:22). Has it no voice to you and me?

Forty Days of Scripture, Resurrection Scenes: the Journey to Emmaus: The Lord Jesus' Forty Days

(Luke 24:13-35)

We have looked on two previous evenings, beloved friends, at the first two appearings to His own of the Lord in resurrection. He appeared to Mary Magdalene first, we are told, and then secondly to her Galilean friends. The scripture before us tonight gives us the three other

manifestations of the Lord on the day on which He rose. I have no doubt that they teach a very special truth regarding resurrection, as presented by the evangelist Luke. If it has not already struck you, you may read this twenty-fourth of Luke with fresh interest, bearing in mind the fact that, if you had only got Luke's Gospel, you would think the Lord was only one day on earth after He was risen, for Luke's record commences and concludes with facts that would all appear to have transpired in the one day.

The day begins with the women seeing Him, continues with the two going to Emmaus, and having

His blessed company for at least, I should say, a couple of hours; then comes out the truth that He has already been seen by Peter; and lastly, He is found in the midst of His own, makes Himself known to them, eats in their presence, teaches them, gives them a commission, leads them out to Bethany, and then passes up to heaven. Had we only Matthew's Gospel, which does not give an account of His ascension, we should think the Lord was still on earth, and, if we had no other Gospel but Luke's, we should think His sojourn here was just one day. And, in a certain sense, it is exactly that. It is essentially the resurrection day, with all the blessing, liberty, joy, and apprehension of God's mind and love that characterize it. It is a great thing for a Christian to get the sense "I am living in the resurrection day."

There is a great deal of instruction connected with the appearing of the Lord to the disciples in the upper room, which I shall touch on another night, as recorded by the evangelist John. But there are beautiful points, which should be carefully noted in this interview which Luke alone presents. His Gospel especially depicts the Lord in what I may call the human side of His character. And we must not forget that He is still a real, living, tender-hearted Man, and as much so, the moment I am speaking to you, as He was in the days of His flesh down here. Many a saint has not so got hold of Him, and that accounts for their distress in sorrow, and their dejection and depression in difficulties as they go through this scene. They have not learned that the risen and glorified Jesus is the same Jesus that passed along through this scene full of grace and tender sympathy. The full exhibition of all that God is, in His nature and being, was made known in Christ, but, apart from that, He was a real, true, tender-hearted, gracious, holy, yea, a perfect Man, with all the exquisite sensibilities that belong to man, either Godward or manward as the case may be. And if perfect in His life when, in the days of His flesh, He trod this sorrow-stricken scene, He is unchanged in resurrection, proof of which is before you in the lovely way in which Luke presents Him when, alive from the dead, He seeks out and cheers His own in their varied states, through the hours of what rolls before us as one day.

Now comes the question, Who saw the Lord on the third occasion this day? I could not dogmatize, because Scripture does not speak, but I infer that Peter was the one who saw the Lord after the women of Galilee. You may rightly ask me my reason for so thinking. Well, when the two who went to Emmaus come back to Jerusalem, and get into the upper room, they immediately hear: "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon" (Luke 24:34). That was the greeting they got as they entered the door; and the interview evidently had taken place previously. I will tell you my reason for so thinking. If the Lord has His eye, in this meeting tonight, more upon one than another, it is upon the unhappy heart that has dishonored Him, disgraced His name, distressed the brethren, played into the hinds of the enemy, and more than that, wrought for its own misery, after the fashion Peter had wrought. I think if the Lord has His eye specially on anybody, it is upon the backslider? And was Peter a blackslider? That is not the point. Are you a backslider? Ah, brethren, backsliding is an awful thing.

But what is so precious to note here is the deep interest of Christ in desiring to recover and put right a heart that has in any measure got wrong. You may not have gone the length of oaths and curses, but, like Peter, my friend, if you knew Jesus better in days gone by than you do now, if His company, His love, were then more the paramount necessity of your life, than at the present moment, it is because the things of the world and the flesh have come in to hinder and spoil you. He knows very well that your heart is not happy, nor at rest; and I tell you what He would like to do. He would like to recover and make you happier than ever. If He would not, I do not know Him. But that is the Christ I know.

I shall not touch on Peter's restoration tonight, because it will come in its own place more fitly when we look at his public restoration, which was on the seventh occasion the Lord was seen. What Luke here records is his private restoration to his Lord. But there was a public restoration also to be effected, and that we are permitted to see by the Sea of Galilee, as recorded in John 21. I do not doubt that Peter got then and there the sense of absolute restoration in every sense of the word.

And now let us go back to the two going to Emmaus. I do not know a more blessed journey than the one with Jesus to Emmaus. I daresay some of you very intelligent people will tell me they were going quite the wrong way. Well, I will not deny it. But what charms my heart is this, that Christ is at their side to put them right. I am not so sure that they were very wrong, for I have little doubt they lived there. I have the deep conviction they were man and wife. You may say they had left Jerusalem, which should have been their center. I know what you mean, but when Christ filled their hearts to the full, the eight mile walk back seemed nothing to them. You will see presently they got to a point when they could tell Him that the day was too far spent for Him to go farther, but, when He filled their hearts to overflowing, it was not too late for them to go back the eight miles to tell others the sweet news they possessed. Like bees going home from a good day's gathering, they are found in the hive sharing with the others the wonderful spoil they have gathered.

And now see how it happened. The tidings of the Lord's resurrection had evidently blown abroad. Mary Magdalene had come in and told her tale. Her Galilean friends had also come and told the apostles. You may think it a strange thing that the testimony of these dear, devoted women was not believed. Make what you like of it, but it was so. In fact, the Spirit of God tells us that their testimony was regarded as "idle tales" (Luke 24:1). The resurrection of Jesus, the victory of redeeming love, the testimony to all that was accomplished in His death, when it was first promulgated, was then, even by His own, regarded as an idle tale. Little wonder there is infidelity to day. Look at the semi-infidelity rampant among God's own people today as to the inspiration of the Scriptures, and "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

And now we read, "And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs" (Luke 24:13). That is about eight miles. "And they talked together of all these things which had happened" (Luke 24:14). Their hearts were deeply interested in Christ. God has been careful to tell us what they were speaking about. They could think of nothing else, though I do not doubt they were bewildered by what had happened to the One they loved. "And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them" (Luke 24:15). Now I beg you to notice that little word "Himself" I think the great point of Luke 24 is "Himself." Presently you will find, "He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). A little later we find, "Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them" (Luke 24:36). And then again, "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself" (Luke 24:39). The great point is a risen Man, the same Jesus, but risen. That is the point undoubtedly of the evangelist in

this chapter.

There are many Christians today who think of Jesus in His life and pathway, and yet in their hearts they are not at home with Him. Why? Because somehow to them the Jesus in resurrection is a different kind of Jesus, a little further off. Something has changed Him. I do not doubt that is why the Spirit of God says so strikingly in the Epistle of John: “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:20-21). I do not think it is at all the question of earthly idols here. It is to keep yourself from any thought of God that does not find its perfect counterpart in Jesus. Because God is only known in Him. If I have a thought of God that is not expressed in Jesus, I have an idol before my mind, and not the true God. Therefore I believe the Spirit of God lays great emphasis here upon this word “Jesus himself.”

What was it drew the Lord to these wayfarers going to Emmaus? I do not doubt it was the perfect knowledge He had of what was going on in their hearts. Because, next to recovering a backslider, if He finds a saint in bewilderment, distress, or perplexity, how He loves to draw near and put that person right. Have you not known the Lord drawing near to you many a time, when you have been worried and perplexed, and you could not exactly unravel things? How He has by His Word, or some bit of ministry through one of His servants, come in and met you, and helped you. Just like the thirteenth chapter of John, where He takes a basin of water, and a towel, and washes His disciples’ feet, so as to put them at perfect rest in His presence. Oh for an adequate sense of how He loves us. Have you any sense of His personal love for you? You say, “I know He loves the Church.” You may know that and yet be miserable. But when you come to this, “He loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20), things become personal. You may depend upon it, that what the Lord delights in is thy apprehension of His own personal affection, and also the responsive love that flows from our hearts to Himself. Do you know what He looks for? Two kinds of heart. A “boiling heart” and a “burning heart.” He does not care for any other but these. In Psalm 45 it speaks of a “boiling heart.” Alas! oftentimes our hearts are not even on the simmer. When you put your finger into a pot that is just on the simmer, it is not hot enough to make you pull your finger out. But a boiling pot, ah there is warmth there. What the Lord looks for is a heart with warmth in it. In the Psalm alluded to I get the way the love comes out. Here, I get the way it is produced.

You say, “I wish my heart would burn.” Just take a journey to Emmaus with Jesus, and I will guarantee your heart will burn by the time you get there. Now look again at these two travelers, as Jesus joins them. We read, “But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him” (Luke 24:16). The eyes of a great many saints are “holden” today. I wonder whether you have ever noticed that their eyes were “holden” in verse 16, and their eyes were “opened” in verse 31. Now, dear friends, Why was that? Lots of things are allowed to come in and hinder the soul. Well, you say, they were not intelligent. Ah, I tell you what will open the eyes — a burning heart. When your affection is right you will very soon see things. People sometimes say, “We do not see.” The question is, Do you want to see? If you were to see such and such things, it is very likely they would cut you off from a good deal you are going on with now. I believe at the bottom we sometimes do not want to see the truth. Our hearts are very like Zipporah’s. She said, “A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision” (Ex. 4:26). She did not like death any more than you or I like it. But she knew very well if she was to keep her husband, her lad had to be circumcised. She had to accept death. It is a great thing to have the “burning” heart and the “open” eye. The Lord give both to us.

“And He said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?” (Luke 24:17). Suppose the Lord crossed our path today and said, “What are you talking about?” Do you truly think He would find us talking about Him, His interests, and His things? It is very good for us if it be so. But if not, we shall have just to own how true was the word of the Lord, “My people have forgotten Me days without number” (Jer. 2:32). Blessed be His name, He has never forgotten us.

And now we read, “And one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering, said unto Him, Art Thou only a stranger in Jerusalem?” Now you might have thought it strange because I said just now this couple were man and wife. I have pretty good reason for thinking so. Here we get the name of the man — Cleopas. If you turn to the nineteenth chapter of John, you there apparently get his wife spoken about. “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene” (John 19:25). Then you might say to me, That would not be conclusive. No, but their invitation to the Lord, “Abide with us” (Luke 24:29), would show that they lived together, that is pretty certain. And there is yet another reason I can advance. Do you know why the Spirit of God in the fifteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians, when citing the testimonies to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, selects only five out of the eleven appearings? Turn to it and just see what I mean.

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that He was seen of James: then of all the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:3-7). These are only five out of the eleven times He was seen. Mary Magdalene is omitted, and her Galilean friends; the two going to Emmaus, the appearing of the Lord in the upper room on the first day, the appearing likewise at the Sea of Galilee when the seven saw Him, and the appearing down in Galilee, recorded in Matthew 28, are all left out. In every one of these six instances, unbelief of the testimony to Christ’s resurrection was displayed, and in most of them you will find women were present. For some reason or other God has been pleased to omit every instance in which women were present.

On the first day of the week, in the upper room, I conclude that women were present, when Thomas was not (Luke 24:33; John 20:19). We are not told that any were present the next week when He was seen “of the twelve.” It was manifestly not an apostolic company only that we find in Luke 24, because to begin with, Thomas was not there, and there were present a great many others beside the apostles. How do you know that? Read verse 33. There evidently was a large company. The disciples generally were gathered together, and that depicts the truth of the assembly, and the Lord was in their midst. However, I do not want to trace out that side of the truth tonight.

I have therefore, from the foregoing considerations, the deepest conviction that one of these two going to Emmaus was a woman. And it is beautiful to see that they were both of one heart. They communed and reasoned together as they went, and Jesus was the burden of their talk. If you are married, I hope you do the same. It is just what ought to be, and it is very blessed to see that when God gives you a record of this beautiful resurrection scene, He shows you a man and wife with one heart and one soul, walking to their house, and speaking together of His Son, and soon they have the blessed Lord going together with them. That was a happy house that night, and unhappy is the house that is not of that sort.

Well, Cleopas answers the Stranger's query by "Art Thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?" (Luke 24:18). Very simple and very touching is that answer given to the total Stranger that addressed them. You might say, "Why did they not know Him?" Turn to Mark 16 for a moment, and I think you will get the reason. "After that He appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them" (Mark 16:12-13). Their testimony was not believed, just as, apparently, the disciples had not accepted the testimony of the "certain women of our company," who earlier in the day "astonished" them by saying "He was alive" (Luke 24:22-23).

That was the reason, possibly, why their eye was holden. The Lord sometimes puts Himself in our company that we may learn just where we are in the history of our souls. He likes us to be real and genuine. We may be hypocrites before each other — that is, one may appear to be what he is not. Verily that is our danger. But He always likes to see the truth. He looks for the truth, and I do not think when He finds the truth, as He did find it in them, that the Lord was in any sense angry with them, though He may rebuke them for their unbelief. But for the Lord to find you and me true and real, on the way, is a great thing. I think He values and estimates it. And what does He find here? What I have no doubt was very attractive to His heart, a sorrowful and unintelligent couple, but a couple deeply interested in Him and His things. This led to His inquiry — "What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto Him, Art Thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days. And He said unto them, What things? And they said unto Him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people" (Luke 24:17-19).

Do you think there was no joy to His heart to hear this couple speak out what they felt with regard to Him? He loves to hear us talk about Him. Do you not know what it says in the Old Testament? "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name" (Mal. 3:16). Here were two weary pilgrims on earth, and He hearkens to them. Listen to them, as they talk to Him in the most beautiful way, and describe what their feelings were in regard to Himself, though they knew Him not at the moment. He was a very interested listener, as they continue, "And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him" (Luke 24:20). That is what Israel had done. And now they tell the disappointment of their own hearts — "But we trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." They thought of the King: they thought of the glory and the establishment of the kingdom; and I do not doubt they were disappointed and dejected. Have you never been dejected? What a wonderful thing if the Lord draws near to you and brings Himself in as the spring of peace, joy, and gladness to your oppressed heart — the blessed heavenly answer to the many things here which have disappointed or dejected you. Their hopes connected with Him had all been dashed to the ground by His death, and apparently all was gone, though they admit their astonishment at what they had heard, but, evidently, had not believed.

"And beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulcher; and when they found not His body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive" (Luke 24:21-23). They tell the story very simply. Then they add, "And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulcher, and found it even so as the women had said; but Him they saw not" (Luke 24:24). There is a volume in those four words, "Him they saw not." Do you know why they did not see Him? They did not expect to. Did you see the Lord last Lord's Day morning in the meeting for the breaking of bread? "Oh, it was rather a dull meeting." Was Christ dull? "Oh, well you know things were not at all bright." Ah, you did not see Him? Shall I tell you why? You did not expect to. You went to meet somebody else, or expecting to hear the voice of some one else. It was not Christ alone that drew you.

Many a time I have seen saints gathered upon right ground, and yet it could be said of them, "Him they saw not." Why? Because it was not Himself alone they went to see, and He let them have the fruit of their unbelief. Do you know the secret of happy, hearty, worshipful meetings? It is when every saint has come just to see Him, to meet Him, and to worship Him. "Him they saw not," is a serious allegation. Whenever you come away from a meeting gathered to His name and you have not seen Him, you may depend upon it the fault was not His, and it would be a great mistake to put the fault upon your brethren. You may depend upon it there was something wrong with yourself. Something needing judging had been allowed.

This statement on their part now leads the Lord to say that which we all should ponder and take to heart. "Then He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25). How true of us. How foolish are we oftentimes, and how slow of heart to believe the word. And then He says, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26). Let us put ourselves back into their position that day, and think what a Jew looked for. The coming of the Messiah in power, the setting up of the kingdom, and the introduction of the glory, were the things which, according to Scripture, a godly Jew looked for. How deep then their disappointment, and the Lord understood it. And although He might chide them for unbelief, see how sweetly He passes on to say, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" The sufferings and the glory go together. When you read the Old Testament you see that is the way in which it is put. It is the suffering first and then the glory. When I come to the New Testament, what I find is this, Paul has the deep sense of what it is to know Christ in glory, and hence he is prepared for the suffering. What made him here such a man as he was, willing to suffer anything for Christ, was the knowledge of Christ in glory.

"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). I think the Lord will forgive me, if you do not, for saying, how I should have liked to have been there that day. Would not you, brethren? Would not you have liked to have made the fourth that day, and hear Him open up "in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself"? Why, sometimes your heart has fairly boiled, and the tears have run down your cheeks with joy as you have heard some bit of ministry of Christ from the lips of a poor servant of His. But think what it must have been to have heard Him going through the Scriptures from Moses on, and from type, shadow, figure, offering and sacrifice, picking out that which told of Himself, and so expounding it that their hearts began to burn. No wonder, the fact was this, they had never met such a Stranger, they had never had such ministry, and never had such company before.

And this lovely exposition went on during an eight mile journey. We can well understand what it produced. It wrought the most exquisite expression of true fellowship. The effect of that ministry was this, their hearts were knit to the Stranger, although they had no notion who He was. He was able to speak so beautifully about the One who was dearest to their hearts that they craved for more of this ministry and fellowship. I do not know any scene in Scripture that expresses more sweetly the effect of real ministry of Christ. That always knits the heart to Christ, and to the one who so ministers. They did not know who it was who was so preciously unfolding Christ to them. He immensely gladdened their hearts as He spoke of Him who was the burden and testimony of all Scripture. It made Christ increasingly precious to their

souls; and ministry that does not do that is worthless, whether it be from my lips or anybody else's. If it does not minister Christ, and make Him more precious to the soul, it is valueless. Thus it is that true fellowship is produced.

This chapter presents a lovely picture of the way in which the Lord, in resurrection, opens up the Scriptures to His own people. Presently you will find He opens their eyes (Luke 24:31), and then He opens their understandings (Luke 24:45). It is a wonderful chapter of divine openings this twenty-fourth of Luke, beginning with an open grave and closing with an opened heaven. Continuing its instruction, we read, "And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and He made as though He would have gone further" (Luke 24:28). How beautiful is that touch. Christ never forces His company on us. He did not force it that day, and He does not do it this day. I can, tell you exactly how much of Christ you will get. As much as you really want. "He made as though He would have gone further." And now I get the right state. "But they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us" (Luke 24:29). The courtesy that ever marked Him, and was one of the perfections of His pathway as a Man, is seen here. What right had He to enter that house? He had a right, but He did not assert it. The question was this, did they want Him?

He will never compel me to have His company. I do not deny what I may call the compulsion of grace upon the sinner, but, where a saint is concerned, He does not so act. Do you and I covet His company? "He made as though He would have gone further." I think I see them. Do they say, "Here is our house, will you come in?" Oh no, it was not that kind of thing. He says, "I am going on." "But they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." They had to ask Him perhaps more than once. There is such a thing as the love of Christ constraining us. But here it was the love of saints constraining Him. It is reciprocal constraint.

Look at the sequel: "And he went in to tarry with them" (Luke 24:29). Ah 1 how glad their hearts were. They had His company who had made their hearts burn with ministry, the like of which they had never heard before. "And it came to pass, as He sat at meat with them, He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them" (Luke 24:30). Here of course He takes His true place. He must be the master of the house. He is not the guest now. All is His. And sitting at the table, What does He do? "He took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to them." At once there is a recognition of Himself, and of His authority. "And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him." And you may ask me, Is this the Lord's Supper? It is not exactly the Lord's Supper, and yet it is exactly that which should take place at the Lord's Supper. He gives thanks, breaks the bread, and gives it to them. There is the ministry of Himself to the heart, and the eye is opened to discover His presence and His beauty.

I do not know what you have learned in your spiritual history; but I freely confess that I have never learned in the solitude of my closet, when all alone, in a Bible reading, or at a lecture on Scripture, I have never learned God, or learned the truth there as I have learned in the assembly, and in the breaking of bread, where it has been the Lord Himself who has been the minister of His own table. It is a wonderful thing to be under the direct ministry of Christ, with man shut entirely outside. The effect is immediate: "And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him." If you want the truth you will get it. If you really want to have what suits Him, and to follow Him, He will give you your desire. So it was here.

The recognition of the Lord being complete, we read: "And He vanished out of their sight. And they said to one another, Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the scriptures?" (Luke 24:32). It is a wonderful thing to get the Scriptures divinely opened up, for that kind of ministry of Christ always causes the heart to burn. If the Spirit of God comes and ministers Christ in His love, grace, beauty, and glory to your soul, you may depend on it, your heart will respond. And if it does not respond, you may well question if you are a child of God at all. It is easy enough to profess Christ. It is easy to say, "I am a Christian." But if my heart does not thrill when Christ is ministered, I may well question if I am a child of God at all. Do you say — You will put many of our hearts shaking. Well, if they shake first and burn after, it will be all right. And if they never burn, there is something wrong somewhere. You get alone with the Lord, and if your heart does not burn while He talks with you, you may depend upon it, there is something radically wrong. The Lord give us a little more of the burning heart. It is a heart that turns first to Him in real affection, and then has something for others. This is the characteristic too of a boiling heart.

Do you often speak to others of Jesus? No. You have not a boiling heart then, I fear. A boiling pot is apt to boil over. We always know a boiling pot, and if there be one thing more than another that I love to meet in this world, it is a boiling saint. Some Christians whom you meet are rather like big blocks of ice. They chill one. God keep you and me from being that kind of saint. Give me a saint that will melt me, touch my conscience, furnish my understanding, and reach my heart. That is what I find on the resurrection day. Christ's company produced it then, and now does just the same. Look at the effect on those two disciples. Had it been most of us, we should very likely have said, "We have had a very nice profitable evening, and now we will just sit quietly still and enjoy what we have heard." Not so with them. They had just gone into their house, and what do we next read? "And they rose up early next morning and returned to Jerusalem." That might have sufficed us, but not this pair. "And they rose up the same hour and returned to Jerusalem." A little while before it was too late for their unknown Instructor to go farther, now it was not too late, nor were they too tired, to trudge back that eight long miles and spread the joyful news regarding Jesus and the resurrection. The wondrous discovery they have made they must needs share with others. This is real Christianity. Carry to and share with others all that God has given your own soul to know and enjoy.

Would to God, dear fellow-believers, that you and I were more like this couple. Do brother Cleopas and his wife live in your district?

This devoted and rejoicing pair, in the shades of night, returned to Jerusalem, "and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon" (Luke 24:33-34). They go in order to tell their news, and as they get in at the door they get their own faith most beautifully confirmed, as some one immediately exclaims, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." God always confirms the soul that receives and answers to the truth.

"And they told what things were done in the way, and how He was known of them in breaking of bread" (Luke 24:35). Do you break bread often? "Once or twice in a year." What a poor half-starved sheep you must be. Many a Christian says, "I like better to hear the preaching." I have no doubt they do. But hearing a servant speak must never supersede the breaking of bread. You will get more for your soul in one divinely-ordained breaking of bread than in fifty sermons. In the Lord's Supper you get the personal touch of the Lord Himself. You get the knowledge of His love and the sense of His grace, as nowhere else. I am persuaded the Spirit has a great meaning in recording "how He was known of them in breaking of bread."

What follows is deeply interesting. The Lord Himself at that moment entered the company, saying, "Peace unto you." Then followed the attestations in relation to His veritable Manhood, and the truth of His resurrection, as He makes them touch Him, and then eats before them.

Of this scene I will speak a little more, please God, another night.

May the fruit of our coining together tonight be to know the Lord better, and have His love more fully enjoyed by our souls. If there has been a bit of distance from Christ allowed, may we get deeply in our souls the sense, that to be where He is, is everything. It makes all the difference in the world what ministry you sit under. I sometimes ask people, “Who is your minister?” Is it that risen One in glory? Is it really the ministry of the Holy Spirit? To myself and to my fellow-servants I like to say, If our ministry does not shake people off ourselves, and attach them to Christ, it is not proper ministry. Right ministry is that which makes Christ precious, and helps the soul to get nearer to Christ. Thus you see He gets His right place in the affections of His loved ones. May you get your eyes opened and your understanding too, and you will find this to be a grand day in which you live — the resurrection day. Luke 24 is full of Christ, and the hearts of the disciples then were absorbed with Christ. He was everything to them, and the end of all is reached — they worshipped Him and were full of joy (Luke 24:51-52).

The Call of the Bride, Barabbas or Jesus?

Luke 23

The Spirit of God has said elsewhere that “the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). “But,” you ask, “how am I to be saved?” By believing on the Son of God. Salvation is yours through what He has done; through nothing that you could ever do. What could man do? What did man do? Listen to God’s tale of what he did. Scripture faithfully tells what man is — man’s state — what man has become when he can treat the Son of God thus:

“The whole multitude of them arose, and led Him Jesus to Pilate.” They accuse Him, they set Him at naught, they mock Him, they array Him in a gorgeous robe, they rail on Him, they crucify Him. Pilate could find no fault in Jesus, but they cry, “Crucify Him! crucify Him!” and they take Him to Calvary, the place of a skull, and Scripture says, “There they crucified Him.” Whom? Him, the Son of God. The world thought the only treatment Jesus was worthy of was to be crucified in a graveyard between two malefactors! That tells what man is; and it tells what God is also. Could He have delivered Himself? Certainly. Would He deliver Himself? No. What did He do? Did He accuse them? No; no upbraiding, no accusing word is heard. “He was oppressed, and He was afflicted; yet he opened not Hhis mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.”

That cross which tells the bitter hatred and enmity of man to God, is the only means whereby God can save man. Yes, it needed that slain Lamb, it needed that spotless Victim on the cross, ere God in righteousness could save man.

But let us turn to Scripture, and see there what man did to the One who had “done nothing amiss.” I say it solemnly, the world lies before God this day charged with the murder, the cruel murder, of His Son. I grant there was love in His heart, but that does not excuse man. Scripture brings out plainly what man does, what man is. His thoughts and his treatment of the blessed Son of God show what he is. You cannot deny it, you cannot get out of it, you cannot escape it man would burn the Bible if he could, because it is the record of what he has done. You say, “Oh! that is not us, we did not live in those days, we did not cry, ‘Crucify Him.’” You blush for your forefathers? Nay, rather blush for yourselves, ye who are not Christ’s; for they who are not for Him are against Him. If you are not Christ’s, you side with those who cried, “Crucify Him!” Oh, what a blot on the world’s history — they slew the Son of God!

What think you is the moral and spiritual state of that world which can refuse the threefold testimony then given to Jesus, the Man of Sorrows? Pilate says, “I find no fault in Him:” the thief says, “This man has done nothing amiss;” the centurion says, “Certainly this was a righteous man.” But He is crucified!

What is the effect of reading this? Is it not thoroughly to persuade you that the world treated Christ shamefully? But I ask you the question, Have you sided with the world or not? Are you still in the world and of it? or are you among those who are His? There are only the two classes — those who have fled to Jesus, and those who have not. Are you for Him or against Him? Do you side with Him, or are you of those who cry, “Crucify Him!” I ask you again, are you His? Does the world take cognizance of you that you are a Christian? Have you confessed Christ? Does your class-mate or your fellow-worker know you are Christ’s?

“But,” you ask, “what is it to be a Christian?” A Christian is one who knows and loves Christ; who follows Him and owns Him as Lord. You say, “I profess to be a Christian.” Ah, that won’t do, there is nothing so despicable as mere profession. Beloved reader! eternity will bring everything into full light, and if there is a thing that will ensure eternal damnation, it is the empty lip profession without the possession of Christ now.

I appeal to you — Have you been converted? By conversion, I mean converted to something and from something: converted to Christ and from the world. He who is converted changes ground, changes states; he is off the ground and state of condemnation. Are you a Christian? The day of the Lord will bring out who are on the Lord’s side and who are not; the veil will be drawn down, and you will be discovered, you who are mere empty professors. I beseech of you, shun unreality; let there be real, genuine work; go down before God and own your sin, your unworthiness, your weakness, and He will save you — save you this very moment.

You are either for or against Christ. Are you for Him? One thing is certain, if you are for Him, you must take your stand for the despised, the rejected, the world hated, the thong bound Savior. Are you for Him, or do you side with the world? Where are you? Can you say, Christ for me? Thank God, I can say it, Christ for me. Can you say, I have seen Him in all His beauty, His perfection, His lowly grace, His gentleness and love? Can you say that, to you, Bethlehem, Calvary, and Bethany are sacred spots? Bethlehem, where He was born; Calvary, where He suffered for me and in my stead; and Bethany, whence He ascended, are dear, but dearer far than they is Christ Himself. What think you of Christ? Do you love Him? Is He your Savior? Is He the object of your heart’s desire and love?

They crucified Him! You weep as you hear of His sufferings and His sorrow; but I would have you rather weep for the sins that caused His suffering; I like when the plowshare of conviction goes deep down in a soul, and when it gets broken down and is in tears for its sin, Whitfield used to put this question to awakened souls, “If God cast you into hell forever, would He be right in so doing?” If they answered Yes, he was satisfied they had a right sense of sin, and God’s judgment thereof.

The perfection of Christ is brought out in His sufferings; as the sugarcane has to be bruised before we can have its sweetness, and the fragrant plant rudely shaken ere it yields its perfume, so the more we see Christ subjected to, all the more strongly His perfection is manifest; the more He passes through, the more is His intrinsic worth fully known. He was bound, blindfolded, set at naught, and mocked. He is asked, “Art thou the King of the Jews?” He answers, “Thou sayest it.” Pilate finds no fault in Him, but “they were the more fierce.” Pilate wishes to be quit of Him, he has heard of all He has done, how He had healed the sick, raised the dead, made the blind to see, the lame to walk, the dumb to speak, and he does not wish to be responsible for this Man’s death, so he sends Him to Herod.

This strange Person is brought to Herod, and the cry is, “He is a King.” Herod was glad to see Jesus: “He was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him.” He wished to see the One who could raise the dead, cleanse the leper, and give sight to the blind; but there was no sense of need in Herod’s soul, he knew not that it was better far to see the Savior Himself, than to see any miracle performed by Him. He sees Jesus, he questions Him, but mark the dignity of the Lord: He answers the usurper nothing. Jesus answered Pilate, because in him He recognized the deputed power of God, even though that power was misused.

And now mark what follows: “Herod, with his men of war, set Him at naught.” Have you? Tell me, have you not? Herod made light of Christ, and, dear soul, have you not made light of Him, too? If you have never come to Him and believed in Him, you and Herod are the same, you have both equally “set Him at naught.” “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on Him.” Did Herod believe on the Son of God? No. Do you? If you do not, you are on the same ground as Herod.

In verse 12 we read: “And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together.” That day they were made friends over the determined slaughter of the Son of God! Dreadful thought! Pilate is glad to make friends with the king; but, oh! what an unholy compact. Those two newly made friends will find themselves side by side through a long, endless eternity. And where? Oh, soul! Spend not your eternity with those who murdered the Son of God. You will if you do not believe on Him: if you are not brought to Him you will surely spend your eternity with His foes. A long dark eternity without the Lord! — is that your choice?

“I find no fault in him.” Oh, why did Pilate not act on this? We are told he tries to release Him, but the cry of the multitude is no! Pilate wishes to set Him free, but he does not wish to lose the world’s favor. And you, are you not afraid of this, too? Afraid of losing the world’s favor! Beware, rather, that you lose not your own soul. Pilate, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them, but they cried, “Crucify him! crucify him!”

Barabbas or Jesus? becomes now the question. They cried out all at once, “Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas!” Pilate is defeated; they choose Barabbas. In a moment “they were instant with loud voices requiring He might be crucified.” And mark what follows: “And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed.”

Jesus or Barabbas? This was the question which divided them. Surely some will be found for Jesus. Not one! I fancy I hear you say, “I would, had I been there.” Well, show yourself on His side now. Side with Jesus, and let the world know, too, that you have done so.

The cross that should have been for Barabbas was used for Jesus! There was plenty of wood to have made Jesus a cross, but He who had done nothing amiss was crucified on that cross which should have been for Barabbas, the murderer! Plenty of wood to make a cross! Ah, yes; the fear of that made poor Peter deny his Lord. And does not the fear of the cross, the ridicule, and the taunt of the world, make you deny Jesus too?

Barabbas’ friends must side with him, and Jesus’ friends must side with Jesus; but there was not one for Jesus. Yes, it was really so; not one for Jesus, the Son of God. In a moment they cry, “Crucify Him! Release Barabbas!” They have indeed divided — divided to a man, and all, all are for Barabbas, the murderer, and not one for the Man in whom they could find no fault.

Do you assent to this? No! Then let there be this day from you the confession that you are Christ’s, that you are on the Lord’s side.

The world may do what it likes with Jesus, He is “delivered to their will;” man does what he will with the Son of God; Christ allows man to do his worst to Him: they scourge Him and crown Him with thorns. He says, “Do your utmost, do your worst, I shall not complain; and when you have done your worst to Me, then I shall do My best for you.” When they had nailed Him to the cross, He dies for them. He died in their stead, He dies as a victim to meet the claims of a righteous God. He bears the judgment that ought to have been theirs. He drinks the hitter cup of wrath, that they might not have to drink it. He says, “Father, forgive them.” Oh, what love! No love like His. I would that you knew Jesus, my Jesus. Oh! confide in Him, trust Him, love Him.

“Unmoved by Satan’s subtle wiles,Or suffering, shame, and loss,His path, uncheered by earthly smiles,Led only to the cross.”

In verses 27-31 we are told that “there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented Him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children; for, behold, the days are coming in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us; for if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”

Do tears fall from your eyes for Him? Weep for yourselves. What does He mean? He means there will come a day when there will be the world’s prayer-meeting! “Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us!” They are in sore need, but what is it they want? It is a place of refuge, of security, a shelter. “The great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Rev. 6:15-17). The world is frightened, and betakes itself to prayer, but it is too late. Oh, beloved one, you can find a shelter from that wrath now in the bosom of Jesus; not in the mountains and the hills, but in Jesus — Jesus who died on Calvary.

The last the world saw of Jesus was with a crown of thorns upon His head; the next it shall see of Him will be when He is crowned in glory with many crowns.

But, “if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” Christ was the green tree; the unsaved soul is the lifeless, leafless, fruitless, dry tree. I saw a man the other day with an ax in his hand laid at the root of a tree. It was winter-time, and the tree looked

much like the others around: they were all leafless, and there was nothing outwardly to denote any difference, nor to make the passer-by doubt that when spring-time came it would, like the others, burst forth into leaf; but it had been tapped, and found hollow; a cumberer of the ground it was cut down ready for the burning! Are you this tree?

Christ was the green tree in all His dependence on God, in all His beauty and perfection. He was a green tree going to judgment, going to be cut down in the midst of beauty and verdure. What, then, will overtake you, you unsaved soul, you who are a dry tree? “If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” Cannot you see your own case? You have not forgiveness, you have not pardon. Oh, what shall be done in the dry? See it cast into the fire. Look at the rich man of whom we read in Luke 16. In a moment cut down, and being in a torment, he lifts up his eyes and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom, and he cries, “Have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.” A dry tree ready for the burning! But, thanks be to God, because the green tree suffered, many a dry one will escape.

If man has done these things to the Son of God, if He gets this treatment from man’s hand, what, think you, will the treatment be that man will receive from God’s hand in a day of righteous retribution? If you are among the doomed, you will remember that you once heard of a way of escape, but you would not receive it. Oh, unsaved soul, come to Jesus, come now!

We go to the cross, and see Jesus forsaken and in darkness, but the darkness is only from the sixth hour to the ninth; it passes away from Him; but oh, unsaved, lost soul, there will be no ninth hour for you; no passing away of the darkness for you, it will be forever.

“Away with Him!” was the world’s prayer; His was, “Father, forgive them.” They revile Him and say, “Come down from the cross; if thou be King of the Jews, save Thyself.” He says, No; I will not come down, I will not save Myself, I will die for you. Oh, what love! Is not this love indeed? He dies, but He does more than that: when He is risen He tells His disciples to begin at Jerusalem, the place where He had been put to death, and to the very people who had cried, “Crucify Him! crucify Him!” He bids them preach the forgiveness of sins through Him — Jesus. And now I write as an ambassador from Him to proclaim to you the forgiveness of your sins, and salvation through the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Will you believe in Him? Will you accept salvation?

As you drop this paper, are you on the world’s side, or Christ’s? Barabbas or Jesus?

Seekers for Light, Thief's Confession or Faith Versus Rationalism, A

(Luke 23:33-43)

There is not a more striking instance of grace the grace of Christ — in all Scripture, than that which is before us this evening, in the case of the dying robber. In all the pages of the Word of God you cannot find anything more touching, or more expressive, of the blessed grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, than the way in which He deals with this man; for every person must admit it was a desperate case. He was a pest on earth, and he certainly was not fit for heaven. His faults nailed him to the tree. He was a man whose history was of such a character, that he was going out of the world in ignominy and shame, a sinner in his sins, to meet God. He was within six hours of his death, and Christ met him, and saved him. Has He met you yet? Has He saved you yet? Perhaps — nobody knows — you may be within six hours of your death, my friend. Who can tell? I am not a prophet, but I am a physician, and I have in my day seen many a hale man, and known that he has been cut off in less than six hours. Ah, friend! If you have never met that robber’s Saviour, if you have never met my Saviour, do not let the few minutes that we shall spend together pass without your coming into contact with Him now.

There is no scene in the history of the world like that which is before us in Luke 23. There is a page in God’s Word, and a page in the history of man’s world, that stands alone, stands unique, because you have there the death of the only absolutely sinless, spotless, holy Man, by the side of two men who were sinners and one of them becomes the companion of that sinless Man for eternity. The other got his chance, but missed it. Between these three seen here, each nailed to a cross, there is an immense difference. Of One I can say this — there was no sin in Him; although there was sin on Him. Then I come to the man who had no sin on him, though there was sin in him. And there was the third of these men, who had sin on him, and sin in him. So he died. Ah! Do not you be the eternal companion of that third man, I implore you.

You may perhaps say, What do you mean? One of these three had no sin in Him, and yet had sin on Him, when He was nailed to that tree! Yes! that was Jesus. Perfect He was. He was the holy, spotless Man; and the charm of this scene is this, that the thief confesses not only his own guilt and his own sin, but he makes, if I may say so, a public confession of what his faith is in regard to Christ. “This man hath done nothing amiss” (Luke 23:41), was his true and blessed asseveration. That man reversed everybody’s judgment; that man stood alone that day in his witness, and in his testimony, to Jesus. I did not read the whole of the chapter, but if you glance through what went before, you will find that everybody was against Christ — Judas, Pilate, Herod, priests, scribes, populace, everybody; there was nobody for Him. Not one solitary soul stood for Him in all that company that day. What a scene! Betrayed by a false friend, denied by true friends, and deserted by all His followers; with the chief priests, who instigated the populace to demand His death, against Him; the governor against Him; the king against Him; the world against Him; everybody against Him!

But, at length, there comes a moment when, at His side, a man — almost entering into the jaws of death — boldly says, He is the sinless, the spotless Man, I will cling to Him. Ah, friends! I do not say I envy the dying thief. I admire him; and, by-and-by in glory, if I can find him out, I shall grip his hand, and say, “Thank you, my brother, you cleared my Saviour’s character in the day when everybody was against Him.”

It was a wonderful scene. Look at it a little bit. You know the Lord had been brought before Pilate who got his chance of receiving Jesus that day, but missed it, like many a man now misses it. The people came up, complaining against the blessed Lord; and when they did so, three times over does Pilate say, “I find no fault in this man; I will therefore chastise him, and let him go.” But the people would not let Him go. Urged on by the chief priests and religious elders, they cried, “Crucify him, crucify him.” I do not doubt Pilate was anxious to let the Lord go; the more so as, when he is seated on the judgment-seat, he gets a warning from his wife, who says, “Have thou nothing to do with that just man” (Matt. 27:19). But he did not heed that message; he allowed himself to be over-governed by the clamor of the people. He was just going to let the Lord go, when those who knew his weak point cried out, “If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend.” Do you know who Caesar was? He was the Roman emperor. And who was Pilate? His delegate; and Pilate was dependent upon Caesar; he was supported by the

world. And I would like to say this to you, that just in the proportion that you are supported by the world, so are you afraid of it. Thresh that out, and see if it be not the truth. “If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend,” turned the scale for Pilate. Caesar’s friends must side with Caesar, while Jesus’ friends must side with Jesus. Everybody sided with Caesar that day, and nobody sided with Jesus. Perhaps, you think, if I had been there, I would have sided with Jesus. Would you? Are you quite sure you have done it now, today? Do you think everybody who knows you intimately knows that you are on Jesus’ side. I should be glad if I thought so. Caesar’s friends must side with Caesar, and Jesus’ friends must side with Jesus, now, as then. Whose side are you on?

We read that everybody was against Jesus, and, Pilate having condemned Him, He is carried away from that hall — I would not call it of judgment, but of misjudgment; because righteousness and judgment, mercy and truth, had parted company there, they did not kiss each other. They parted company, and He, who was the Truth, was led away to die; Simon, a Cyrenian, bearing His cross. And I do not doubt it was the cross which had been prepared for Barabbas, another robber. That man was condemned to death; his cross was ready; and when the jailers went down to the cell where he was confined, I have no doubt Barabbas thought he was going to the gibbet; and when he got to the judgment-hall, found the populace a raging mass around the Man he had heard plenty about, and then heard the question put, “Whom will ye that I release unto you, Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?” As robber and Saviour stood side by side, I have not a bit of doubt what was in his mind. The question was put whether they would have Jesus or Barabbas, and I have no doubt Barabbas thought, “Why, of course there will be no doubt about that; they will choose Jesus, not a sinner like me; there will be no chance for a murderer like me. They will not let me go.” I think that man was bewildered when he heard the cry go up, “Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas” (Luke 23:18).

Christ is then led down from the hall, the cross is laid upon the Saviour’s shoulders, and He goes out to die. Thank God, He did die; and He died for me, I know. I do not know if you know it yet, but He died for sinners. I do not think Barabbas knew what was wrapped up in that death. As He goes out, a number of women weep and bewail Him; but He turns to them, and says, “Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck” (Luke 23:28-29). That is, there is a solemn day of retribution coming; do not suppose that God has forgotten the fact that His Son was murdered. Do you suppose that God forgets that His Son was in this scene, and that the world cast Him out? Has God forgotten that, do you think? No; though, in His patience, He has set His Son on His right hand, and said, “Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Psa. 110:1), He is coming again. “Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom,” was what the thief said; and come back He will. And so the Lord says, “In that day” mark, their lips will utter a strange prayer “They shall begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us” (vs. 31). You would scarcely believe that men would appeal to nature to hide them from God; but such will be the case, and what a revelation is this of man?

There are four prayers spoken of in this chapter. The prayer of hatred, “Crucify him” (Luke 23:21); the prayer of fear, “Mountains, fall on us” (vs. 30); the prayer of love, “Father, forgive them” (vs. 34); and the prayer of faith, “Lord, remember me” (vs. 42). The prayer of hatred has been answered. By-and-by there will come the prayer of fear, “Mountains, fall on us: hills, cover us” (see Rev. 6:15-17). Anything to keep men out of the sight of God; anything under the sun to keep them out of the reach of God, and from the wrath of the Lamb. They will put anything in between themselves and God; but all in vain, for, says the Lord here, “If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” (vs. 31). What do you understand by that? Who was the green tree? Why, Christ, of course. Sap, life, verdure, and fruit, all were seen in Him; and God, looking down from above, saw that one fruitful green tree, and — as He looked everywhere else-saw what? Dry trees! There are a good many such in this hall tonight, let me tell you. A dry tree is lifeless. Christ was the green tree, ever presenting that freshness and fruit which suit God.

And what do I take out of this figure for myself? That by nature I am a dry tree, and so are you; there is no life in us. Sinners are the dry trees, and a dry tree makes good fuel. What do you mean? you ask. Well, thresh that out, my friends. A dry tree makes good fuel, and that is really what a man in his sins becomes if he go to the lake of fire. “What shall be done in the dry?” is a serious question indeed. I, says the Saviour, the green tree, am passing through all this – what is to be the lot of the sinner? If the Holy One passed through God’s judgment, because He was bearing the sins of others, what about the sinner in his sins? I appeal to you. If you are a sinner, you will have to meet God, and you will have to answer to God about your sins. Whatever you may be, whatever profession you may make, or do not make, you will have to meet the Lord by-and-by; and there is a solemn question here propounded by the Lord, “If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” There was no answer that day; it will have to come.

And they drew Jesus out of the city. “And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him.” These four words describe the most terrible scene enacted upon earth — “THERE THEY CRUCIFIED HIM.” The place, a graveyard; the actors, the whole civilized world; the act, the cruelest and most shameful form of death; the victim, God’s own beloved Son! The selected spot was a graveyard — Calvary, Golgotha, “the place of a skull.” And why there? Had not Jesus talked about life? Had He not raised the dead? Had He not unstopped deaf ears, and given sight to the blind? Had He not done many wonderful miracles? Had He not talked about the Lord of life coming from glory; and had He not spoken about being the Son of God? He had. And why did they take Him there? To insult Him in that graveyard. They use the signs of death on every hand to mock Him who was the Lord of life. They bring Him, who was “the resurrection and the life,” to the scene where there is every evidence of death around Him, as much as to say, Let us see if you can avoid death. It was the most solemn mockery. They had crowned Him with thorns, and now they put Him to death.

But see what that death meant as viewed by God. It was this—that He who was Lord of life came into the scene of death that He might bring life to us. As regards the world, it was the violent effort to get rid of God and of His Son. And the world is unchanged today; “There they crucified him” is the declaration of what the world’s estimate of Christ is. But, say people nowadays, we have got on a good bit since that day; you are a little bit antiquated in your notions, the world has changed very much since that day. Well, I admit that advance has been made in science; I admit a little advance has been made in art and knowledge too. I am not blind to the progress which has been made in those ways which contribute to men’s comfort in this world; but tell me, Are they nearer God? That is the question. Are you nearer God? You know a little more about scientific things than you did some years ago, but are you nearer God? The world was not a baby when it murdered Jesus. It was a full-grown man, if I may say so, when the blessed Saviour was put upon the cross.

Over His head was a superscription, “THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS,” written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, the three dominant languages of the earth. What, you ask me, do you mean by the world being a full-grown man? I reply, Whose books do the students of today read? Why, the books of the men who wrote in that age. Their teachers are careful to give them the books of the men of that day; we

must turn to the Homers, and the Virgils, and to the philosophers of that age. It is a strange thing; but if I seek ornate sculpture, or marvelous buildings, I am sent bank to these past ages to find them. If I talk about monuments, men turn me back to that age. It was the Augustan age of the world. No, no; the world was no babe, but full grown, in the day that it gladly yet calmly set that superscription there, in the three languages of Rome, Greece, and Judah. The religious Jew, the martial Roman, the learned Greek, all three combined, and said, We do not want Jesus; get rid of Him. That was why the crime of Jesus (which really was being just what He was) was written over His cross in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. United in evil, “there they crucified him.” They gave this blessed One, who was the Son of God-yea, who was God incarnate-a felon’s death, and a felon’s cross; while by His side hung two malefactors, that the scripture might be fulfilled, “He was reckoned among the transgressors” (Luke 22:37).

What follows now? The Lord prays a remarkable prayer. There was the prayer of hatred, when the people cried, “Away with him.” There is coming by-and-by the prayer of fear. But, mark, here is the prayer of love. I will come to the prayer of faith in a minute or so, but here is the prayer of love, and what was it? “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Go back to that scene in the memory of your heart for a moment. Do not forget it is the cross of Jesus. I would like to guide you to that scene on Calvary, and point out those three crosses. Look at the One in the middle, look at that blessed One, crowned with thorns, hanging on it, while the soldiers are gambling for His garments beneath His eyes, and His enemies are regaling themselves with the very, sight of His death agony. Tell me, who is He on that tree? Over His head is written, “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,” in the plainest language. That was the full inscription clearly. What was His crime? I repeat, simply being what He was. And who was He? Jehovah, the Saviour, and the King of the Jews. And what was His crime? Not that He did anything wrong, but that He was what He was. And what was He? Jehovah, the Saviour, and the King of the Jews.

The Jews would not have Him, you say. I know that; they refused to have Him. There, however, was the truth; for, you recollect, another scripture tells us that when the chief priests came along they said to Pilate, “Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews” (John 19:21). You know what Pilate replied, “What I have written I have written” (John 19:22). Ah, Pilate knew he had written the truth that day; but He was more than the King of the Jews — He was Jehovah the Saviour! Mark, friend, He was not alone a holy, spotless Man; but that Man was the incarnate God — God manifest in the flesh, seen of angels, and preached to the world; but, alas! cast out by the world.

In another gospel we read, “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14.). Here then I find this Man, who was hung upon that tree, crowned with thorns, to be God. And, friends, you have to meet Him. Who hung on that tree? God! And you have to meet Him yet. Oh you say, He was a man. I know it, and love to own it. And what kind of a man? The thief shall tell you presently. But, mark you, He who was there was God. I will tell you what it is; when the truth of that fact enters a man’s soul, it becomes light. And that poor dying thief by His side got light. Whenever the thief got to know who was by his side, it was light in his soul, and it made a wonderful revolution in his history.

But listen to this prayer, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” His enemies have done their work, and now see the perfection of Jesus, in grace. At the moment when His enemies have done their worst, spit in His face, smitten Him with a rod, preferred a robber to Him, crowned Him with thorns, and nailed Him to a tree, then was fulfilled the scripture, “He was numbered with the transgressors.” Then, I suppose, there was a little hush in the crowd, and His voice was heard. Listen to it, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” It was the prayer of perfect love, and I have no doubt it was answered, in the second and third chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, when Peter came in the power of the Spirit, and preached so effectually. I do not doubt that then the intercessory prayer of the Saviour was blessedly answered. What I want you to notice here is the perfection of the love of the Saviour as He prays for His murderers, and this prayer goes up, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” I believe, as these words fell upon the ears of that dying thief, they came, if I may say so, as a flash of light to his soul, and he became conscious that the One beside him, on the cross, was closely linked with God. Whether he was clear that He was God, I do not say exactly; but manifestly at this moment he got the light that Jesus was the Son of God. That he learned from the words, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

Amazing scene! The man who is dying in his sins, hears this sinless, spotless Man positively praying for His murderers! I believe that was the moment when the rays of blessed, divine light entered his soul, and the man became conscious that God’s Son was being crucified by his side. Evidently there was some time for him and others to think, for “the people stood beholding” we read (Luke 23:35).

Now mark what follows, and observe the contrast between the infidelity and rationalism of man’s mind, and the simple faith of this dying thief. Look at the different classes of people who come out here, because what is before us in this scene is just a sample of what is all around us today. I am not surprised that there is infidelity and rationalism in the world today. You have the seed and germ of it all in the scene before us. “And the rulers also with them derided Him, saying,” tauntingly and jeeringly, “He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He be the Christ, the chosen of God.” That little word “if” has the whole root of infidelity in it. Ah! my friends, you are here tonight with a good many “ifs” in your mind. You are in bad company. The rulers were doing terrible work that day; they were the leaders, and they headed a countless host of unbelievers and doubters, stretching from their day to that in which you live. “He saved others.” They did not doubt that; they could not deny it. They knew of many deeds of beneficence, and they gave witness to them. I mean to give witness tonight too. He has saved me — has He saved you? “He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He be the Christ, the chosen of God.” Is He the chosen of your heart? That is the question now. God had chosen Him; but they did not believe Him.

How, they asked, if He be the “chosen of God,” does it come about that He is crowned with thorns, and gibbeted with malefactors? “Let him save himself, if he be the Christ.” Eternal damnation stalks behind that little word “if.” The heart full of “ifs” is not full of faith. That “if” is a terrible word; there is want of faith in it. And there are many people who have a large number of “ifs” to answer for — they have really no faith. They are certain of nothing, except that they cannot be certain about anything. Thank God, there are no “ifs” in my faith; I am perfectly well aware by whom I am saved, and who He is, and what He is, and what He has done for me. Faith is the most positive thing in the world. Rationalism is just like a bat in the sunlight, and you know what the bat does then? The more light it gets, the more dumfoundered it becomes. You know the bat goes out in the dark; it can only flit easily about in the evening, when the light is gone, and that is where many are today. The bats of infidelity and rationalism are abroad in myriads, and everybody has got at some time into their company. I was among them at one time, but I did not like their company.

Let us go further. “And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming to Him, and offering Him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the King of the Jews, save Thyself.” Again this awful if. They wanted Him to prove that He was the King of the Jews by saving Himself. But He would not do that; He would not save Himself, just that He might be able to save others like you and me. Unbelief doubted, faith accepted, then, as now, the superscription, “This is the King of the Jews.”

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on Him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.” You would not have thought that the poor fellow would have talked in that strain; you would not have thought a man in his serious position, in the jaws of death as it were, would have railed in such a manner. Another scripture tells us that both the malefactors did it (Mark 15:32). I do not doubt both of them were hardened enough to mock at the Saviour; they did not, you will notice, taunt each other; they both, however, twitted Christ. Why, there is not a man that does not hate Christ at the bottom of his heart to begin with. Even a dying robber, just going to drop into a lost eternity, will spend his last breath in abusing Christ. But note this, Christ will spend His last breath in praying for those who have abused Him. If sin leads a man to abuse Christ, He in the goodness of His heart, spends His last breath praying for His murderers; and I think that was what wrought the great change in the heart of one dying thief, while the other dying wretch, untouched by grace, and abiding in unbelief, says, “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.” There was, alas! no faith in him towards Christ.

At this moment a charming scene takes place, under the most difficult circumstances. When everything was against Christ, and when there was every reason why he should not believe in Jesus, the other thief comes out in a magnificent way. It is quite evident that the Spirit of God works in him, as he is heard speaking to his neighbor. Three hours ago you might have heard him railing against the Saviour. But what has happened? Light has come into his heart I would like you, my friend, to get light into your heart. I cannot give it to you; I can only say, that when light comes into a man’s soul, he learns himself, and he learns to know God. If you do not know God, it is because you have not got light. He turns, and mark what he says: “But the other answering rebuked him” (Luke 23:40). It is not a godless man rebuking a godless man. No, it is a godly man now rebuking the godless. That man was converted, I have no doubt. Oh! you say, I do not believe in sudden conversion. I will tell you why; because you are not converted yourself. An unconverted man never believes in sudden conversion; and more, I never knew a converted man yet that was not converted suddenly. When light gets into a man’s soul, he is a changed man at once. Here was this dying thief, who had been cursing and blaspheming the Saviour just a little while back, he hears the prayer of the Lord, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,” and the man is changed — converted. I Do not you tell me he was not converted then. If he was not converted then, he was never at any other time; but he went to Paradise that day, mark that. Be certain of this, that the prayer of Christ was light to his soul. He recognized that he had God’s Son by his side, yea, before his eyes. Others may gibe and jeer, but he looks into the face of God incarnate, into the face of Jesus, and sees grace, kindness, perfect love, and forgiveness there; and, as he listens to that prayer, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,” a wonderful change takes place in him. The Holy Spirit works in him, and presently, when his neighbor again breaks out abusing Jesus, he turns and says, “Dost not thou fear God?” (Luke 23:40). Ah! you say, What a pretty fellow to talk that way. My dear friend, it is the man that is converted who can talk; and the reason why you cannot talk, is because you are not converted. The moment you are converted, your lips will soon be urged to talk, and your feet to walk in the way of righteousness.

Take a good look at that thief! See the change in him. He is now bold for God, and fearless of man. “The wicked flee,” says Scripture, “when no man pursueth but the righteous are bold as a lion” (Prov. 28). And here is a man with that kind of character. Until now he was such a pest that his fellows had to get rid of him; but now, touched and changed by grace, he turns round and says to his neighbor, “Dost not thou fear God?” It is a fine thing when a man fears God. Perhaps you do not fear God. Well, I know what the Psalmist says of the man who does not. “The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes” (Psa. 36:1). There was no fear of God in my heart for many a day, but at length, like this thief, I found out that it is a wonderfully blessed moment when a man begins to fear God. It is not cringing fear I mean, but the sense of what is due to God. “Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments” (Psa. 112:1).

Do you know what is the fear of the Lord? I find it well described in a sevenfold way by the wisest man that ever lived — except Jesus — Solomon. He says, (1) “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”; and by way of antithesis he adds, “but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov. 1:7). You know where you are, my friend; I do not know. But you know your company, and your companions will tell you where you are. I will read it again, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Then, again, (2) “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil” (Prov. 8:13). The thief was getting into his proper place, and approaching the beginning of knowledge, as he showed his hate of evil. I go a little further, and I find, (3) “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding” (Prov. 9:10). The thief was set for this, and is getting on, you see. I go still a little further, (4) “The fear of the Lord prolongeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened” (Prov. 10:27). The two thieves illustrate that. One was cut off forever, the other passed into eternal blessedness. Again I read, (5) “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death” (Prov. 14:27). The believing thief proved that also. And now I read, (6) “The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom” (Prov. 15:33). That the thief illustrates too, as he gives it to his neighbor. There is only one more, and it reads thus, (7) “The fear of the Lord tendeth to life; and he that hath it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil” (Prov. 19:23). That the thief fully entered into, as he passed that day into Paradise. I tell you what it is, it would be well for you to get into the company of that thief who had the fear of the Lord.

“Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?” was a wonderful query, coupled as it was with, “and we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds.” What genuine repentance is there manifested! He took God’s part against himself. You are a dying man, and I too, and we are justly punished. The man who is divinely converted always condemns himself. “We indeed justly” is the language of real repentance. When we are not right ourselves we never employ “we.” We can then use the word “you.” This man, divinely taught, says, “We indeed justly”; and then, conscious of the glory of the One who hung by his side, sinless but suffering, adds, “but this man hath done nothing amiss.”

It was a very striking confession. The world heard it, God heard it, Satan heard it, and tonight you hear it. Do you think he was a fool or a wise man? Nay! He was a wise man; and the man who is not his companion is a fool. You say, That is bold. It is true; it is right. That man was right, and every man, who is unbelieving, is wrong. That repentant thief accepts the judgment of God upon him, condemns himself, and clears the character of Christ, when all had condemned Him. His life had been a sinful one, and he owns it, saying, I have sinned, and I am getting what I deserve; and then boldly confesses his faith in Jesus. “This man hath done nothing amiss,” is his triumphant allegation. He says to his neighbor, so to speak, “You and I never did a right thing, but here is a man who never did a wrong one. He is dying, but I am going to cleave to Him. I reverse the world’s verdict. Judge and jury, I reverse your verdict. You declared Him to be a ‘malefactor’ (John 18:30), you adjudged ‘He is guilty of death’ (Matt. 26:66); I declare, “This man hath done nothing amiss.” Thank God for the bold, true, glorious confession of that dying malefactor on the cross beside Jesus.

That dying thief changed his company at that moment. He fell in line with God, and His servants, in rich appreciation of Christ There was a moment when a strange man by the side of Jordan saw coming to him another Man, and from the Baptist’s lips came the exclamation,

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” It was Jesus; and, as John baptized Him, the heavens were opened, and another voice was heard, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 17). On the mount of transfiguration, again, the heavens were opened, the Father declared, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” The thief heard Him, and confessed His worth. Even out of the mouths of His enemies the confession of His excellence was made. When the servants of the high priest were sent to take Him, they returned, saying, “Never man spake like this man!” And Pilate, three times, as we have seen, declared, “I find no fault in Him.” But “He, who knew no sin, was made sin for us.” There was no sin in Him, and yet He was made sin for us. The fact was this — in the moment when the poor thief discovered the perfection of Jesus, his sins were shifted on to Jesus, and He bore them, and blotted them out.

I ask you, Is not the testimony of this recent convert beautiful? “This man hath done nothing amiss.” What think you of the testimony of the dying thief? He confesses his own sin, and judges it too, and at the same moment gets a glimpse of, and proclaims, the glories of the Saviour’s character, “This man hath done nothing amiss.” Grand old thief! Ah! my friends, in the way of faith, there is nothing like this in the world’s history. This man, in the very jaws of death himself, and when every possible evidence was against Christ, discovers His worth, and proclaims alike His excellences, His Lordship, and His Kingly rights, saying, as it were, I will guarantee His life, I will guarantee His character, I will guarantee His history, I will go bail for His perfection — He has done nothing amiss. He is Lord and King, and although He is dying now, He will rise and come in His kingdom. Splendid testimony of faith!

The next moment he says, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest in (not into) Thy kingdom.” I know Thou art dying, but I know Thou art the King. Thou art going out of the scene, but Thou wilt come back again. Remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom. That is all the length his faith got then; but mark the Lord’s answer, “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” Oh! look at the Saviour’s grace to the man who confides in Him. That other thief, hand and glove with the world, was railing against Him — infidelity, rationalism, and reason were working in all save one, as they stood, or hung, taunting Him to save Himself, if He were the Christ, and if He were the King. The poor thief sees that He is a King; sees that He is the Christ the Son of God, and then owns that He is his Lord

I verily believe that men nowadays have not a thousandth part of the faith which that poor thief had. He trusted Jesus when every possible evidence why He should be trusted was gone. He was dying, refused of man, and forsaken of God, yet then it was the thief confided in Him. We have all the evidence about the Lord Jesus Christ — that He is risen from the dead, has passed into glory, and is thus accepted of God. This the Holy Spirit has come down to tell us, and we have, for the assurance of our faith, all that is given us in the Scriptures. The dying robber, touched by grace, and wrought on by the Holy Spirit, says, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom,” at a moment when all this was unrevealed. Will you, my friend, trust that blessed Saviour, and give Him the confidence of your heart? Notice now the Lord’s answer, “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” The dying believer got the assurance of present salvation. And observe this, ye who are fond of ritual, he was never baptized, and he never took the Lord’s Supper either. And where did he go without either? To paradise that day. How do I know? Because Christ said he should; “Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.” It was that day, not the day after, not tomorrow, but that day. Such is grace; and such the reward of faith.

Now see what follows immediately after this. The Lord Jesus was forsaken of God. You do not get that account in the Gospel by Luke, but we read that “it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour” (Luke 23:44). Up to this point you have the human side of the cross. From the sixth hour to the ninth hour there was darkness over the land, and in that darkness do you know what took place? The sun refused to yield his light that day — darkness shrouded the sun, while the Saviour was in that darkness taking up with God the whole question of man’s sin. He had said to the thief, “Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise,” and here comes the moment when the Saviour bears sins, is made sin, suffered for sin, and died for sinners, so that, the work being completed, the thief can go there. The redemption work of Jesus is the ground and basis of all blessing on the one hand, while the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the thief is evident on the other, as he first trusted, and then boldly bore testimony to Christ. I do not know if there is a man here who would bear such a testimony. There, first of all, you see the work of the Spirit of God in him, and then you see the atonement, which the blessed Lord came to make, wrought and completed, so that he could be righteously saved. One scripture says, “He was made sin for us, who knew no sin”; while another says, “He came to bear the sins of many”; and yet another, “The Lord hath laid upon him the iniquities of us all.” He bore in His body, at that moment, the sins of many, and, as the result of bearing the sins of many, He is forsaken of God, and then He cries out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

What a cry is that which comes from the dying Saviour! Listen to it. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” If you cannot give an answer, I can. He was forsaken, blessed be His name, that I might be accepted. And that is what every heart in this hall who knows Him says. He bore the judgment of my sin, because “He was made sin, who knew no sin.” I said just now there was no sin on the thief, though there was sin in him. How is this? His sins were laid on Christ; they were taken off the poor thief who trusted Him. I now see the poor thief’s sins borne by the thiefs substitute. Though that dying thief was, in himself, what he was, the atoning efficacy of the blood of Christ is laid to his credit, and the work of the Saviour, in atoning for that robber’s sins, is effectual. “Today,” says Jesus, “Thou shalt be with Me in paradise.” He gets the knowledge of his eternal safety. He is the first trophy of the Redeemer’s sacrifice. The sins of the thief are laid upon the Saviour, and He atones for them, and forever puts them away.

With what unspeakable interest did all heaven that day watch that scene, when heaven’s Lord becomes man’s Saviour, and dies! And who is the first trophy of redeeming grace? It is a poor dying thief — it is this poor robber. Oh! it was a wonderful scene, as heaven looked down upon that cross, and watched what the result would be. And when the Shepherd came home, what had he got? He had got the lost sheep truly on His shoulders, and He brought him in, the trophy of His victory. And now I ask, Are you not going to let that Saviour save you? He would not save Himself; but He saved the dying thief. And in grace I can say, He has saved me. Will you not trust Him? The dying thief trusted Him; I trust Him; and, oh! I implore you to trust Him. Take one look at that cross. See Jesus there for you. Well wrote the poet —

“There, from His head, His hands, His feet,Sorrow and love flow mingled down;Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,Or thorns compose so rich a crown?”

Did He die for me? Faith replies, He died for me. Sinner, He gave Himself for you. The poor thief as he prayed, “Remember me when thou comest in Thy kingdom,” thought of blessing in a far distant day, for the Lord has not yet come in His kingdom; but perfect love replied, “Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.”

The first man turned out of an earthly paradise was a poor thief, his name was Adam; and the first man who enters the heavenly paradise through Jesus was a poor thief. Grace is a wonderful thing, and it was by God’s sovereign grace that the robber was brought into paradise that day. He tasted it for a few hours on earth, and then unhinderedly forever. I have tasted grace — will you not taste it? I implore you to receive that Saviour. Believe Him, and then go forth and confess Him.

God's Restoring Grace, Backsliding in Ways

(Luke 22:31-62)

We do not find the word " backsliding" in the New Testament, but we find the thing.

Now, it is a certainty that no backslider is happy. What the Lord wants above all things for our hearts is that we should be profoundly happy. If you are not happy, you are not right. There is a screw loose somewhere, and the sooner that screw is tightened up the better. You know what that screw is, and you also know the danger of continuing in a wrong state. It gets worse and worse if not rectified, hence the importance to a backslider's soul of learning the way of restoration.

I do not know a heart that does not say, when it hears about backsliding, " God keep me from it." It is pretty easy to get away a very long distance without knowing it. Declension of heart does not come all of a sudden. It came gradually in Samson's history (see Judg. 13-16). He was a wonderful man, nobody like him in the Old Testament in a certain sense. But look at his history. He was a Nazarite, a separate person for God. There was no feat of strength he could not quite easily perform. What was the secret of it? He was sustained of God, and as long as he was separate, he was kept of God. But by-and-by his affections were drawn away from Jehovah; a woman meets his eye, and she became his wife. Eventually she betrays him. What was his first downward step? You know the story. He lost his separation. He ceased to be a separate person. The thing the devil desires above all things is to get you to hob-nob with the world. He says you must not be too separate. Yes, I know that is exactly what the devil says. He has said it to me, as well as to you. He said it to Peter. But then I think what an old Scotch woman said about Peter was quite right. She said, " He had nae business down among the lackeys." He was warming himself by the world's fire. The same was illustrated in Samson's history. The moment you and I cease to be separate from the world and its ways, we are in for declension of soul. I need not deceive myself. I am in for it as sure as the sun is in the heavens.

This woman whom Samson took tried to get the secret of his strength out of him. She wept for seven days. At length he told her that the secret of his strength was connected with his hair. He was a Nazarite. " And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death, that he told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man. And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath showed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand. And she made him sleep upon her knees: and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out, as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him. But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house" (Judg. 16:16-21).

The Philistines sent Delilah money, and what was the next thing? Off came Samson's hair. The first thing he lost was his separation. And the next thing he lost was his strength. And then he lost his liberty. He was really captured that time. Had not they bound him before? Yes, they had bound him with new ropes, but they were like cobwebs to him. He had lost his separation, and now that his strength was gone he lost his liberty, next he lost his eyes, and finally he lost his life. Lose your separation, and your strength, your liberty, your eyesight, and your life all follow. Samson is the awful figure of a man who went right down from the top to the bottom. He is the picture of a Christian who has got into the world, and been utterly spoiled for the service of Christ. Oh, brethren, God keep us! Samson's history is a very solemn one.

But I come to Peter now. I think it is beautiful to see the way he is recovered. Now the twenty-second chapter of Luke, that I have read, gives you the moment when he fell outwardly. There are four salient points I wish to draw your attention to in Peter's history; his conversion, consecration, fall, and restoration. Have you ever studied Peter's life? I would advise you to do so. You pick out the life of Peter, and put it together. I have written a book myself on his life, and very happy I was when doing it. But I don't ask you to read my book, read God's Book. It is wonderful to see the place that dear man had. He was a big-hearted man. I know he stumbled, but he even walked on water Oh you say, he sank. I know he did, but he walked before he sank. Now mark, the great point is not that he sank, but that he walked. It was affection for Christ that drew him out of the boat on to the water, but even affection for Christ does not make us safe unless we keep our eye on Christ, which is of the last importance.

We have Peter's conversion recorded in the first chapter of John, when he met Jesus. The Lord changed his name. " And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone " (John 1:42). He was converted then, but not consecrated to Christ. You, too, are converted, and can say, I am a believer, and I know I am saved. Yes, but, beloved, have you really set out to follow Christ? If not, you are very like Peter between the first chapter of John and the fifth chapter of Luke. There the Lord wanted a pulpit, and He took Peter's boat for that purpose. The Lord was the best preacher that ever was, I need not say, and a most practical preacher too, for " he opened his mouth and taught them " (Matt. 5:2), and the people heard Him. The point is, if you are addressing people, be sure that they hear you. He addressed the people on the shore, and speaking as He was from the boat, they could both see and hear Him.

On that occasion He gave them the lovely story of the sower and the seed. The truth went right down into Peter's heart that day. Oh, it must have been a wonderful scene. See Simon sitting in his boat, and listening to all this wonderful ministry. He belonged to Christ, but up to this point he has never followed Him. And now, when the sermon is over, the Lord, who will be no man's debtor, as it were, says, 1 am going to pay you for your boat, Peter. His words were, " Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draft. And Simon, answering, said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net" (Luke 5:4, 5). They caught so many fish that the net broke, and they had to get their neighbors to come and help them. " And they came, and filled both the ships, so

that they began to sink." Peter had never had such a catch in all his life, and when he saw it," he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me: for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

What brought up this question of his sin? As he got a revelation to his soul of the glory of the Person of his Master, that He was God as well as Man, I judge he was thoroughly ashamed as he thought what his own pathway in relation to Him had been. Peter learned his lesson that day. The light of God fell on his soul, and, although he says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," the moment he comes to land he turns his back upon everything, and follows Jesus. He is consecrated to Him now, and begins to follow the Lord. I have known many a man turn to the Lord when earthly things had all failed-very likely, the bank had broken, and everything had been swept away. In such circumstances a soul will often say, Now I think I will devote myself to Him. But when the day was brightest, and his business most successful, Peter left all, and began to follow the Lord. Christ filled his heart, and the glory of His Person eclipsing everything here, he left all, and followed Jesus. Now was there ever a moment in your heart or mine like that? Is there anything as fine in the history of your soul or mine? That is the real question for us.

It is very interesting to see how Peter comes to the front everywhere in the Gospels, just from the affection of his soul to the Lord-affection coupled with energy that often led him astray because of his self-confidence.

But now the close has come. In the chapter I have read-Luke 22-the Lord has been betrayed, and He knows He is going to die. So when He had gathered His disciples together in the upper room, and had given to them the expression of His love in the breaking of bread, He told them that one of them should betray Him. Peter did not know who it was, and he beckoned to John to ask who it was. And John leaning on the Lord's bosom put the question. You know, beloved friends, it is a great thing to be near Christ. You cannot be too intimate with the Lord. There is nothing He loves so much as to have you near Him. There was not a cloud between John and Jesus, and John put the question, " Lord, who is it?"

After supper was over, " the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren " (vers. 31, 32). That is a very striking word. I think, beloved, it is a great thing for our souls to bear in mind that the enemy is always on our track.

The way the Lord warns Peter is very striking. He says, " Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." Observe, it is wheat. Perhaps you may say, I have had a good bit of sifting. Well, there is one thing clear, if you had not been wheat, you would not have been sifted. If you had been mere chaff, the devil would have left you alone. He never worries his own subjects, he keeps them in peace. Saints he always attacks. Sin in a sinner is bad, but sin in a saint is ten times worse, because we sin against Christ and light. Therefore sin is infinitely worse in my life, as a saint, than it was when I was a poor lost sinner. Do not, however, be in despair if Satan does sift you. Self-confidence was the secret of Peter's fall, and usually of all our falls; and it is a great thing, beloved, when the spring of self-confidence in us gets broken up. God allows it to be.

What is the next word? " But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." That is beautiful. We should pray for God's servants too. Pray for those who are in the forefront of the battle. The devil is ever ready to trip them up. Before Peter was tempted, Jesus had prayed. " I have prayed for thee." Charming words I The Lord's intercession for us is a wonderful thing, and may well cheer our hearts, but, on the other hand, we must be careful, and prayerful also.

In that prayer, commonly called " The Lord's Prayer "-in reality the disciples' prayer-occur the words, " Lead us not into temptation." We should often pray that, I think. When our Lord was in presence of difficulty, He always prayed. You will find Him in prayer on seven separate occasions in the Gospel of Luke. Trace them out, and their occasion. In our chapter He is found in prayer (ver. 41). The hour of His sorrow and rejection had come, and as Messiah He was being cast out. Hence He could say, " This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (ver. 53). The more need, therefore, for tenacious clinging to God. He was praying for Himself, but first said to His feeble follower, " I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Faith is very apt to fail,-and, no doubt, when Peter woke up, and discovered what he had done, he broke down. But love had prayed for him, and he was kept from remorse and suicide like Judas. The Lord on high is there always in intercession for us. He died to make us clean, and He lives to keep us clean. He does not say we shall not be tempted, but He does say -" Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:12, 1; 3).

Sometimes one hears this question-If I go to such a place, or such a scene, shall I not be kept? I know I ought not to go, but, if I go, will God keep me? If you go against the warnings of God's Word and your own conscience, you will surely fall. Would not the Lord keep me? No, not a bit of it. Do you think God is going to keep any one who is in a path of disobedience? If Peter had only heeded the word of the Lord he would have escaped the fall.

Now look at Peter's answer, and his fall. Would not you have thought that you would have found Peter trembling? Look at the thirty-third verse. " Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death." What an answer! Beloved, that man had fallen! His fall did not occur when he really denied the Lord. Here is where he fell. He is occupied with his own affection. He did love the Lord, undoubtedly, but instead of being simply occupied with Christ, and clinging to Christ with this sense, Lord, if Thou dost not keep me I shall fall, he was self-confident. The Lord warns him, and us through him. " And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me " (ver. 34).

But the history passes on. Let us follow the Lord to the Mount of Olives. We go into the garden, and there is the blessed Lord praying. He says to the disciples, " Pray that ye enter not into temptation " (ver. 40), and again, " Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder" (Matt. 26:36). When He comes back He finds them sleeping. When they should have been praying, they were sleeping. How much do I pray? How much do you pray? Prayer is the secret of the soul's success. " Watch ye, and pray" (Mark 14:38), He also says. Here instead of praying they were sleeping. It only shows what the weakness of the flesh is. They see His sorrow, and yet they can sleep. Such hearts as we have! We can sleep in the presence of His glory (see Luke 9:32), and we can sleep, too, in the presence of His sorrow. " The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38), is the Lord's tender comment thereon.

The temptation was now come as the multitude, headed by Judas, appeared. " And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss? When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him." (Luke 22:47-51).

They said unto Him, " Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" and without waiting for His reply, one of them smote the servant of the high priest. It was Peter who did it, and that was the very action that detected him. " And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew" (John 18:25-27). When he got into the high priest's hall, the wounded man's relation recognized the man that used the sword. Possibly Peter thought he was very devoted, and that he was doing a fine thing. Ah, beloved brethren, what we need is to get the word from the Lord. Mark Jesus' answer here: " Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him " (Luke 22:51).

The next thing was they took Him and bound Him. Do you know the last thing the Lord did before they bound Him? He healed that ear. Blessed Lord, the last movement of His hand was to heal the bleeding ear that His poor servant had cut off. " Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off" (ver. 54.). Poor Peter, when he should have been distrustful, he was self-confident; when he should have been praying, he was sleeping; when he should have been quiet, he was using an unbidden sword; when he should have been separate, he was sitting down at the fire among the worldly; when he should have been near Christ, he was following afar off; and, as a legitimate consequence, when he should have witnessed for his Lord, he denied Him. Poor Peter! How like us too!

Where was John all this time? Another scripture tells us that John went in with Jesus. At first " all the disciples forsook him and fled" (Matt. 26:56). He is left alone. By-and-by John picks up courage, and comes back. Peter followed afar off Ah, brethren, are we following the Lord afar off? If so, we shall not be kept. What about John? Nobody challenged him. No. He was very near Christ. The man that follows afar of is bound to be found out and tripped up.

" And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them" (ver. 55). Three times over thereafter he denies his Lord, as forewarned by Him, and energetically refuted of Peter. And when he had done it the three times, " the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter: and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out and wept bitterly" (vers. 61, 62). How does the Lord recover our hearts? By a look sometimes. He turned and looked on Peter. What kind of a look was it? Was it a look of anger and reproach? Is that the kind of look it was? No, no, I think it was a look of brokenhearted, disappointed love. It said, You do not know Me, but I know and love thee. Nothing has changed My love to thee. That look broke poor Peter's heart, and he " went out, and wept bitterly."

I think when Peter found that his Lord was crucified, it must have been a terrible moment in his history. What could sustain that man's heart? I believe Christ's prayer, and Christ's look sustained him. If he had not had the word," I have prayed for thee," and the look, I believe he would have gone, and followed Judas. Judas went and hanged himself. Remorse puts you into Satan's hands, but repentance leads to real breaking down before God. There never will be recovery without repentance. Peter had the sense that the Lord loved him. He knew that the Lord loved him. Judas never knew that. If he had known the love of Christ, he would not have hanged himself.

Some one may say: "This is very like my life and my history. Years ago. I was a bright happy Christian, but somehow I got away from the Lord, slipped into the world, lost my joy and peace, and I have got so down in my soul, that my whole pathway has been a dishonor to Christ." My dear friend, go and weep alone; weep bitterly, and your tears will be dried some day. Oh, if you only get the sense in your soul, He has loved me, and He loves me still, all will come right. God's word to Israel, " I remember thee, and the kindness of thy youth," is equally true of you. Though eight hundred and fifty years of backsliding had rolled by, God had not forgotten the moment when they loved Him, and He was everything to them (Jer. 2:2). They had long forgotten it, but He had never forgotten it. Ah, is there a backsliding heart here? My dear friend, do not remain such, but come back to the Lord. Do not lose another hour. Peter had to wait three days for his restoration. It was what the Lord had said to him, and the look of the Lord, that wrought in his heart. He remembered that He had prayed for him, and the last look He gave him was a look of such love and pardon, such infinite grace, that it broke his heart.

You will find that Peter has a private restoration, and a public restoration. The private restoration is referred to in the twenty-fourth of Luke, verse 34, and you get his public restoration in the twenty-first of John. The evidence of his restoration is manifest in the second of Acts. The Lord met him privately. What took place at the meeting nobody knows. The Spirit of God has thrown a veil over it. Shall I tell you why? It would not do you the slightest bit of good to know how the Lord dealt with me when my soul had backslidden, and it would not do me any good to know how he dealt with you. No, no, because the way He deals with you would not suit me. A veil is flung over the scene. But we know this, he was beautifully restored to the Lord. How do we know this? John 21 supplies the answer. His brethren were slower than Peter in reaching the Lord on that occasion. He did not wait till the boat got to the shore; he cast himself into the sea in his hurry to get near the Lord. He says, You can have the fish, let me get to the blessed Lord. I know the man was restored by this action.

But then, of course, the Lord gave him a public restoration. I think, beloved friends, you will never find a saint doing any real good until he is completely rid of self-confidence, and broken down before the Lord, and hence really right with the Lord. He is then in a condition for the Lord to use him. We see Peter restored to the fellowship and company of the apostles in John 21, and then we see him in the second of Acts preaching the Word and mightily used of the Lord. I have said many a time, I believe when the devil saw Peter preaching in the second of Acts, he wished he had left him alone in the high priest's palace. Why? Because the breaking of him was the making of him, and in the first half of the Acts of the Apostles we hear a great deal more about Peter than any other servant. I repeat, the breaking of him was the making of hint He was picked up and restored. Ah yes, there is nothing like grace. Grace saved us as sinners, and grace has kept us as saints. And when we get to glory, what shall we say? It was grace all along the line. And therefore the deeper in our souls there is a sense of the Lord's grace, the more our hearts will rejoice in Him.

Simon Peter: His Life and Letters, Sifted as Wheat

Luke 22:31-34,54-62

The contrast in Simon's history between Luke 22 and Matthew 17 is exceedingly striking. Our apostle in Matthew 17 was on the mount of transfiguration, where he was in the presence of all the brightness of the glory of the Son of Man, and where his heart, always impulsive, was really desirous of doing his Master honor, for, in spite of what we read in Luke 22, Peter loved his Master dearly.

Here we have something very different, but it is a scene that is of the deepest moment for us, perhaps of deeper moment than that which took place in Matthew 17, for we shall never, in our earthly pathway, behold the Lord, as Peter beheld Him that day on the mount, but we shall all have the temptation, some day or other, to do as Peter did in Luke 22, that is, to deny the Lord.

There are many things very interesting in the history of Peter between Matthew 17 and Luke 22 which we have glanced at with profit, but we come now to the moment in this man's history, when, forgetful of the Lord, full of himself, and tripped up of Satan, he drops into a course which every upright mind must reprehend.

Scripture gives us these sorrowful details for our profit, and herein lies the difference between Scripture and every other book. As a rule biographers tell us only the good, the sweet, the attractive side of a character. They think they should draw the veil of charity over the defects, and shortcomings of the one whose memoir they are writing, and this often has a very depressing effect on a young person, who, reading the life of a godly man, gets up from it and says, "I must give it all up, for I can never be like him." But Scripture invariably gives us the dark side, as well as the bright; and what does this bring out? Only the grace of the Lord, who can take a saint out of the slough into which he has fallen, and make him a more useful vessel than ever before; for this fall breaks the neck of Peter's self-confidence, and he learns not only what he is, and what he can do, but he also learns, as never before, what his Master is.

If there could have been an occasion when the Lord needed the loyalty of those who loved Him, this was the moment. The Passover day had come, and the Lord knew He was going to die. Judas, six days before, had sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver, the price of the meanest slave. Judas, alas! loved money, and lost his soul forever, and many a man today does the same, puts money before Christ. Do not you, I beseech you, my dear friend, follow Judas' example, and share his fate forever.

It is an intensely solemn fact that every man or woman, who is not in the company of Christ, is in the clutch of the god of this world, and sooner or later, must learn the power of the evil one. In this scripture the Lord would teach us that even a saint, away from Christ, is in the power of Satan. Up till this moment the Lord had flung His sheltering wing over His disciples, but now He says to them, as it were, You must shift for yourselves, I am going away (vss. 35-38); and to those who come to take Him in the garden He says, "This is your hour and the power of darkness" (vs. 35).

Judas, doubtless, before the Passover, had his feet washed, when the others had theirs (John 13), and at the supper he received the sop from the Lord, and then he passed out to consummate his wretched work of betrayal. Thereon the Lord turns to Peter, and addresses these words to the disciple whom He knew would deny Him, but whom He loved; and further, knew that in spite of everything, that disciple loved Him devotedly.

" Simon, Simon," the Lord says, "behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted (restored), strengthen thy brethren" (vss. 31-32). Simon got his warning here; if he had only taken heed to it, what a different sequel would have been recorded! If he had only been chaff, and not really "wheat," Satan would not have wanted to sift him: it was because he was the real wheat that Satan desired to get him in his power. Satan does not tempt an unconverted person, he tempts a child of God, but he governs and controls entirely the unconverted — drives them before him at his will. Man talks about being a free agent, but there is no such thing as being a free agent. Man does not see that he is in the power of Satan while still unconverted. Man is blind, and does not see his danger. A blind man sees nothing of his circumstances, he may be on the edge of a precipice and be quite unmoved, because he does not know his danger. Such is the condition of the unawakened and unsaved reader.

The episode in Peter's history now before us, is that of a child of God, and shows what depths he can fall into through self-confidence.

First observe that the Lord warns him. Then note two other most touching things, the Lord's prayer for him before he fell, and the Lord's look at him after. "Satan hath desired to have you," is divinely met, in grace, by "but I have prayed for thee." The Lord made use of Satan to break the self-confidence which was the cause of Peter's fall, but the Lord's controlling hand was upon the enemy, even so, and he was allowed to go so far and no farther; and I believe that when the day of Pentecost came, and Peter, restored, and happy in his Master's love, was the means of three thousand souls coming to Christ, and being saved, the devil was heartily sorry that he had not left him alone in the high priest's hall. But for that bitter experience he would never have been enough broken down, humbled, and self-emptied, for the Lord to use him in that marvelous manner.

See what follows the Lord's warning. Peter answers, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death." Think of that! No sooner has the Lord said, "Satan hath desired to have you," than Peter says, "I am ready." You get the secret of Peter's fall in these words. Had Peter been right, instead of saying, "I am ready," he would have prayed, "Lord, do Thou keep me; Lord, do Thou help me; Lord, do not let me fall under Satan's power," but he was self-confident, and self-confidence is, I believe, the cause of all our failure, whereas self-distrust is the secret of our getting on with the Lord.

If Peter had learned not to trust himself, but to cling to his Master, and keep near his Master, what we are looking at here could never have happened.

After this solemn warning we have the lovely teaching, from the Lord's lips, which we find recorded in the 14th to the 16th of John. Then the wonderful prayer of the 17th of John fell on Peter's ears. The Lord thereafter went over the brook Cedron, with His disciples, and then, taking with Him the favored three, Peter, James, and John, who had been with Him when He raised Jairus' daughter, and were with Him in the holy mount, and had there seen His glory, He went apart to pray.

When in the garden, we read, He "began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy, and saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death tarry ye hero, and watch. And He went forward a little, and fell on the ground and prayed." When He comes to the disciples He finds them sleeping. Think of it! The Master praying, and the servants sleeping. The Master is agonizing before God, showing the perfection of

human dependence, in that moment of unparalleled sorrow, while the servant is sleeping. Such is human nature. Peter slept in the presence of the glory of the Lord, on the Mount of Transfiguration, and he is sleeping now in the presence of His sorrow. Well can we understand His rebukeful query, “Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation” (Mark 14:37-38).

Then He adds, “The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.” That is exquisite grace. He sees these three disciples sound asleep, at the very moment when He might have expected them to be watchful with Him in His sorrow, though they could not share it. He longed to have those He loved with Him. But His plaint on the cross was, “Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness” (Psa. 88:18). Sadly therefore does He say to Peter, “Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?” And then He tenderly adds, “The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.” The day of the Holy Spirit had not yet arrived when they would be strengthened to suffer for Him under every circumstance.

The Lord having gone away and prayed for the third time, Judas, the betrayer, comes again on the scene, and with him a band of officers and men, with swords and staves. Peter now takes up a sword, and cuts off the ear of Malchus, the high priest’s servant. Then they surround the Lord and take Him, while His last act, ore they bind His blessed hands, is to touch the wounded ear of the servant and heal it. Then they bound Him, and led Him away, and “all the disciples forsook Him and fled,” though all had said they would never deny Him, and Peter had vowed, but a little before, “I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death.” Ah, how little Peter knew of himself! When the Lord, in perfect human dependence, was with God in prayer, His poor disciple was sleeping, when he should have been watching and praying; then afterward he was fighting, when he should have been quiet; and now he is running away when, if ever there was a moment that he should have stuck to his Master, this was the moment, but “they all forsook Him and fled.” Afterward we see Peter following “afar off,” and then again we see him in the high priest’s hall, where there was a fire, and he warms himself by it.

Peter and John both follow Jesus, but John, known to the high priest, went in with Jesus. Then he sees Peter at the door, and speaks to the maid that kept the door, and thus gets Peter in, and I cannot but believe that when John and Peter were again inside, John made straight for his Master, to get as near to Him as possible. May the Lord keep us near Him too! To be near Him is the only place of safety for the soul that knows Him. I believe, had Peter been near Him that day, he would never have fallen.

First we read that Peter “followed afar off,” and then when he got inside the high priest’s hall, where the servants and officers, who had taken Jesus, had kindled “a fire of coals,” Peter sat down among them, as though one of themselves, and warmed himself with the servants.

What steps we see in Peter’s downward course, leading to his denial of the Lord he loved! First, declaring he was ready to die for Him, although the Lord had just told him that Satan was desiring to have him, and that He was praying for him; next, sleeping when he should have been watching; then fighting when he should have been quiet; then following afar off when he should have been near; and now sitting down, side by aide, with the enemies of Christ, and warming himself. With such a prelude one can only expect what followed.

I believe the little maid to whom Peter first denied the Lord questioned him at the door as he came in, and then followed him up to the fire and questioned him again, and that then Peter went and sat down at the fire among them all as though he were not interested in what was going on. There he was, among the enemies of the Lord, far away from Jesus. No wonder Satan was too strong for him; and if we, who are the Lord’s now, will go among worldlings, and seek to warm ourselves at the world’s fire, we can only expect to be tripped up by Satan too. A fearful position, indeed, was it for Peter to be sitting at the fire among those who had just taken his Master prisoner, and, having bound Him, were plotting for His death. Well did the old Scotchwoman say, “He had nae business there among the flunkeys.” No he had no business among the servants of those who were going to murder his Master.

The various accounts given by the four Evangelists, of this sad scene in Peter’s history, have presented a difficulty to some minds, that will disappear if we bear in mind the well-known form of an Eastern house. Those of any importance, such as the high-priest’s palace was sure to be, were usually built in the form of a quadrangle, having an interior open court. Access to the house was had by a porch or arched passage from the front, closed, as regards the street, by a heavy folding door or gate, containing in it a wicket for foot passengers, and kept by a porter. This entrance to the court would appear to be what Mark calls “the porch” (Mark 14:68). The interior court was usually open to the sky, and here it was that they “made a fire of coals; for it was cold” (John 18:18). In Luke we read that they “kindled a fire in the midst of the hall” (Luke 22:55). The word here rendered “hall” is , signifying an open court, or courtyard. As regards the house most of its ground-floor rooms opened directly into the court. Some of these rooms were large, and formed a place of audience, quite open to the court. It was therefore most probably in a chamber of this sort, open behind to the court, that Jesus stood before the high-priest, and thus we can easily see that, when He turned, He could see Peter in the court among the servants — the crowing of the cock possibly reminding Him of His servant’s fall.

The order of the incidents which led up to Peter’s threefold denial of the Lord would seem to be as follows. His first denial took place in connection with his admission by the damsel to the court through the wicket-gate. John tells us (John 18:15-17) that the damsel who kept the door was the first to challenge him; Matthew 27:69-70 says she came to him as he “sat without in the palace”; while both Mark 14:66-68 and Luke 22:54-57 inform us that the first denial took place as he sat by the fire. There is no inconsistency in these statements, the facts, I conclude, being that the damsel began to assail him at the door, and followed him to the fire-place, where others would join in her banter.

The second denial, as recorded in John 18:25, took place as Peter stood and warmed himself, when it is evident he was set upon by more than one at a time, for the statement is, “They said therefore unto him.” Matthew 27:71-72 leads us to judge that after the first denial Simon had moved away from the fire, and gone to the porch, where “another” saw him, and said, “This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.” Mark 14:68-70 says that after the first denial he went out into the porch, and there a maid — probably the same as first attacked him — says, “This is one of them.” In Luke we merely read that “another saw him” (Luke 22:58). What would appear to have been the case was, that the apostle was assailed by quite a number of different foes, who followed him about the court. The replies he made to the various attacks are substantially the same in each case, though the form varies, and in one case, as Matthew informs us, was accompanied by an oath.

As regards the third denial, Matthew 26:73-75 indicates that many had a hand in the assault on the already bewildered Simon, and pressed home their charge of his association with Jesus, by alluding to his Galilean accent. Mark 14:70 follows Matthew’s account, and Luke 22:59-60 practically does the same, naming, however, but one assailant. John 18:25-27 mentions the crowd as attacking Peter, and adds the fact of his recognition by one of the high-priest’s servants, who was a kinsman to Malchus, whose ear. Peter had cut off in the garden. His fleshly action there it was that aided in his detection at this moment. But, again, if several assailants are borne in mind, all here too is easy to be

understood.

A careful review of all the scriptures leads one to think that Peter's denials of the Lord were not merely on three occasions, and to three separate persons. On the contrary, it would appear that on the latter two occasions he was generally set upon by a number of persons, who all questioned him as to his association with Jesus. To the company of servants gathered in the high-priest's palace that night he was regarded as a good object of attack. Doubtless they enjoyed the joke, which Satan helped them to carry out, that thus really God's work might be done in this self-confident man's soul. Bearing all these circumstances in mind, we can the better understand the nature of the temptation before which poor Peter fell. Nothing could be more exasperating than to be baited and taunted by a set of unfeeling priestly servitors, who mingled their own coarseness with the venom and hatred of their masters against Jesus, and any who should confess Him. These were indeed powerful foes to be in conflict with, but it was Peter's own previous condition that really made him their victim. John, who kept near to Jesus, escaped scatheless.

In truth Peter had fallen before he got into the high-priest's palace. Self-confidence was his ruin. The Holy Spirit has been careful to record his sayings at the Supper Table. The Lord hail warned His disciples, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night" (Matt. 26:31). What does Peter say? "Though all shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.... Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" (Matt. 26:33-35). Again, "But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise" (Mark 14:31). Again, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death" (Luke 22:33). More, "I will lay down my life for thy sake" (John 13:37). Boastful words indeed were these, and doubtless when he said them he felt them, for manifestly Peter was no hypocrite; but his self-confidence flung him off his guard, and took him away from Christ. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" had no place in his mind, and so, failing to pray to be kept out of temptation, though bidden of the Lord to do so, he slept when he should have been gathering strength, and fell an easy prey to the enemy's stratagems, in the moment of temptation, when he should have humbly, yet boldly, confessed his Lord.

So will it be with any of us, if self-confidence, or a spirit of boastfulness be found in our hearts. The day that a saint falls is the day that he ceases to fear to fall. So long as the fear is in the heart the feet will be kept of God.

No doubt much banter went on, as they asked him, again, and again, if he were not one of His disciples, and at last Peter denied with oaths and cursings that he had ever known the Lord. Poor Peter! Old habits are easily revived. Fishermen and sailors, notoriously, are great swearers, and what had probably been Simon's style of language by the Sea of Galilee, before the Lord called him, comes out again now.

When, for the third time, Peter has denied his Master, whom at bottom he really loved, the cock crows again. The cock had already crowed once, and Peter should have remembered the word that Jesus had said to him, and been warned by it. I ask you, my Christian reader, Is the cock crowing for you today? that is, Is the Word of the Lord speaking home to you today about something? Oh, if so, give heed to it, get nearer to Jesus; may God draw you nearer to His blessed Son, that you may not go on, as Peter did, to still greater lengths. Peter heeded not the first crowing of the cock, but went on to deny Him again, with oaths and cursings; and then I think I see that man, as the cock crowed a second time, and he pulled himself up to remember that he had done the very thing his Master had said he would do.

Peter loved his Master in spite of everything, and now, as the cock crew, and he called to mind what Jesus had said, he turned toward Him, and "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter." What did that look say? Was it a look of anger, or withering scorn?

Did it say, as it were, contemptible miscreant, can you deny Me at such a moment? No, no, I believe it was a look of unutterable, albeit wounded, love. That look said, Peter, do you not know Me? I know you, Peter, and I love you, notwithstanding your denial of Me. It was a look, I believe, of tender changeless love; and more, I believe Peter lived on that look for the next three days, till he met his Master again in resurrection, and communion was restored.

Peter went out then, and "wept bitterly." Repentance did its proper work in his soul, as he saw his folly and sin in the light of his Lord's love. Here is the difference between repentance and remorse. Repentance is the judgment of my sin that I have in the light of love, and grace known. Remorse is produced by viewing the sin in the light only of its probable results. Repentance begets hope, remorse leads only to despair. Repentance leads the soul back to God, remorse drives it to deeper sin, and further into Satan's hands. This is all illustrated in the consequent pathway of Peter and Judas. Judas, who did not know what grace was, went out and, in remorse over his consummate wickedness, hanged himself; Peter, who did know what grace was, and who knew better than ever then how deeply the Lord loved him, went out and wept bitterly. The last thing Peter had done was to deny his Master, and the next thing his Master did was to die for Peter; and if He had not died for Peter, he never could have been restored nor saved.

Are you saying, my reader, But I do not know if He died for me? Listen, He died for sinners! Are you a sinner? Then you may look back and see how, when betrayed by a false friend, and denied by a true one, and forsaken by all — yea, at last, forsaken by God also — He died for sinners; and if you know that you are a sinner, and you want Him, you may know also that He died for you.

Peter must have been very wretched as he wept that day, and learned later on that those that stood by smote Jesus, and derided Him, and sent Him bound from one high priest to another, and then on to Pilate. Before him they clamor for His blood, and Pilate, reluctantly enough, but afraid of Caesar, finally sends Him forth to die.

What wore the feelings that filled Peter's heart, as he learned of, or saw the death of his blessed Master, Scripture is silent regarding, but they can well be imagined. Of one thing we may be certain, that the Lord's look, and the Lord's words, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not," must have in some measure comforted his heart, amid the pitiless siftings it went through at Satan's hands, and under the writhings and ploughings of a conscience that upbraided him with ingratitude, unfaithfulness, and cowardice. Amid all the bitterness of those days, that look, and these words kept him from despair, and from following Judas. Repentance was doing its holy work in Peter's soul; remorse had already destroyed Judas.

The moral lessons for each of us from this sad episode in Peter's history are many and plain. It should teach us to walk softly, prayerfully, and ever keep near to the Lord. It shows us too, as in many other instances in Scripture, that the very trait that distinguishes a servant of Christ is just that in which he is liable to break down. Now Peter was eminently courageous, and devoted to the Lord. He betrays cowardice. The real strength of a chain is that of its weakest link. What we would think our strongest point is in reality our point of weakness, and it is just that

which Satan will attack. Moses, the meekest man on earth, lost his temper under slight provocation. Abraham, noted for faith, fails signally therein. Elijah, a truly bold man, flies from a woman. Job, remarkable for patience, breaks down therein. John, the man of love, would have fire come down from heaven on the Samaritans. Paul, the living expositor of Christianity, dropped back for a moment into Judaism.

There was but one perfect Servant. He was lovely in everything, and equable in all things: as dependent, as devoted; as loving, as holy; as faithful, as tender. Precious Saviour, Master, and Friend, teach us all more simply to cleave to Thee, and thus be more like Thee!

Without doubt the place of prominence that Peter had in the Lord's service carried dangers therewith. He was a marked man by the enemy. The devil delights to pick off, or trip up the leaders in the ranks of the Lord's army. A place of prominence therefore is a special place of danger. The way Satan attacked the Lord Himself, may well make us watchful, in the assurance that he will not leave us alone. No security whatever is assured by success in the Lord's work, and, if the Lord is using you in His service, depend upon it that Satan's sifting is determined of him. The only path of safety therefore is found in keeping as near to the Lord as we can, and as far away as possible from all that savors of the world, and from the heat that is generated at its "fire of coals." To be "hail fellow, well met" with the servants of the devil, is to ensure being tripped up by their master. Sure am I that Peter gave all the servants of the high priest, and the warmth to be got in their company, a wide berth, from that day forth.

Night Scenes of Scripture, Night in Bethlehem, A

(Luke 1:26-38; 2:1-21)

The night scenes of Scripture are exceedingly interesting, but the one that is before us this evening, I need scarcely say, must outstrip and exceed every other in interest; and for this reason, that it is connected with the birth of the Son of God into man's world for God's glory, and the blessing, and redemption of man. The moment in the history of this scene had come of which the Apostle Paul says: "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4-5). Think of it: the Son is sent to win sons! Oh! it is wonderful.

Now you might ask, What do you mean by "the fullness of time"? Well, it was clearly the moment when the probation of man was over. The first man had had a fair, full, and complete trial. Tried in innocence, he had fallen, and become guilty: tried without law, he was lawless tried under the law, he had broken it. God had one resource left — the secret thought of His heart from eternity — it was to send into this scene His own Son; His own beloved Son became man, that, as man, He might bless and redeem man, fallen man, and bring him to God. Man with all his learning, all his inventions, all his searchings, had not found out God. He had lost God through the fall — the fruit of sin — and he never found Him again. Even the law did not meet his case, for the law was not the revelation of God. The law was the declaration of what man ought to be, not the revelation of what God is.

You may turn round and say to me, But did not man know God in creation? To a certain extent clearly, and therefore he is without excuse, as the apostle puts it in Romans 1:20. His eternal power and Godhead are most surely to be known by creation, but that is not what He Himself is. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork" (Psa. 19:1); but that is not Himself, that is not God. I might show you one day in a certain building a beautiful picture, and as you stand before it with admiration you exclaim: What a marvelous artist! What conception, what artistic power, what skill with the brush, what a touch that produced such a picture! I turn round and show you an exquisite piece of sculpture that came from the same hand, showing that it could use the chisel as well as the brush. And again you exclaim, What a wonderful man! Yes, I say, but he drinks like a fish, starves his children, beats his wife, his life is a scandal to the whole neighborhood. In spite of his pictures and his sculpture, his moral character is of the very worst kind. Thus, you see, you do not learn the man by his works.

Neither can God be fully known by His works. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John 1:18). If there be a man here tonight who supposes that he can learn to know God apart from the Blessed One of whose birth we have been reading, depend upon it, my friend, you are profoundly mistaken. God is not to be known save in the person of this Blessed One, whom the second chapter of Luke introduces to us as the Babe in Bethlehem.

Now see how beautiful are the circumstances connected with the introduction of the Savior into the world. Luke 1 tells us how the angel Gabriel visits Mary in Nazareth. He salutes her, and she is troubled by the salutation; but the momentary trouble produced by this distinct visitation from God is banished by the angel's words: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God," and then follows the message: "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS." It was a revelation to her. And let me say, beloved friends, if you are ever converted, and saved, you will have a revelation likewise: it will be a revelation from God of your state; and if you have not got it yet, may God give it to you now.

Well, Mary gets this revelation that she will have a Son, and call His name Jesus. You know the meaning of that name — Jehovah the Savior. But furthermore she learns what this Son is to be: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David." He is to be heir of the Jewish throne. But more than that: "He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." What a surprise to her soul! She was to have a Son who should reign over the house of Jacob forever! She was to be in this way connected with One — a Man in this world — who, while her veritable child, was yet nevertheless the Son of the Highest, and was to have a Kingdom that would never end. Marvelous revelation! And I am in no wise surprised that in pious ignorance Mary asks this question, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" God gives her an answer through the angel: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Never had woman in this world, and never can woman again in this world, have such a revelation as is here given to Mary. But, while it was marvelous that she should receive it, let us distinctly understand that the revelation she received was not for her alone: it concerned you and me, as the next chapter will show us immediately. Mary's answer is very beautiful: she received the revelation in simple faith: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her."

Now, if we turn for a moment to the Gospel of Matthew, we shall find there another very interesting scene in connection with the birth of the Savior, because there we are introduced to Joseph, the reputed father of Jesus, as men would say, and we find the Holy Spirit telling us there (Matt. 1:15): “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: when as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.” There had been this marvelous conception. It was of course a miracle: it was the direct intervention of God not alone to display His own glory, but to carry out His purpose and thought, and that there might be in this scene One, and the only One, who could meet man’s need, and man’s state as a sinner. He was to be here not alone to reveal God to man, but to bring man to God. Consequently His mission is stated here in brief and concise language.

But first observe Joseph’s conduct. Being a just man, and not willing to make his wife a public example, he was minded to put her away privily. You must bear in mind that Joseph and Mary had been a long time espoused, and, by Jewish law, if two were espoused, any fruit that came in the way of nature was regarded as their mutual offspring. Therefore Joseph concluded he would be regarded as the father of this unborn child. Yet he was not hasty or precipitate. He had not got the jealous nature that many a man would boast of, and did not act with that rashness that others even would admire in such circumstances. It is well to think matters well over when a difficulty crosses your path.

“But while he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived (begotten) in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins” (vss. 20-21). Observe the difference between the message to Mary, and the message to Joseph. The mother of Jesus hears of His greatness: He was to be called the Son of the Highest, to have the throne of David, to reign over the house of Jacob forever. The reputed father of Jesus hears that He is to be a Savior. And did not Joseph know that he needed a Savior? Indeed he did. And furthermore Mary knew it too, for in that same first chapter of Luke she says, My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior” (vs. 47). How sweet it is that before the child was born God should give Him this name —”JESUS” — Jehovah the Savior. Blessed news for sinners! Charming name: none other so sweet. Do you not love the name of Jesus? Thank God, I do. Does not your heart respond as you hear that name? It has been the resting-place of myriads of troubled anxious souls in days gone by, and it can give rest to every such one today. Every other name will perish: the name of the mightiest man that ever appeared. in this world will pass away, but the name of Jesus shall endure forever. The enemies of the Lord said, “When shall He die, and His name perish?” (Psa. 41:5). What does God say? “I will make Thy name to be remembered in all generations; therefore shall the people praise Thee forever and ever” (Psa. 45:17). “Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” Thus we learn two things. The name Jesus, given to this unborn child, speaks of His being the Savior, and furthermore His birth was the fulfillment of a prophecy, well known to Joseph, that in His person God was going to visit the earth.

Now we pass to Luke 2, and see how all this was brought about. There had been a remarkable prophecy in the Old Testament, which I daresay is familiar to most of you. The prophet Micah had announced: “But thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2). This scripture plainly declared that Christ should be born in Bethlehem. I do not know whether you have noticed the meaning of the word, but it is very interesting. Bethlehem means “The House of Bread.” And, oh, beloved friends, has not Bethlehem been a very House of Bread for hungry sinners for eighteen long centuries? Thank God, it has. From that spot came out the living bread, the bread of God. That scripture was so well known that when Jesus was born, and the wise men came from the East to look for Him, the scribes could quote the passage, and tell Herod that Bethlehem was to be the birthplace of Messiah (Matt. 2:5-6).

But how was this to be brought about, seeing that Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, scores of miles away from Bethlehem? How then was the scripture to be fulfilled? Oh, how little men think that God is behind the scenes, and quietly overrules what takes place on the earth. The Emperor of Rome, Cesar Augustus, became suddenly possessed of the idea that he would like to know the extent of his dominion and the number of his subjects, and he determined therefore to have a census taken. He sends out, in the pride of his imperial majesty, an edict that the people are to be numbered. Very natural for a king to like to know how many people he reigns over. But in this instance the emperor would know, not only the numbers, but the nationalities of those over whom he reigned; and consequently, when the order went out for this census to be taken, every man went to his own city. So absolute was the edict that every Jew, no matter where he lived, was bound, under terrible penalty, to go up to his own city to be enrolled.

See how God steps in and uses the pride of this godless monarch in Rome to accomplish the words of Scripture. Scripture is always true. I know we live in a day when men profess to find faults and flaws in Scripture. You may depend upon it, the faults and flaws are not in the precious Word of God, but in the men themselves who look at it. If I point out a certain thing to a man, and he says, I do not see it, does that prove that the thing is not there? No; all that it proves is that it is not visible to him. It may be there, and the reason he does not see it is some fault in his own vision. I think there is something lovely in the way in which God has His eye upon what takes place upon earth, and moves everything in His own quiet unseen way, to bring about His own blessed purposes.

Well, Joseph went up “unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and lineage of David), to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child” (Luke 2:4-5). I do not know whether you have observed what the second verse says: “This taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.” It would thus appear that the census was not made at all at this time; it fell through. Although the emperor had commanded it, and put everything in motion to get the census taken, for reasons of policy it fell through — was countermanded — and it did not actually take place till ten or fifteen years afterward. However, the commandment sufficed to bring about the fulfillment of the Word of God, and, as Micah by the Spirit had said that Christ should be born in Bethlehem, the world’s machinery was allowed to be so moved and ordered that His mother must needs travel thither to obey an earthly ruler, and thus He was born there.

Now look at the manner of His birth: “And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered; and she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” Now think of what we have been looking at touching this Blessed One, what we have been hearing from God’s Word concerning Him, what He was in Himself, and what He was to be, the Son of the Highest, the King of Israel, the Prince of Peace, the Lord of Life, the King of Glory, God’s own Blessed Eternal Son! Think who He was, and what He was, and whence He came, and why He came; and then travel in your mind to that little city of Bethlehem, and see there that lowly carpenter, with his espoused wife, shut out of the inn where travelers are generally received, because it was full, and obliged to take their place in the stable! There was no room for them in the inn, and so Jesus, the Son of God — the Son of Man — was born in a stable among the cattle.

I daresay somebody will say to me, That was merely a coincidence; doubtless the very fact of the census being taken had brought a great concourse of people to Bethlehem, and Joseph and, Mary were late in arriving, and so, the inn being full, they had to find shelter where they could. Well, notwithstanding all that, I have the impression that if Joseph had been a great man, and had come with an equipage, sending an outrider before him, room would have been found for him. I have found many a time that if a rich man arrives at an inn, room is somehow found for him, no matter how full it is. But think who was here; the Son of God was about to be born into this world, and there was no room for Him!

You say it was a coincidence. Well, tell me this: Why has there been no room in your heart for Jesus all these years, no room for the Savior up to this very hour? Ah! it only means this; there has been no want, no wish for Jesus, no desire to have Him. But if there has been no room in your heart for the Savior till now, God grant that this night you may make room for Him. My object just now is not to expound this scripture, profoundly interesting as it is, but to bring before you the fact that the Savior has come into this world; and, just as at that day there was no room for Him in the inn, so now there is no room for Him in the hearts of men.

What a scene that is in Luke 14. The supper is ready, and the invited guests are sent for, but instead of coming with gladness to the feast, they begin to make excuses. Then the servants are sent forth again, to bring in the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind; and after they have been brought in we hear “yet there is room.” Luke 2 tells us there was no room for God’s Son — the Savior — in this world’s inn; the Lord Jesus when grown up, and entered on His public ministry, tells sinners that there is room in God’s house for them. If, alas! there be no room for God’s Son in this world, and no room for Jesus in your heart, there is room in God’s heart and God’s house for you. The sweet and blessed note of the gospel trumpet tonight is, “Come! for all things are now ready” — “yet there is room,” and that is just why I am here, to invite you to the spot where the feast is spread, and where there is still room. But what I want is this, that you may have room in your heart for Jesus.

God grant it may be with you as it was with a man I once met in the city of Chester. On my way to Dublin I stopped for two or three hours, and had an interesting little gospel meeting. After it was over, my host said, “You must be off at once, or you will miss your train.” There was no cab on the stand, but a man at the door said, “I know where a cab can be got.” Off he went, and very soon found a cab, and we all three got in. I thanked the stranger for his courtesy, and then said to him, “Were you at the meeting?” “Yes,” he replied, “and a splendid meeting it has been.” “Have you room in your heart for Jesus?” I rejoined. “Well,” he replied, “I never had room for Jesus till tonight. The fact is that tonight He made room for Himself, I could not keep Him out any longer.” Happy man!

Friend, what have you been doing all these years? Keeping the Savior out. He has been knocking at your heart for many a long day. He knocked very hard when that near relation of yours was taken from your side; He knocked again when you had that severe sickness, and scarcely expected to recover, but you kept Him out. He knocks again tonight, and are you going to turn Him away once more and say: “No room, Lord, no room for Thee; no room for Thy love. My heart is satisfied with the world, and the things of this life. I have no time to think of Thee and Thy things.” No time for Jesus? Ah! take care, my friend, that it be not with you as with another busy man, a man of immense energy, money-loving, respectable, prosperous. One Monday morning as he was starting to go down to his business, a neighbor came in and said to him, “Have you heard the news? Your friend Mr. Brown is dead — died very suddenly.” “Dead,” he said, “I have got no time to die. I am too busy.” As he said the words, he stooped down to tie his boot, and he fell dead on the spot. Yours may be the next death heard of.

Have you no room for Jesus? Room for sin, room for folly, room for pleasure, but no room for Christ! Stay, God speaks to you again this evening. Make room, let Him have room in your heart this night.

Sometimes people think that in order to get converted they must go through a very wonderful process. Now I have been often struck with the simplicity of what is found here in the Word. The wonderful fact has come to pass that the Savior, the Lord of Glory, has arrived in man’s world, and no one knows it. Only God knows it. Heaven does not yet know it, earth does not know it, but God in His grace begins now to send out His glad tidings, and it is beautiful to observe that the people who first received the glad tidings (and it is true of most of the early conversions to the Savior) were men fully occupied in business. Ah, I like to see a man converted when his heart is full of the world. Some people think they will turn to the Lord when they are tired of the world, but I think it is a grand thing when you get a man full of the world’s pleasures and business, and he hears tidings that turn him right round, and make him drop at once the thing he was most wrapped up in, to make room for the Savior, and then begin to follow and serve Him.

So was it with these shepherds of whom we read here. They were keeping watch over their flocks by night. Go out into that starlit scene, and see these men busy looking after their sheep, guarding them from wolves and thieves, going on with the dull routine of life — what time have they to think of the Savior? But; “Lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid.” That is always the effect when God begins to deal with a man. The felt presence of God was made manifest. And that is the thing which I covet above all for this meeting tonight, that God Himself will be with the message. I daresay many of you will recollect that when the glory of God went away from the earth, it went step by step, as it were reluctantly (Ezek. 10). But here what do I find? The glory of the Lord revisits the earth in connection with the birth of the Savior, the Son of God. God’s Son had become man’s Savior, God’s glory revisits man’s earth, and the angels make haste to tell the good news to these shepherds in the stillness of that night lighted up with heavenly brightness. The brightest light that man could invent or manufacture would be but dusk compared with the brilliant glory which shone that night upon the plains of Bethlehem. No wonder these men were startled. “The glory of the Lord” turned that night into day for the nonce, and we read “they were sore afraid.” It is a fine thing when a man is wakened up, and begins to be afraid. The mark of an unregenerate man is that the fear of God is not before his eyes, but as soon as a soul becomes conscious that God is speaking to him, that God is drawing near to him, and addressing him, that moment that soul begins to have this right, this holy fear. Do you know what the fear of God is? It is a fountain of life, it is the beginning of wisdom, the steppingstone to every blessing.

But immediately after we read that these shepherds were sore afraid, we find that the angel says to them, “Fear not.” The moment a sense of the presence of God works the true fear of God in the soul, that moment the gospel comes and takes away the fear. Immediately therefore the angel says, “Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.” Here is the gospel proclaimed for the first time on the plains of Bethlehem. What are the good tidings that are going to produce great joy? Tidings of Christ. That always produces joy sooner or later. I never knew a man yet who was really converted to God who did not get great joy. I have known many a person profess, without getting any joy, but never one who really came to Christ. I remember a young lady saying to me once, “If I came to Christ, wouldn’t I get great joy?” “Yes,” I said; “I came, and I found great joy; have you come?” “I have been trying to come,” was the reply. Ah, that is quite a different thing. The one trying

to come, has not really come to Jesus.

Look at Samaria when Philip preached the gospel there: “There was great joy in that city” (Acts 8). When Christ is believed on, and received, there is always great joy; it could not be otherwise. I do not say that the first effect of the gospel is to make a man happy, but rather to make him wretched. And why? Because the gospel tells me of what God is, of His justice, of His righteousness, of His holiness, and it tells me that I am a guilty, ruined, lost sinner, that I am under the judgment of God, on my road to hell, hurrying on to meet judgment. Would that make a man happy? No, the first effect when a man is awakened, and begins to think seriously about eternity, is that he is not happy, but in distress. But I tell you what the effect is in heaven when a sinner listens to the gospel and repents; as Luke 15 puts it, there is “joy in heaven.” Heaven begins to rejoice when the sinner begins to repent. If I may so say, when the sinner gets miserable heaven gets happy. When the gospel comes to a man, and he learns himself a guilty sinner, unfit for God, that he cannot meet God’s claims, and that God is righteous, and will not abate one iota of His righteousness to let him escape, the man begins to get wretched, and God begins to rejoice. He knows quite well that the man who is wretched today, the man who repents today, will certainly rejoice tomorrow, so he rejoices. The first effect when the gospel reaches a man is anxiety; it makes him serious; it raises the question of his sins, and guilt, and thus godly, right, and holy fear springs up. What is the next result? The gospel removes the fear: God’s perfect love casts out fear, because fear hath torment. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son the propitiation for our sins.”

Well, the angel brings these tidings to the shepherds: “Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” Oh, what a revelation! A Savior born, a Savior for you! I rejoice with great joy tonight that I am privileged to tell you that there has been born in this world a Savior. Have you appropriated Him? Is He yours? Do you believe on Him? Do you love Him?

He is not now in this world, I quite admit; He has gone back to heaven; He is at the right hand of the Father; but as He sits tonight on the Father’s throne, He is still the Savior. I look up tonight to the throne of God, and whom do I see? The Savior of whom I read here in Luke 2, having accomplished redemption, and finished the work which enables Him to act as Savior, He has gone up to the right hand of God. It is a wonderful thing to find out that there is a living man in the glory of God, Jesus, who died and rose again. And therefore I can say to any poor sinner, no matter where I meet Him, there is a Savior in glory for you, if you will have Him. Fear not, troubled soul; fear not, anxious one — a Savior is born unto you, which is Christ the Lord.

Then the angel goes on to say, “This shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” What is the result? No sooner has this blessed news come out than “suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill towards men.” If men had not believed the news, angels had; if earth be indifferent, heaven is not. The heavenly hosts, so to speak, break all bounds, and join this angelic messenger who proclaimed the glad fact which was the fulfillment of the first part of that wonderful verse in 1Timothy 3: “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh... seen of angels.” They never saw Him before. The heavenly hosts came trooping down to earth with deep joy. Heaven is full of ecstasy, and why? Because the unsolved riddle of four thousand years is now made clear. How is man to be saved? At length the news, the startling news goes up to heaven that the Son of God has come down to earth, that He has become a man in order that He might die for man, and deliver him. I say it with reverence, beloved friends, that I believe heaven was filled with ecstasy over the manifestation of God down here as the Savior of poor, guilty, lost man. As to earth, it was utterly indifferent.

Oh, sad and solemn truth! Heaven moved to its center, and men upon earth, save these few shepherds, untouched. But thank God, they were touched. As they see the glory of the Lord shining round about them, and this beautiful heavenly song falls upon their ears, what effect has this marvelous revelation upon them? They say one to another, “Let us now go even to Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us.” They are wise men, they are in earnest, they are a company of thoroughly awakened sinners, deeply anxious, and powerfully impressed by the tidings they have heard. There is a Savior for them, and they have learned where they can find Him. Let us now go, they say. Prudence might have said, “Don’t be in a hurry, better wait till the morning, lest the wolves should come and steal the sheep”; but faith said, “Let us go now.” When a man is anxious, he does not put off coming to Jesus, he does not wait till tomorrow. And if I tell you tonight that there is a Savior in glory for you, do not you put off till tomorrow. What about the sheep? What good would the sheep be if you missed finding the Savior? What good would the world, or gold, or business, or position, or pleasures, be to you if you missed Christ? “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

There was no unbelieving “if” with these shepherds. They did not say, “Let us go now, and see if this thing has come to pass”; but, “Let us now go, and see this thing which is come to pass.” And they came to Bethlehem, not with the slow laggard steps with which some sinners come to Jesus. “They came with haste.” Oh, sinner, wake up now; you have been too long coming to the Lord. I thank God that when the first gospel preaching was given on earth there were ready hearers, and anxious listeners, and souls that were moved by it. “They came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.” They found exactly what God had told them through the angel: the Savior as a babe lying in a manger. “And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.” They were splendid young converts. They believed the gospel for themselves, and then went and told others about it.

And next they “returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.” They had heard that the Savior was born, they had heard where He was to be found, and they had acted upon the truth they had heard. And when they had heard, found, and seen, they went and told everybody else. And what did they say? Not only we have heard of the Savior, but we have found the Savior, we have seen Him. There was no hoping, or fearing, or doubting, or uncertainty. Beloved friends, if you have found the Savior, go and do likewise. It is a sweet thing when the gospel gets into a man, and the very best evidence that it has is this, that he desires to tell others of it. He would like others to be as well off as himself: he cannot keep it in.

Well, you know, some people say, I never speak of these things. Ah, I am afraid it is because you have nothing to speak about. But I tell you this: if you get Christ in your heart, you will find Christ will come out.

Now, dear friends, let me urge you again, do not put off coming to the Savior. On the same night that these shepherds heard the good news, they sought and found the Lord: they did not stop till they got to the spot where He was. They received Him, they believed on Him, they rejoiced and thanked God, and they told others of Him too. I do not want any better converts than we have in Luke 2. They are deeply and thoroughly impressed, they believe God’s message, and they rest not till they have found Jesus. Ah, my dear friend, have you found Jesus? If

so, you have got God’s choicest treasure for your everlasting portion; and if you have not got Jesus, you are poor indeed, even if you are the richest man in the town where you live: you are a guilty sinner on the road to an eternal hell. Oh, man, whoever you be, do not put your head on your pillow tonight without the Savior; and then tomorrow, if God spares you, tell others, I have found the Savior. That is the way to spread the gospel.

“Charming is the gospel story,Love’s tale of Jesus, Lord of glory,The sinner’s Friend, seen here on earth; Bethlehem’s lowly manger held Him,There trustful shepherds sought and found Him.When angel’s voice disclosed His birth.Hail! Hail! Incarnate Word!‘A Savior, Christ the Lord,’Hallelujah!God’s Son, in grace, takes here a place, To seek, and save, a fallen race.Perfect love marked all His pathway,As, through this world of sin and misery,He hastened onward to the cross: There in grace for sins He suffered, As unto God Himself He offered,Our souls to win by His own loss:The cup of wrath He drained,The victory He gained,Hallelujah!The crimson wave, His opened grave, Proclaim Him mighty now to save.By the Father’s glory raised,Ascended high, in glory seated,With joy we see our Savior now; Ransomed by His full redemption, To Him we cry, with adoration,Worthy of homage, Lord, art Thou: Both heart and voice we raise In Thine eternal praise,Hallelujah!In Thee we boast, at endless cost,Jesus, Thou’st sought, and saved, the lost.”

Seekers for Light, Publican's Guest or Two Seekers, and What Each Found, A

(Luke 19:1-10)

Every one in this audience tonight will at once perceive that there are two exceedingly anxious seekers in this passage, and it is not to be wondered at that each found the other. I read of Zaccheus, that “he sought to see Jesus.” The Lord Himself says, “For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). These two are the complement, the one of the other. I find a Saviour seeking a sinner, and I get a sinner seeking a Saviour. Of course they meet. I never knew a man yet, and I never expect to meet one, that really sought to find Jesus, and did not do so. No, I have been hunting for the last seven-and-thirty years for the man in this world that wanted Christ, and could not find Him. The man does not exist.

If you want Christ, dear friend, I have very good news for you; He wants you. You may say to me, But does it not say in Scripture, “There is none that seeketh after God.” That is quite true; the Word of God does say so. “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:11). That is what man is by nature, but when light breaks in upon man’s soul, it sets him seeking to find out God. When divine light breaks in upon the soul of man — I do not say how it comes, for God has wonderful ways of letting the light into the soul — it makes him feel that there is something wrong with him, that there is a void, a vacancy, an emptiness, a want; that he is not satisfied. That is the first thing. Then, very likely, he will find out that he has to meet God. You have to meet Him; so have I. Every sinner has to meet Him sooner or later. The man finds out that he has to meet God, and the next thing he will discover is, that he is not fit to meet Him. Let me ask you, Has the light ever entered your soul yet? Has light from God entered your soul, the dark chambers of your heart, my friend? Have you found out, that you not only have to meet God, but that you are not fit to meet Him? Ah! I will tell you what it is; the man who gets his heart illuminated, gets earnest, begins to get anxious, and says, How can I meet God, and where can I find Him?

Whenever that is the case, God puts the gospel in his way, just as you have it in this remarkable scene here. Here was a man who was very desirous of seeing Jesus. Now, I wonder, if God were writing your history — and you must not think He does not take a note of your work — I wonder if God’s recording angel has ever been able to write down, in the page of — your life’s history, that you are anxious to see Jesus. You have desired much, and you have desired to see plenty of things in this world. There have been many desires in your heart, and perhaps they have been gratified; but has there ever been in your history, such a record by God as this, that you desired to see Jesus? It is a wonderful moment in the history of a man when he wants to see Jesus, and when, in plain language, he sets out to seek the Saviour.

I quite admit that there may have been, and there usually is, some kind of preparation in the man’s soul for his search. The heart is quickened, or the conscience is troubled, and there is a desire after Christ. It is a wonderful moment when the soul sets out in search of Christ. It may be through the achings of an empty heart; for some people are led to seek Christ through these. Others, again, are driven to Jesus, through the writhings of a guilty conscience. You will find, all through Scripture, illustrations of this. Look at Nicodemus! What drove him to Christ? His conscience. If I take the woman in the fourth of John, what brought her to Jesus? Undoubtedly, it was the aching of her heart. Her heart was empty. Aye, and there is many an empty heart in this hall tonight. You are having your fill of the world, but you are as empty as a deaf nut, and when the nut is cracked — and the day of doom is coming — its condition is manifest. If you are honest, you will admit your heart is empty and unsatisfied; you know what I mean. There is no satisfaction in it. But what did that woman find, when she came to the Saviour? Satisfaction in Christ.

Now, Zaccheus was drawn to the Lord in a remarkable way. Doubtless he had heard of Jesus previously, for the Lord had passed near, if not through Jericho on a previous occasion. He never passed through it again. That is what gives the story its great force. The man had one last opportunity, and he took it, of getting into contact with Jesus. Mark you, he embraced it; he seized it. I can understand why the Lord says, “Make haste and come down, for today I must abide at thy house” (Luke 19:5). Suppose the man had put it off, and declined the Saviour’s call, as you know many of you here have declined His call for many a day, what would have been the result? He would never have got another opportunity. Jesus never passed that way again. Let me say then, before I go further, it may be the last time that God will give you a call; it may be the last opportunity that God will give you of hearing anything about His blessed Son. That is why I reiterate, with all my soul, the words that we sang tonight, “Decide for Christ today.” How much is wrapped up in that word “Today! Today!”

Now, in reading Scripture, it is always interesting to observe the context. Sometimes you will find in reading the Word of God, that some circumstance leads to the unfolding of a parable, and then that you get an instructive narrative connected with the doctrine which the Lord enforces. On the other hand, you may find that you get a striking narrative, and out of it flows a statement by the Lord of unspeakable importance. That, I think, we have in this Scripture, when the Lord says, as a reason why He should go to Zaccheus’ house that day, that “the Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Before dwelling upon the narrative, I should like or a few moments to draw your attention to verse 10. That is just what Jesus tells us tonight. Though we have not the same kind of opportunity of coming to Jesus, as Zaccheus had, of getting to the Lord — for He was then in this world

— still our need, the guilt of our souls, and their state, before God, is described, and marked in verse 10, in the clearest way. What does Jesus say? “For the Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which was lost? Oh, but, you say, you do not mean to tell me that I am lost? I do not tell you, that you are lost, but I will tell you what the Word of God says, “The Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which was lost.” And if you are not a person saved by grace, do you know where you are? If a man be not in the enjoyment of the gospel, and if he has not received forgiveness, then he has not peace, nor eternal life. He is still lost. “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.” What? Lost? Yes. “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world” (that is Satan; I hope you know whom you follow, if you are not Christ’s) “bath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:3-4). I find, then, the distinct statement, made by the Spirit of God, that the man who has not received Jesus as his Saviour, is lost.

I know there are people, who would say to me, Oh! I thought a man would be lost if he died in his sins? Scripture does not put it that way at all. And you say, Will a man not be lost if he die in his sins? He is lost before he dies; and, if he dies in his sins, then he has to meet something else; he has to meet judgment and damnation, the consequences of those sins. I do not think you and I had better tone down the truth. God knows what is ahead of us. I do not think our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world, “to seek, and to save, that which was lost,” and I do not think He went to the cross, and bore the judgment of sin upon it, if there were no judgment, no punishment ahead. To put it simply and plainly, the Word of God declares that we are lost, every one of us, if we have not known Jesus. There is but one word applies to us, it is the word lost! And after death there comes the judgment. It is a solemn word that; I would to God that every man in this hall tonight felt the weight of it. I know we live in a day when men tell us, God will never judge people for their sins; God is too good, too kind, too loving to judge them. Well, I again repeat, dear friends, that you and I had better listen to the words of the Lord Jesus, and I find Him saying here, “The Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which is lost.”

Oh! but, you say, that refers to Zaccheus the publican, and from his occupation — a tax-gatherer — we know what sort of a man he was. Well, do you think your life will compare with his? Do you give half of your goods to the poor? He did. Will any man stand up in this meeting and say, “The half of my goods I give to the poor.” No, he cannot I am not going to stand up and say it, because I do not. Nor do I expect to be saved on that ground. He says, “Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and, if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold” (Luke 19:8). I think honestly that Zaccheus’ life will compare most favorably with that of any living man here. Every soul, without exception, has to be saved, but not on that ground. The Lord knew that he was lost, and then out came the glorious truth, “The Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which was lost.” Man is a lost sinner. On every man, old or young, rich or poor, learned or illiterate, the Spirit of God fixes that word — “LOST.”

You have the same truth brought out in the fifteenth of Luke by the blessed Lord. I find Him, in the figure of the Shepherd, seeking the lost sheep; He goes out to seek and save it. The same idea is present in the lost bit of money. The woman swept the house till she found it. And when the father received back the prodigal, he said, “This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:24). The Lord points out there the truth as to man’s condition. He is away from God; he is no longer with God. He is lost; and if he be not delivered by sovereign grace, where is he forever? He remains where he is. Therefore the Lord announces that He is come “to seek, and to save, that which was lost.” I know this is not a very palatable doctrine nowadays. But it is not a question of whether it be palatable or not. Is it true? is the question. It is far better to know the truth, because if I do not know the truth, I do not see where I am, I do not learn my state before God, I do not learn what my condition is, and in consequence do not seek to remedy it. Consequently it is of unspeakable importance that every one should know where he is, and what his condition is in the sight of God. Lost, is the emphatic word which describes the condition of every unsaved man.

The Lord Jesus says here, “The Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which was lost.” What does He mean? Let me illustrate it. I was passing along Princes Street a few years ago. It was a fine bright, sunny afternoon. I came to a cross street where a little lassie, about five years of age, was standing. She was in floods of tears, with her hat in her hand, and her hair hanging down her back. The child was the picture of misery and distress. I was naturally touched. “What is the matter, my little one?” I said. She lifted up her hands, and piteously said, “I am lost” That one word “lost” explained all. She was away from home, was alone, and lost, in this big city, with no one to help her. That, dear friends, is where you are. You are away from home, and away from God. It is a great thing to know you are lost. I debated with myself what I should do for the child, and thought of handing her to a policeman, when I noticed a girl of about eighteen running down the street, as hard as she could, and looking this way and that, as if she wanted to find someone she had lost. At last she saw the little lass, and rushing up to her she cried, “O Jennie, Jennie, I’ve found ye.” The little creature, immensely relieved, rushed at once into her sister’s arms, and I thought, that is just my history. The Saviour has come out to seek, and to save me. That child was found by her sister, and the man who speaks to you, tonight, has been found by the Saviour. Have you been so found? I have got to know the truth, that the Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which is lost. Oh friends, let us face the truth. It is good to do so. It is an immense mistake not to know the truth. It is of paramount importance to know the truth about ourselves, about our souls. I must know where I am. It is an immense thing to get light as to what my state before God is, for light shows me just what, and where I am, and also reveals to me who, and what Jesus is.

An old man came into my consulting room a few years ago. He was a stranger from the country. “Doctor,” said he, “will you give me a little medicine?” “What for?” I asked. “Oh! I do not feel very well.” “But,” said I, “what is the matter?” “I have got a little pain here,” putting his hand to his breast “What is the source of the pain? Let me see the place where the pain is?” He opened up his coat and vest, and revealed to me a huge pulsating tumor, which indicated to me that the man’s life was in jeopardy. “How long has that been there?” I asked. “What?” said he. “That,” and I put his hand on it. “Dear me,” he said, “I never knew it was there. Is it dangerous?” “That is not the point,” said I; “how long has it been there?” “Well, Doctor, I never knew it was there at all.” “It has been there for many weeks, possibly many months.” “Well, I never knew it was there.” Then he asked what it was, and I told him that it was an aneurism. He next asked if it was dangerous, and I had to tell the man the truth. “Do you think I shall have long to live,” he next asked, and I said, “Do you want to know the truth?” “Yes, I do.” “Then I do not think that you will live very long,” was my reply. I then asked him, “Are you converted?” “No,” he replied, “I never thought much about those things.” “Well,” I said, “I do not think that you can be cured, and I think it is about time you got ready for the march.” Thank God! he did get ready. He went into the Royal Infirmary, there found Jesus as his Saviour, and soon died, prepared to meet God.

Perhaps you will say, You are a funny doctor. Well! I think it is best to tell people the truth. If you do not want the truth, do not come to me. If you do not want the truth, spiritually, do not come back next Sunday, because we must have the truth. The truth is worth everything. And what is the truth? I was a lost sinner, and so are you, my friend. But by sovereign grace, I know what it is to be saved, or I would not be

speaking to you this evening. I know what got into that old man's mind, after I told him the truth as to his body. It was this I know perfectly well my days on earth are short, and I know I am not fit to meet God. I will lose no time; and he did not lose any time. He was a wise old man. I traced him out, and I heard of his evening days. In these he came to Jesus, and passed away rejoicing in the Saviour's love. I will tell you what it is, my friend, you may not have a malady, that will cut you off so quickly, but you are nothing more nor less than a target for death to shoot his arrows at. And I should not wonder if the archer, Death, were standing, the string of his bow drawn tight with arrow set, and that, ere the morning light, that arrow may have found its target in your heart, and that you have passed into eternity. Tell me, into what kind of eternity would you go, if tomorrow found you there? Whether you are an old man, or a young man, a man gone o'er tile summit of life's hill, or a man in the heyday of youth, I put it to you, Are you ready? Not unless you have come to Jesus. If you have come to Jesus, then, thank God, you are ready; you are saved. "For the Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which was lost." It is a great thing for the soul to discover, I am lost. It must be learned sooner or later. The truth must do its work in the soul.

I do not dislike the idea of being lost, and there is no hardship in hearing that truth, when along with it I hear these words, "The Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which is lost." If a man were told that he was lost, and that there was no Saviour, it would be bitter indeed. If there were not a single chance of my returning to God, and if there were no Redeemer, and no redemption, it would be bitter, and bad, my friend; but God tells me I am a lost man in one breath, and in the next, He presents to me a loving, living Saviour. That is the very thing I want. What I need, as a lost sinner, is what the grace of God provides for me — a Saviour. And let me ask you, Did you ever think calmly that the blessed Son of God left the realms of glory, and came into this world to seek you and me? Did you ever ask Him to come? He tells us He came to seek, and to save, that which was lost. It was His own heart that brought Him. His love prompted Him: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). The blessed Son of God became a man, and came into this scene to seek, and to save, that which was lost. Glorious tidings! And, has He not sought you, worldly man, time and again? Does He not seek to attract you to Him now? I will tell you what has happened. You have hitherto managed to evade His grasp; you have eluded Him; you have kept Him at arm's length. Do you think you are wise; do you think you evince wisdom by this?

It is a startling thing to say, but I know well its truth, that if you draw near to a worldly man, to tell him about God's salvation, he will avoid you. He will shrink from you, as though he feared you wished to infect him with small-pox, or some other terrible disease. This only brings out the real state of the heart, and the blinding, deadening power of sin. It only shows where the sinner is with regard to the Lord.

On the other hand, Christ is the joy of the believer's heart, and there is nothing sweeter to his ear than to hear about Him. If I meet you, and it turns out that I know some intimate friend of yours, who is also a great friend of mine, why, at once, there is a bond of union linking us together. I am a Christian, and every Christian is my brother. I was walking down Leith Walk some time ago, when I overtook two men. One of them remarked as I passed, "It is sweet to hear of Jesus." I was pinned to the spot. Jesus! why, that was the name of my Saviour. I confess I was arrested. I said to myself, These men must be two of my brethren, two of the same family as myself. If you meet a Christian in a tram, or a train, your heart begins to warm up immediately. You say, But my heart does not warm up. No, of course not; you are not a Christian. That is the reason. I will tell you why; you have never learned His grace to you as a lost sinner, but when you learn that He has saved you, a wonderful change will take place.

"For the Son of Man is come to seek, and to save, that which was lost." How does He save? He saves by His death; He saves by the work He accomplished for us on the cross. The only way we can be saved is through the death of the Saviour. Sin is on us; we have all sinned, and our sins must bring us into judgment. But what has taken place? The blessed Lord Jesus Christ has gone to the cross, and borne our sins, and the judgment of God, in respect of sin that He may bring us to God, through the work that He alone could accomplish. It is wonderful news, that the "Son of Man came to seek, and to save, that which was lost."

You do not know how the Lord loves you, how He longs for you. He wants to save you this night; will you let Him? Will you have Him? He has come to seek, and to save, that which was lost. If there be a lost soul here tonight, one consciously lost, you may have Him. But you say, How can I have Him? Let Zaccheus show you the way. It was in a very simple way that he came to Jesus. He was a rich man; chief among the publicans; a kind of commissioner of customs or of taxes. He was evidently a high-placed official, but the publicans, or tax-gatherers, were not loved in those days, nor are they loved in ours. This man desired to see Jesus. His riches did not satisfy him. He knew there was something wanting, something lacking. Jesus had passed that way before, but he had missed Him. Just before this, Jesus had opened the eyes of the blind man, and this rich man said in his heart, I would like to see Him. That is a striking word — "He sought to see Jesus, who He was" (Luke 19:3). The man was in earnest. There is no doubt of that. Do you want to see Jesus? Jesus was the point of attraction for Zaccheus. It was Jesus whom he longed to behold. Say, have you beheld Him? You have heard plenty about Jesus; have you ever seen Him? Oh, no! you say, we cannot see Him now. If you had faith, faith in the blessed Son of God, He would become a reality to you. Faith sees Jesus; faith knows Jesus. There is nothing more real than this knowing Jesus. It is a far more real thing to know the Lord Jesus Christ, than to know anybody else in this world, and to know Him is eternal life.

Zaccheus wanted to see Jesus, "and could not for the press, because he was little of stature." Is that always the case? Invariably. The devil will always do his best to hinder a Christ-seeker. If any man says, I would like to be a Christian, I would like to have Christ, I would like to know Christ, I would like to see Christ, what will be the effect? Why, the devil will put every possible obstacle in his way. Here it was "the press." What sort of press was it? It was a big crowd that day, and Zaccheus was a little man; and I have no doubt the devil suggested to him that a little man like he could never see over the heads of the big people; and if he had not been in downright earnest, he would have said, "Here are hundreds of people gathered, this is not the time to see Him, and I will wait another opportunity." But no, Zaccheus is in downright earnest, so he clears out of the crowd. He sees ahead a sycamore tree, and do you think the devil helped him to get up that sycamore tree that day? I do not think so. In his earnestness Zaccheus had said, I want Him; I must go to Jesus; I desire to see Jesus; and I will see Him, if I have to go up that sycamore tree to accomplish my wish. I think I can see Zaccheus. Then the devil comes along and says: "Zaccheus, if you go up that sycamore tree everybody will laugh at you. You know you are unpopular; you are a tax-gatherer, and it is a most odious tax you have to gather — the Roman tax. You had better not do it." "Never mind," says Zaccheus, "I am in earnest this time; I missed Him the last time. I will see Him this time." And what do I read now? "And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him" (Luke 19:4).

He cleared the difficulty, and got out of the crowd. I admire him! Look here, young man, what is your crowd — your difficulty? Your difficulty in becoming a Christian is this, "What would my fellows say? What would my classmates say, if I were to become a Christian? They would laugh at me." Never mind that. When I was converted, my old companions had plenty of laughing at me; but I said to them, "My dear fellows, I have the best of it, depend upon it. I have Christ for time and eternity. I am safe for time and eternity. I am happy for time and eternity. You may

laugh as you please, but, thank God, when you will be just finishing with the things of this world, and will have nothing but the wages of sin for eternity, I shall be just beginning my joy." My dear friends, that is how the devil tries to hinder a man. Sometimes he says he would not hold out to the end; or, again, that he would not be able to stand against the mockery of his fellows; or, again, he suggests that he would be a contemptible fellow if he began to follow Christ, and did not hold out. In that way the devil seeks to hinder your blessing. Heed him not. My friend, you must get out from all this press; I implore you, break from the press. There is a man in this room who is anxious, but the devil says to him, "Your prospects would suffer, you must not be a Christian." I reply, "Better lose your prospects than lose your soul." "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37).

Well, Zaccheus got away from the press; he wriggled out of it. He got clear of the thing that entangled him. If there be a convicted sinner here, who wants Christ, I will tell you what that man will do. In his heart he will say in the presence of God, "I will get out of the crowd; I will get clean away from all that hinders me." Zaccheus was a man with downright earnestness about him. He ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Jesus. He just cleared out of the press. Every soul really has to do similarly.

The night I was converted, there was an awful press on my soul; I will tell you what it was. It was just a week before Christmas, and I was engaged to go down from London to Devon, because I had to sing at a concert during the holidays. This was the point; I was pledged to sing the comic songs, and the devil said to me, "You cannot go and sing comic songs if you become a Christian." I thought it was rather indecorous, and I said to myself, "How can I decide for Christ, and then go and sing comic songs?" Then the devil suggested, that I should put off deciding to be a Christian for a fortnight, that I could well defer for that short time, could go and redeem my pledge, and then return to town and be a Christian. I can tell you that he pressed this procrastination strenuously. However, I am glad to say that I came to the Lord that night.

"And what did you do about the concert?" I hear someone saying. I wrote to the conductor saying that I was converted, and that if I came down to the concert, I must sing about Christ; and I was afraid that would damage the success of his concert. People asked why I was not at the concert, and the conductor let out that I had been converted, and then my old friends said that I was gone wrong in my head. But no, dear friends, the truth was that I had got right in my heart. I was not wrong in the head then, nor am I now, as I speak the truth in love to your souls, and say that I want you for Christ. I want everyone here tonight, by the grace of God to say, I will be for Christ. You would never regret it. I have been seven-and-thirty years on the road to glory now, and I have never repented of my decision for Christ for one solitary second. Repented it! Why, it is the grandest thing under the sun to be a Christian. If you are not a Christian, you may well be ashamed of yourself.

Now Zaccheus was in earnest, and would to God that you too were in earnest. I have no doubt that he got up into the tree with the thought in his heart, I hope nobody will see me. That is what our hearts say at the first, till we get into the enjoyment of the grace of Christ. Then, when the love of God is enjoyed, and His salvation known, we want to tell everybody about it. That is always the way. When a man really gets to know Christ as his Saviour, then he wants to let everybody know about it.

What happened next? When Jesus got to the spot, He looked up, and saw him. Zaccheus hoped nobody would see him. He sought to see Jesus, and as He moved along in the crowd his wish was gratified; he saw the Saviour. Happy man. At that moment Jesus ".looked up, and saw him" (Luke 19:5). Ah friend, He has His eye upon you also. Jesus saw him, and then said, "Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house" (Luke 19:5). He knew what was in Zaccheus' heart. He knows what is in your heart; He knows exactly what you want; what you desire. He knows if you want Him. Do you want to be His? Do you want to be washed in His blood? Then you will break through the press to get at Him.

"Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house." That is a lovely word, "Today!" Ah, friend, do not despise it. Today! That is just now, where you sit at this moment, and the blessed Saviour says to you, "Today I must abide at thy house." He wants your heart for Himself. He wants your heart filled with the knowledge of His own grace, and calls to you to "make haste, and come down, for today I" — Jesus, the Saviour, "must abide at thy house." Is not that sweet? I, Jesus, the living, loving Saviour, must abide at thy house. What then did Zaccheus do? "And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully." Do not you put it off. Do not you delay till the morrow. Do not you say, I will think about it; I will give it my best consideration; I will ponder the matter carefully, I would like to be a Christian some day.

Stop, my friend, this will not suffice. The Lord says, Today! If you put it off till another day your fate may be that of a lady, who had been prevailed upon to go to the theater to hear a well-known preacher. The realities of eternity were brought before her soul, and she was deeply impressed, for her diary revealed that she meant to turn to the Lord. After relating that she had been to the theater, hearing So-and-so preach, her diary of that day contained these words, "I am determined, this day twelvemonth, to give up the world, and yield up my heart to Christ, and become a Christian." But conscience was not satisfied with twelve months. The delay of twelve months for an immortal soul is a heavy risk, depend upon it. Underneath was written, "This day, six months, I am determined to give up the world and become Christ's, and yield my heart to Christ." Apparently her conscience would not give her peace, and a third time she recorded her decision. This time she wrote, "This day month I am determined to give up the world, and give my heart to Christ." Her conscience was apparently dulled by the prospect of decision within thirty-one days, and she retired to bed. Next morning that lady was found dead in her bed. God says to you, dear friends, "Today." Jesus says, "This day." "Make haste, and come down, for today I must abide at thy house."

And what response did Zaccheus make? We read, "He made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully" (Luke 19:6). Blessed action. Blessed decision. "He received him joyfully."

And how may we receive Him? you ask. He is not here on earth as He was then, and we cannot receive Him in the same way as Zaccheus did. If you want to receive Him, the Word of God tells us the way: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). The way we receive Jesus is by believing on His name. If you want to receive Him, He is willing to receive you. You believe on His name, and Christ is yours, and you are Christ's.

But the bough of a sycamore tree is too far away from Christ, and Zaccheus is bidden to come down. His heart is obedient to the call, and he comes down, and receives Him joyfully. The people murmured that He was gone to be the guest of a man that was a sinner. I would like you to take up this position of obedience to Him tonight, and what would be the result? You will hear. What is said here? "This day is salvation come to this house." The moment the will is bent to Jesus, the moment the sinner's heart is bowed at the Saviour's feet, then comes this word to the conscience, "This day is salvation come to this house." It is a present salvation, because it is God's salvation wrapped up in the person of Jesus. This day is salvation come to this house. It is a present salvation; a perfect salvation; a personal salvation. It is a salvation wrapped

up in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the moment you receive Jesus, you are a saved person. You have received God’s salvation. What a treasure to have in a world of death. Death has dominion over the believer no longer.

The man who receives Jesus receives eternal life on the very spot where he is, and the Saviour whispers to him, “This day is salvation come,” not coming. There are a great many people who say, Salvation is coming. I beg your pardon; salvation has come. I will tell you what is coming; judgment is coming. Salvation has come in the Person of Christ, and the man who receives Christ has salvation. Can anything be more simple? “This day is salvation come to this house.” The heart that receives Jesus can sing, I have a Saviour. Do not be afraid to confess Him. The difficulty that many a soul has to contend with, is confessing that you have received Christ. You do not need to wait till tomorrow morning to confess Him. You have the feeling, that if you confess Him tomorrow, men will laugh at you. Never mind that; who cares for that? He is a poor weak sort of a man that cannot stand something for Christ’s sake. He is a very poor fellow that cannot stand up for Christ, and take his stand for Jesus in this world. Mark, for your soul to simply say, I am on the Lord’s side, is to find that the Lord will sustain you, and you will find He will help you. Is there such a young man in this room tonight? God be praised for every man who stands for Jesus, and may you be able to stand for Jesus tonight. You will then find what Zaccheus found. The Saviour had found the sinner, and saved him. The sinner had received the Saviour joyfully. Each found just what he sought, and each had joy in the possession of the other. Have you sought and found the Saviour yet?

“If I could find the oldest heart,That longest has withstoodThe wooings of Almighty love,-My Saviour could and wouldForgive the awful life of sin,And take the aged offender in-My Saviour could and would.If I could find the hardest heart,Receiving only good,And yet returning only ill,-My Saviour could and would,With one sweet glance of patient love,The hardened rebel’s spirit move-My Saviour could and would.If I could find the coldest heart,And in its coldest mood,A stone beneath the brooding wings,-My Saviour could and wouldPut warmth into the icy thing,And give it life and give it wing-My Saviour could and would.If dark despair had sealed the heart,And like a sentry stood,And cried, ‘ Life is impossible!’My Saviour could and would-He could give life, for He has died;He would give life, though all denied-My Saviour could and would.My heart is charmed to sing this song;And if perchance it shouldProve music to a hopeless one,My Saviour could and wouldThat hopeless one this hour forgive,If but God’s message he believe-My Saviour could and would.”

The Call of the Bride, Remember Lot's Wife

The 32nd verse of Luke 17, “Remember Lot’s wife,” is the Lord’s solemn comment on Genesis 19; and there is something weirdly strange about this word of the Lord.

“Remember Lot’s wife.” What about Lot’s wife? She stands the everlasting witness of the folly of not obeying the word of the Lord, the folly of a sort of middle path, when God’s Word has declared what is coming on the scene. Lot’s wife is the picture of many souls: they would like to be saved, but they have not reached the point of safety, have not reached the spot where there is safety. The Lord says to such, “Remember Lot’s wife.” Did she not want to be saved? Yes. Did she not wish to escape destruction? Yes. Did she not make a show of escaping it? Yes. Did she escape it? No! “Remember Lot’s wife.” She might have been saved, but she was not saved, and yet she was not overtaken by the judgment of the cities; not one drop of that liquid fire fell on Lot’s wife: no, she was cut off, but not by the judgment which fell on the cities.

There are two points, I believe, come out about Lot’s wife: she was unbelieving and she was disobedient; and, dear unsaved reader, is not this what you are? Have you believed God? Have you obeyed the gospel? You know you have not “Remember Lot’s wife.”

Because of her indifference, because of her coldheartedness, she was turned into a pillar of salt. She was a hypocrite, she appeared to leave the city, she appeared to be going to the mountain, but her heart was in the city; she did not really believe in the judgment corning; she said in her heart, “I see no sign of judgment coming; I will look back and see if what those men said is true:” she looks back, and is turned into a pillar of salt.

Did the judgment come? Yes! Lot’s sons and the cities of the plain were all destroyed. God is not mocked! And the Lord says that “As it was in the days of Lot, so shall it be when the Son of Man is revealed.” This is not the Lord’s coming into the air for His people, but His coming with them to the earth for the premillennial judgments.

The last act of the world towards Christ was to nail Him on a cross between two malefactors. The last the world saw of Christ was dead between two thieves! Did they not see Him when He rose from the dead? No! Did they not see Him in resurrection? No! Have they seen Him in glory? No! Faith has; but the world saw Him last on the cross, to which, with wicked hands, they had nailed Him; it will see Him next, in the day of which Luke 17, speaks, when He comes again in judgment, when He puts His hand to His strange work of judgment.

Do you know, my friend, there is judgment coming? The world is like a murderer between the passing of his sentence and the execution of it; and what is that? A condemned felon, only waiting the moment when, on the scaffold, that red handed murderer shall expiate his crime. The world is like that. Its condition is fixed. But what comes in between the sentence and its execution? A way of escape! You who have not taken that way of escape, “Remember Lot’s wife.” She was one who knew there was a way of escape and did not take it! The angels dragged her even out of Sodom, but that did not save her from the judgment of God. She was dragged out of Sodom, but she never reached the mountain. Halfway will not do; there is no safety halfway, either for Lot’s wife or for you.

We bring the message of judgment, judgment coming, but before it falls there is a way of escape for you, if you will take it; for judgment is coming, surely coming.

You may say, “I do not think I shall live to see the world judged.” Very likely not, because the Lord may do with you as He did with Lot’s wife, cut you down, before the judgment comes. The Lord does not say, “Remember Sodom,” but “Remember Lot’s wife,” the woman who might have been saved but for her own awful folly, and was very nearly being saved, but — she was not saved! Cut down by God’s hand in judgment, because she did not believe the message. How solemn is the word, “Remember Lot’s wife.”

Did she not hope to be saved? Yes! Did she not expect to reach a happy place with her husband and daughters? Yes! Did she reach it? No! She was cut down, because there was no faith, either in the judgment coming, or in the way of escape.

We read in Genesis 19:12, “And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? Son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place.” Are you the only one of your family? Have you any still unsaved? “Bring them out,” says God; “get them but of the world, break the fatal spell that binds them to the world of the dead, loose the chain that holds them, bring them out to Jesus.” He wants your faith to pierce the clouds, wing its way to the very throne of Crud, and there leave your loved ones at the feet of Jesus.

The evangelist’s desire is to drag you out of the world to Christ.

“Out of the world?” you say. Yes, right out, for if your heart is out of the world you are morally outside the scene.

A Christian brought to know Christ, having the joy of the Lord’s love in the heart, is entirely outside the present scene, or if occupied with it, is only so in order to get souls out of it.

How do I get my heart out of the world? I get a glimpse of Christ, I see Him, before the day of the execution of the coming judgment, doing a work for me, whereby I can escape from the coming judgment, and then going back to the glory; my heart gets attracted to Him there, where He is, and drawn completely away from the world. Home, then, is the place where He is who has won my heart, and this scene becomes a wilderness to me, because He is not in it. Before God judges He always warns; and have not you, my friend, had many a warning note falling on your ear? Look at the grace of God in this chapter. The angels find their way to Sodom, they are, if I may so speak, evangelists to the house of Lot, and while declaring what is coming on the scene, they point out a place of safety.

And what has God done! Before the day of judgment falls on the world, His own Son has stepped in, and done a work on the cross, whereby the sinner may escape.

There is a way of escape, and God works, and the Holy Ghost works, and His servants work, to try to get you on the road that leads to a place of safety.

The very fact of God’s sending a Savior is the irrefragable proof that man needed salvation, and how shall we escape if we make light of Christ, if we “neglect so great salvation?”

Have you not heard the message often, and yet you are unconverted? I would fain, like the angels, lay “hold upon your hand,” and bring you forth, for you are, like Lot, a lingerer still. You do not deny that judgment is coming, and yet you linger. What has seized you, to be any longer careless about your soul? Put the Bible in the fire, and I could understand your conduct; but tell me you read the Word of God, tell me you believe Scripture — believe the tale of the blood-shedding and death of the Son of God — tell me you believe the tale of the day of judgment coming, and I cannot understand you. Oh, wake up, wake up, be no longer careless! If you merely say you believe Scripture, you are in the world and of the world, depend upon it the world knows very well who belongs to it, and God knows. God knew that Lot did not belong to that defiled scene — Sodom, and “delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.”

The angels said to Lot, “Up, get you out;” and to you, unsaved soul, I say, “Up, get you out.” Men talk of the progress of the world. Where is the progress? “Oh,” you say, “look at science.” Yes, I grant it. “And look at the inventions, the improvements.” I grant it, but are children more dutiful? Are servants more faithful? Are masters and mistresses more considerate and careful? Are husbands more tender? Are wives more prudent? No! no! The world is making great progress, but to what? I will tell you. To judgment! To judgment! Did not Sodom progress? Yes! and all of a sudden it was judged; and “As it was in the days of Lot, thus shall it be in the day that the Son of Man is revealed.” Then, in fancied security, they reared their heads proudly aloft, and defied God, and so they do now. But the judgment came then, and it will surely come on this scene in which you are.

But that judgment is not what I press so now. Lot’s wife never saw the judgment; she was cut off, but not by Sodom’s judgment; and you, halting, unbelieving sinner, “Remember Lot’s wife.”

Lot’s sons-in-law did not believe the word about coming judgment; they seemed to say, “If you are going to leave the city — give up the world — we are not;” and they remained, and tasted the judgment they courted.

“Up, get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city,” says Lot. But what thought the sons-in-law? They thought he was a fool, and was playing the fool for their amusement: he seemed to them as one that mocked. It was not they who mocked him, but “he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law.” The very idea of their city being overthrown was ridiculous, for Sodom had never been more busy, never more prosperous; the sun was shining, and there was no sign of coming judgment. They refused the message that told them of the way of escape, and perished in its overthrow. It was sheer unbelief, and many a time has not the preacher seemed to you as one that mocked? But search the Scriptures, and see if these things are true or no.

I am not mocking you, I am warning you, delivering my own soul too, and if you sink into the lake of fire — you will, if you do not come to Christ — you can never say in its depths that you were not warned. Oh, flee to Jesus, flee to the mountain, “escape for thy life!”

Perhaps you say, “I would rather stay where I am.” Very well, but you can never say you were not warned. Do you say, “Christians are not consistent”? I own it; but are God’s words true? It will be no consolation to you by and by, that you did not believe because Christians were not consistent.

Arise! flee for thy life, flee to the Lord now, lest thou mayest never have another opportunity.

“Oh, but,” you say, “you do not expect the Lord so soon, do you?” I do expect Him every moment, and I will tell you what, if He comes tonight, tomorrow you will believe. “Believe what?” Believe the devil’s gospel, for the devil has a gospel. Oh, yes, you may yet be a believer, but you will believe a lie. “God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” (2 Thess. 2).

I have no doubt part of the devil’s gospel to you will be, “You are all right.” Satan will say, “You are getting on all right now you have got rid of these troublers.”

The troublers are taken up to meet Christ, and the world will go on just as before, but no more troubled by these preachers. Sons and daughters no more troubled by converted parents, brothers no more troubled by converted sisters. No! the troublers are gone, the fools, the madmen in your eyes, are all gone; and you are left to enjoy a Satanic, balmy calm, untroubled by anything about your soul — till. till one day the bubble of fancied security bursts, and swift destruction falls, and there is no escape.

Oh, arise! flee now! now while you may. Have you lingered long? Delay no banger. The Lord would lay His hand on you and bring you forth. Can you linger still? You that have hesitated — have not decided — have not been in earnest about your soul hitherto, oh hesitate not, linger not, lest you taste judgment, before the day of judgment. “Remember Lot’s wife,” lest the mercy of God be too long disregarded, and He show no longer mercy but judgment.

Thank God you are still in life, still here where the gospel is preached; if you had died yesterday you would have been in hell! You that are undecided, impressed about the truth, half-decided, but not quite, oh, “Remember Lot’s wife.” Will you refuse the Lord’s hand, that would touch you, and drag you now to Jesus?

Look! the angels drag them outside the city, but outside the city is not safety, out of the world is not safety, to have broken with old habits is not safety, to make good resolutions is not safety; you must get to the mountain — get to Christ.

The mountain, I take it, is the same place where Abraham had communion with God; the mountain, I believe, typifies Christ — Christ the only place of safety, Christ God’s salvation, Christ risen from the dead, Christ the sinner’s friend. Hear God’s exhortation to you, O soul — “Escape for thy life.” Hear also God’s warning word to the unsaved soul, “Remember Lot’s wife.” Who bids thee he warned by her — take warning by her solemn end? The Lord! They are His own words.

She started on the road, but she never reached the mountain. Nothing can save your soul but Christ; anxiety will not save you, desire to be saved will not save you. She got out of the city, but she never got salvation. She turned round to see if there was any truth in what she had heard, and if she might not yet get hack to Sodom, and she stands the witness of the righteous judgment of God on a soul that was not real, was not true, did not with her heart believe the message; and tell me, shall it be with you, Christ and the mountain-top, and safety, or judgment on the plain, eternal judgment? Do you say, “I will think about it, I will think over what you say”? Then to you I again say, “Remember Lot’s wife,” one that turned aside when God said, “Escape to the mountain.”

Reach Christ you must; it is not how near have you got, but have you got to Him? I do not know how near she was to Zoar; she might have been just outside the gates, and her husband going in, but she never went in; never, never.

And I do not know where you are: you may be but two inches from Christ, but let me tell you, if you are but one hair’s-breadth from Christ, that hair’s-breadth will ensure your eternal damnation; you and Lot’s wife will be in the same case, eternal monuments of the righteous judgment of God on your own outrageous folly — you might have tasted salvation:, but you did not.

God lingers over you, calls you, would drag you forth, points you to the mountain top, points you to Christ; “Stay not,” He says, “do not halt or hesitate, there is no place of safety, peace, or security, till you have got to that spot, the risen Christ in glory.”

You say, “Did not Lot get to Zoar?” Yes, and he got safety there, but he did not get tranquility; he had security, but he had not peace, he had doubts and fears in Zoar, so, soon, he went to the mountain.

Going into Zoar is like people who desire to be saved, but who want a little hit of the world too. “Is it not a little one?” says Lot, i.e., he is half-hearted. Must I make a clean cut? he says.

It is a sorrowful thing to be in Zoar. Zoar is a kind of ditch, into which the devil likes people to fall, who really are converted. He likes them to take a bit of the world with them. “It does not do,” he tells them, “to he too true, too out-and-out for Christ.”

O, my friend, escape for thy life and flee to the mountain; never rest till you reach Christ. Look not behind, “Remember Lot’s wife.” Smoking corpses, a burning city, and ashes throughout all the plain, were the only things that remained to speak of the utter folly of disbelieving the warning of God. I said the only things, but there was yet another. Had a traveler drawn near to Sodom that day, a strange sight would have met his eye — a pillar of salt! Charred? No! Blackened? No! No sign of that fiery judgment had touched the Pillar of Salt. No! It stood the witness of the folly of going halfway, of being half persuaded, almost decided, but only almost. “Remember Lot’s wife.”

What turned her back? Love of the city she had left. Oh, whoever you are, decide for Christ now! Supposing the Lord were to shut the door tonight, where would you be? You, who think you would like to be a Christian some day, think it is a good thing to be a Christian — mean to be one some day — to you, I say, “Remember Lot’s wife.”

Ye halters, ye undecided, ye who know the claims of the world, think of her, on her way to salvation but never reaching it — having her back for a moment turned on the world, but turning round again. Let me beseech you, decide now: the way is open, the Lord calls thee, the evangelist beseeches thee, God urges thee, the Church would welcome thee; turn round, own your sin, confess your guilt, acknowledge your danger. Come to Jesus!

He will receive you, pardon you, you shall know now His salvation, know security and tranquility likewise. There remains but one thing for you to do, get to Christ, reach Christ, believe on Christ.

How couldst thou bear, through the long, the mothingless night of eternity, to be the counter, part of Lot’s wife? And what is that? A person who was lost within sight of salvation, who went down to the pit passing by the open door of heaven on the road. Oh, do not risk such a fate! Come now — turn now!

May this lead you who are unsaved, so to remember Lot’s wife, that you shall never be like her. If I remember her I will take good care never to be like her. The Lord give you to hear God’s word to you, and to believe on His Son.

And for us who are Christians, if there is. but one day more before the return of our Lord, may we know what it is to do as these angels, to seek to drag those whom we know out of the world, and to draw them to Christ.

Unsaved reader, wouldst thou “remember Lot’s wife”?

“Then linger not in all the plain,Flee for thy life, the mountain gain!Look not behind, make no delay!Oh! speed thee, speed thee on thy way!Haste, traveler, haste!”

If thou slightest the warning of that Pillar of Salt thy future is thus solemnly pictured:

“‘Almost persuaded,’ harvest is past!‘Almost persuaded; doom comes at last!‘Almost’ cannot avail;‘Almost’ is but to fail;Sad, sad, that bitter wail — ‘Almost,’ but lost!”

Records of Grace, yet There Is Room.

(Luke 14:22, 23.) LUK 14:22-23

But where is it that “yet there is room "? In the Father's house, the Saviour's home, at the “great supper” which God has spread, and to which He has invited you, my reader.

God wants you to be His guest. He has spread His table with every bounty love could furnish, much less than our poor needy hearts could desire, and sent out His servants with the word, " Come; for all things are now ready."

And what is the result of this loving call? All invited have “made excuse." Man does not want to be God's guest. God wants man's company, but man does not want God's, in such close proximity as a feast suggests, so he politely says, “I pray thee have me excused."

Alas! “a piece of ground," " five yoke of oxen," or, strangest of all, " a wife," sufficed to prevent the acceptance of God's call. There was no heart. Had there been, the one just married would have said, “Where I am wanted, my wife will be welcome too; I will take her with me."

It is a sad picture, dear unsaved reader, of your heart, is it not? But listen to me. God is in earnest. He will certainly have His house filled. If you will not fill a seat in His house, some one else will. Do not miss your opportunity, I beseech you.

To you I now say again, “YET THERE IS ROOM." Oh, heed the call of God. Where will you spend eternity? It must be with him whose “guests are in the depths of hell;" or with God, who now again invites you to be His guest in heavenly glory. Again He calls; will you again refuse? Your life is wearing to a close. You began it a stranger to Jesus and His blessed salvation. Will you end it in the same dreadful state? God forbid! “Yet there is room." Come now to Jesus. All you have to do is to cast yourself simply on Him. He has died, and risen again. The work of atonement is accomplished. God's claims are all met. The question of sin has been for ever settled on the cross. There He "who knew no sin, was made sin for us;" and the sins of all who trust in Jesus have been borne for ever away. Will you not trust Him?

Had you anything to do, you might delay; but when all is "finished," and all "ready," the only thing left for you to do is to come, and appropriate in faith what love provides for your present and eternal blessing.

I assure you God is waiting to bless you. Nay, more, He is most anxious about you being His guest. He says, "Compel to come in." Are not these strange words? They show the reluctance on your side to come, and the earnestness on God's side to get you to come.

Oh, let me “compel" you to come ere you drop this paper. God loves you; why do you refuse Him? Christ has died for sinners; why do you not believe Him? You are going straight to hell; why do you not turn to the Lord?

Have you no shrinking from the “wrath to come "? Do you not see the awful folly of your present path? Blinded by Satan, sin, and the delusions of this present world, you are hurrying on to a scene of endless despair. Oh, sinner, you must wake up to your state. You are unwashed, unpardoned, unclean, and unjustified, and you will soon stand a self-condemned criminal at the bar of God. Countless are your sins indeed; but the crowning, damning one of all will be this, that you refused grace, despised mercy, rejected Christ, and " excused " yourself from being saved; and, consequently, ensured your eternal damnation.

Oh, my fellow-sinner, I call on thee. Awake, awake! arouse thee to thy danger; see thine impending doom. “Escape for thy life," I beseech thee. “Compel to come in," warrants me in calling on thee, with all the earnestness and affection I possess, to turn to the Lord. “Yet there is room," may assure thee that, if thou dost but come, thy salvation is certain.

But thou must no longer delay. God's house is nearly full, I am sure. “Some guest will be the last," has been well said; and then the shut door will solemnly thunder to lazy, half-awakened sinners,—No room, no room, NO ROOM!

What crushing conviction will then possess the soul that finds itself too late! It will be willing, but too late; wishing, but too late; wanting, but too late; weeping, but too late; praying, but too late; pleading, but too late. Oh, how dreadful!

Reader, fancy yourself going down to hell with "yet there is room " resting on your memory, and " too late" ringing in your ears, and stamped in living characters of fire before your guilty, godless soul for ever. This must be the fate of a gospel neglecting, a Christ-rejecting soul. Shall it be your fate? With you now lies the opportunity and the responsibility of accepting God's call.

Once more, “Yet there is room." Oh, my friend, be persuaded. Yield yourself just now to the Saviour. His words are sweet and true. “Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Again, “He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

Reader, farewell. May this appeal be used of the Lord to your coming to Him while "yet there is room."

Handfuls of Purpose, Waiting and Watching

(Luke 12:1-42)

In the eleventh chapter of Luke's Gospel you find the Lord definitely rejected by the nation. They attribute to the power of the devil, that activity in Him which led Him to cast out demons. So blinded was the nation of Israel that the mighty energy of the Holy Spirit, they attribute to Satan. This declared rejection of Himself becomes the basis, I think, of the Lord's remarks to His disciples, in the twelfth chapter.

He speaks in Luke 12 as One rejected, as One who is outside this scene altogether, and He gives to us instructions of the most lovely nature, as to our walk during His absence. He indicates what the behavior of His own should be, and how, in every possible difficulty, temptation, and opposition that we could by any means be confronted with here, we should be sustained. The object of this is that our hearts should be kept just simply waiting for Him.

Although you will observe the coming of the Lord is brought in, it is introduced in connection with the kingdom. He is coming back by-and-by, and there will be rewards to those who serve Him during His absence. But it is very beautiful to see the way in which the blessed Lord clears away the things that are difficulties in every one of our souls.

The moral principles of the chapter are very interesting. Broad, blessed principles of truth of the most far-reaching importance, you will see the Lord brings out here. There was a large company gathered round Him, and they had not felt the force of the truth. But He knew the need of "His own," and unfolded to them what their pathway should be while, in His absence, called to pass through this world.

"In the meantime, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, in so much that they trod one upon another, He began to say unto His disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore, whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops" (Luke 12:1-3). He first of all warns us against a danger to which we are all exposed. "Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." And the reason is this, "There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known." He warns our souls against being unreal — seeming to be what we are not. We have to watch against hypocrisy. It often takes a pseudo-spiritual form, that is, the desire to seem more spiritual than we are.

Take the case of Ananias and Sapphira, in Acts 5. You may say, it was a very solemn thing for the Lord to cut them off. Yes. But they had not given heed to the Lord's word here, or else they would not have fallen into Satan's trap. They desired to look a little more devoted than they really were. Are not our hearts subject to the same temptation? We know it. The Lord knows it also, and hence says to us, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

Then He adds that everything is to come out. But the light has come in now, and what an upright Christian delights in is the light of God. He does not wait for the judgment-seat of Christ to declare his motives. "We are made manifest unto God: and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences" (2 Cor. 5:11). The springs of our actions bring out what we really are before God. A Christian should be perfectly transparent. If not, he is unlike Christ. You may read me through and through, says Paul, I have nothing to conceal, all is out now.

Then the next thing is, we are going through a scene, where there must of necessity be persecution for Christ's sake. "And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him. Are not five sparrow's sold for two farthings? and not one of them is forgotten before God: but even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows" (vss. 4-7). It is blessed to see what the Lord says here. They had cast Him out, and what could His disciples expect but similar treatment? It has not been your lot or mine to have it, but many of His beloved saints have. And what a comfort, to the martyrs of years gone by, must those words have been, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." Everything in this chapter is viewed as to its importance not in connection with the body, but with the state of the soul before God. Hence foes and fears are all pushed aside. It is not a question of bodies, or goods, but the soul in relation to God and eternity.

The fear of man is cast out by a greater fear, the fear of God. Nothing but the fear of God can cast out the fear of man. We shall stand in awe of men round about us, if the fear of God does not control us. But the Lord says, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body." In the plainest possible language He cheers us, for the fear of God works most blessedly in the heart. Then He asks: "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows."

Observe, in the fifth verse it is, "Fear Him," and in the seventh verse it is, "Fear not." There is no contradiction. Oh, no! In the fifth verse, it is the holy fear of a child, lest he should do that which would pain, or grieve the Lord. And then in the seventh verse, it is, you have the sense of the care of God. If God keep His eye upon the sparrow, how much more upon His servants, and saints. The care of God, in its exquisite particularity, is put in a way that is very touching. "Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered." There is the blessed, the deeply blessed interest which God has in us, and His eye is upon us in all the tender affection of a Father's love. It is a great thing to cultivate the sense of this as you go through this scene. What a blessed thing it is to have this sense, I am so the object of His interest, that He has actually numbered the hairs of my head. If you had this sense, you could leave everything with God.

And now He goes further. "Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God: but he that denieth Me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God" (vss. 8, 9). There is another thing now. It is not only that God cares for us, but that the Lord is going to confess us before the angels of God, if we confess Him here. That is the sense of His eye being upon us, and that He knows exactly what our pathway is, and, by-and-by, there will be a recognition on the Lord's part of your path and my path, as we have gone through this scene. How this cheers a saint

He adds a third thing then. "And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven" (vs. 10). That is a wonderful statement, because you see what the Lord speaks of is the testimony of the Holy Spirit through a Christian. That is, He says, I put you down there for Myself, and if a word is spoken blasphemously against you, it shall not be forgiven. Where is the Holy Spirit dwelling now? In the Assembly, and in the Christian, individually. And therefore, really, the Lord regards His people as being, and sets them up here for Himself. It is a wonderful place that the Christian occupies now, in this scene; and immense responsibility devolves on those round about us.

“And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say” (vss. 11-12). There you have the divine competency of the believer by the Holy Spirit in every possible circumstance. What could we wish more? The care of God, the recompense of Christ, and the sustaining energy of the Holy Spirit — and these for every child of God — are to furnish our souls in the time of our Lord’s absence. If persecution come, you will be sustained. The apostle says, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil. 1:29). You might get reproach. The apostles in Acts 5 “rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” A Christian must expect to have the same treatment as his Master. But no matter what comes, he has the support of the Lord, and the energy of the Spirit of God to sustain him.

Of course I take it for granted that when the Lord says, “The Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say,” it is the Spirit ungrieved in a Christian, because we are to be here for Christ. It is not a question here of ministry in the Assembly — although the principle be true — but of what falls from your lips and mine day by day. Our words and our life ought to impress the world round about. If they take you before magistrates, “Take ye no thought what ye shall answer, or what ye shall say, for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.” That is, in plain language, every child of God is looked at as being one through whom God speaks by His own blessed Spirit, and speaks in such a way that the world is conscious it is God that has spoken. This consideration makes Christianity a very serious thing. But I do not think, because the responsibility is so great, that our souls would shrink from that which the Lord gives us here.

At this point there is a break in the Lord’s ministry. A man appears at that moment to ask Him to settle a difficulty between him and his brother. “And one of the company said unto Him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And He said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?” (Luke 12:13-14). He had not come to be a judge. He had come as the revelation of God in perfect goodness. He is coming by-and-by, both as a Judge, and as a Divider. But it was not His character in that day. He, however, uses the occasion to unfold truth of the most weighty character to His disciples. “And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). Although the man who had the inheritance had no right to it, and was covetous in keeping it, yet the other was as covetous in wanting to get it. There is a great principle in this, and the Lord uses it for our sake. Elsewhere the Spirit of God bids us mortify “covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). “A man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.” His life consists really in his enjoyment of God.

This interpretation gives occasion to the parable which follows: “And He spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (vss. 16-20). The man thought he would yet lay things up for himself. But God would not have it, and in the midst of his projects he is called hence. What became of his soul? That is a most serious question.

“So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (vs. 2:1). Now there, you have the cure, I believe, for covetousness. That is, being “rich toward God.” The Apostle Paul amplifies this subject in writing to his son Timothy. “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness” (1 Tim. 6:11). These verses show our danger, while the cure is given in the same chapter. “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (vss. 17-19). But you say, What is the harm of riches? Suppose it kept you out of heaven? Well, I did not think of that. Very probably, few men do, but there is great danger, or our Lord would not have said, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:23). It is not the money that there is harm in, but it is the “love of money” that is “the root of all evil.”

The principle is here, and “Beware of covetousness,” God’s sure cure. I shall never forget a dear old servant of God speaking upon this chapter thirty-five years ago, and when he came to this verse he said “Which of us here would not rather have a ten-pound note than a five? That touches us all. And God says, ‘Thou fool.’” The man going on that line is reproved, because he is letting the things of this life really command, and govern him, instead of living in the sense of the Father’s love and care.

Now, beloved friends, it is beautiful to see the way in which the Lord cures the covetous disposition of our hearts. Here is the cure, being rich toward God. The soul is set down before God. What is it to be rich toward God? I do not think it is a question of much giving. I think the widow in the twenty-first chapter of Luke was rich toward God. She cast in two mites which make a farthing. One often hears the expression, “Here is my mite.” Is that exactly half you possess? She cast in both her mites, and I do not doubt that is why the Lord takes notice of it. The temptation was to give one, and keep one to herself. But she was rich toward God, and into His treasury, and for His work, cast in her all, and that of her penury, we are told. She was a widow, and she had nothing left.

I think if it had been us, we would have said, We will give the Lord one, and keep the other to ourselves. If I had come to my last two shillings, and I gave the Lord one, and kept the other one for myself, I fear that I should think I had done very well. Ah, beloved, look at this, she cast in both. She was indeed rich toward God. It is not the question of the amount, because the Lord never measures by what I have given, but by what I have left after I have given. I think she is an illustration of one rich toward God. On the other hand, you might have nothing to give, and yet be rich toward God. You cling to Him, you live for Him, and in relation to Him. That is really what it is. God rules and governs the soul absolutely. Anyway, this is the only cure for covetousness, of which our Lord and Master bids us beware.

Then the Lord passes on, and touches on a matter of much wider application than riches, namely, poverty. “The lire is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you by taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I

say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye 'shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after; and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things" (Luke 12:23-30).

There you get a class, I believe very much larger than the company that the rich man was in. In this world there are a great many more oppressed by poverty, than riches. How am I going to make ends meet? is often in the heart if not expressed by the lip. Care, like a canker, eats out the very life of many a dear child of God. If such be your present condition, the Lord's words, "Take no thought," and "Your Father knoweth," may well comfort your heart. The Lord really says here, Do not think of tomorrow.

In this connection there is a charming word in the end of the sixth chapter of Matthew. Did you ever notice it? "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34). How oftentimes, beloved friends, have we troubled and worried ourselves about what was going to be on the morrow, and, when it came, we found how beautifully the Lord stepped in. We found that His care, and His love, had anticipated all our need, and more than met it. "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things." Oh, they are lovely words. To me, these three words, "Your Father knoweth," are exquisite. Ah, beloved, to get them deeply engraved in the soul! To remember that your Father knows, is to put the heart at peace. Further, we might never have to face tomorrow, because, before tomorrow comes, the Lord may have come, and we may have gone home to our Father's house on high.

I do not doubt that when Israel drew near to the Red Sea, and to the Jordan, they wondered how they were to get through, but, when they came to the spot, there was no water to go through. It was dry land. And in principle it is the same with our souls. We are so prone to leave God out. But the Lord here says, You leave everything out but your Father's care, and then your heart will be free. And then He adds, "But rather seek ye His kingdom; and all these things shall be added unto you" (vs. 31). The Father's care, the Father's kingdom, and the Father's good pleasure all go together. You set your heart on the things that are His, and upon the interests that concern Him,

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (vs. 32), is the next cheering statement, and, beloved, if He has good pleasure in giving you the kingdom, do you think He would grudge you a loaf of bread? Look at the kingdom, all that is connected with the glory of Christ, that scene where the Father's love is known, and where everything will speak of Christ. Why, He says, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. It is all that is connected with the heavenly place that Christ now has, and which He shares with His people. Well may Paul say, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

I think the Lord has a charming mode of winning our hearts. The way the Lord takes of removing snares and difficulties is wonderful. Here we find hypocrisy swept out, the fear of man swept out, covetousness swept out, and care swept out. If you can show me a heart with all unreality, all fear of man, and all covetousness turned out, the sense of being rich toward God controlling it, and all the care connected with the things of this life gone too, I will show you a heart that is now free to be occupied with the Lord without distraction.

This is what the Lord wishes, and that point gained, He can now say: "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:33- 34). Everything in this scene is marked by waxing old, or becoming corrupted, or stolen. A treasure in the heavens is the only abiding one. I know men often say, Where my heart is, that is where my treasure is. Well, in a certain sense it is the truth, but, even then the treasure is really valueless, for it is only for time. Sometimes you find people who have let their hearts go after earthly treasures. What do you find presently? The treasure is gone, and the heart is left desolate. They have not had a treasure in the heavens. Do I hear you saying, I am trying to make Jesus my treasure? You will fail if you try. Do not try to make the Lord your treasure. Did you ever discover that the Lord Jesus has now a very peculiar and priceless treasure on the earth? And who is the treasure? Am I His treasure? Paul could say, "The Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). The Church, of course, which He has loved with a love deeper, and stronger, than death itself, is His treasure. But if I do not get hold of this wonderful fact individually, I shall not hold it collectively. "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me," is a priceless treasure for the soul to apprehend. If you enjoy that, you will have the sense, I am His treasure down here, and the next thing will be that He will become your treasure where He is.

When that state of heart is effected, He says, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately" (Luke 12:35-36). Everything is to be ready now for His coming. He says, I am coming back, and I want you to be waiting for Me, in true simple affection. We are bid to gird our loins in the thirty-fifth verse. And in the thirty-seventh verse, He says, by-and-by He will gird His. I must not let my affections wander. My loins are to be girt about with truth. I must get my affections ruled, governed, and controlled by the truth of God, because a person who has his loins ungirded, is not fit for service. In the first chapter of Revelation, the garment of the Lord was down to His feet. That gives the idea of priestly discrimination. It was not tucked up in service. Here it is service.

We have to be waiting and watching, with our lights burning. And what is the light burning? It does not mean a great deal of preaching. The girded loins betoken the affections right with Christ, and then the lights burning show that you are watching for His return. You are sitting up all night. If you go to sleep, the lamp wick gets long, and if not trimmed, the light gets very dim. It is not a light for the world. But does the Lord see that you are watching? Oh, you say, I hold the Lord's coming. So do I. But I have to ask my heart whether the Lord's coming holds me. Because you see it is very easy for the light to get dim.

In the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew it says, of the ten virgins, that "they all slumbered and slept." And mark, five of them had oil in their vessels. I might go to sleep with the Holy Spirit in my heart. And that is why the apostle says: "Let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night" (1 Thess. 5:6). Night-watching is a little bit wearisome. It needs watchfulness, and carefulness, and our souls really being exercised before God. Those round about us should know that we are a people who, by unmistakable signs, are, practically speaking, done with the earth. We are to be "like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding: that, when he cometh, and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately" (vs. 36). It is a very simple figure. Let me ask you, Would you like Him to come now? Am I watching? Am I really on the tiptoe of expectation, looking for His coming? If not, I am not morally right. I would not like to deceive myself.

“Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also; for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not” (Luke 12:37-40). Now you come to responsibility. I believe waiting shows affection. But now you come to, “Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he comes shall find watching.” And you find it three times in this scripture. In verse 37, and in verse 38, and again in verse 43. There is a blessing in waiting, there is a blessing connected with watching, and there is also a blessing connected with serving. Now what are we about? Are we really devoting ourselves to the blessed Lord in His service? Are we set to please Him. We cannot please everybody. It is a great mistake to try to do that. If you can only please the Lord, be satisfied. It is not a question of pleasing anybody else.

Now mark, the servants here are watching in connection with their service, and the Lord says,”Verily, I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.” That is rest. We have been serving Him, and what He proposes is, I am going to give you rest. I shall make you sit down, and I shall serve you. What is that? I think it is this. He has served us already down here, but He has gone as a blessed Man into glory, and He will never cease to be Man. He is the Man who has served us even unto death, and then in glory He will make us to sit down as guests in His Father’s house. Thither He will bring us, and there His love will ever minister blessing to us. Love delights to serve, so He will make us to sit down to meat, and He will serve us. How precious indeed will it be to take blessings then, blessings made infinitely more precious, because ministered to us by His own hand, in the outflow of love that never varies, and never ends. Happy people! Happy to be His servants! Happy to know Him!

Then comes the injunction, “Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not” (vs. 40). Peter then wants to know the extent of application of the parable, and gets his desire. “And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath” (Luke 12:42-44). Who is now the faithful and wise steward? is a question I have to ask myself. Am I a faithful servant? Am I a wise steward? It is not a question of success. The Lord never bids me be successful. No. The point is, am I wise, and am I faithful? To be really successful I must be faithful, and wise. Many servants have stopped short of the truth, because they feared that they might spoil their success. The Lord has said, also to us: “After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:19-20). Carefully observe, it is “Well done, good and faithful servant,” not “successful servant.” I should like to find that man, the Lord says. Oh, do not look round about to see who the man is. The point for you and me, is — and the Lord exercise our hearts regarding it — Am I that man?

I should like to be found doing just the thing He would like me to be doing. Should I like to be found doing this thing or that, when the Lord comes? No! Then I am done with it. Our privilege is to be giving others “their portion of meat in due season,” and “blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.”

Well now, beloved, I am sure that our souls will be in a very happy state, if His Word gets its right place in our heart and conscience. God forbid we should get into the state next described: “But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken” (vs. 45). That is a very sad thing. We must not delay His coming. If the servant gives up the thought of the Lord’s coming, as the Church universally has done, he begins to beat the men-servants and maidens — as Rome has done — and to eat and drink, and to be drunken, as mere Protestantism has done, that is, got into the world. To fall out with God’s people, is as bad as being drunken. The Lord keep us bright, and simply waiting for Himself, with our hearts fresh and happy in His love, and our lives devoted to His service while ever watching for His return. And then the next thing will be that we shall find ourselves at home with Him, in everlasting joy and rest.

To wait and watch for Him is what we are called to. The two words do not carry quite the same thought, and I cannot better explain the difference than by giving an illustration, which suggested itself to me, when speaking to a company of Firth of Forth fishermen, awhile ago.

The fleet has all gone to the fishing ground, when a furious and long-continued westerly hurricane bursts on them. Rapidly getting in their nets, they have to fly before it. Each day it lasts takes them farther and farther from home, where now great anxiety prevails as to their safety. At length the gale spends itself, and the wind veering to the south-east, the boats, having all weathered the storm, make for home.

On their way they manage to get a telegram flung ashore and transmitted: “All safe! Coming home,” and the good news spreads like wildfire through the village, bringing joy to many a troubled bosom.

Up the Firth of Forth they now come, at a spanking pace, having a fair wind and a flowing tide. The old skipper of the leading craft has a telescope, and as he comes within sight of the pier-head he uses it. After a good long look, he says to his crew, “The hale village is out on the pier, watchin’ for us, my hearties,” which gladdens every man aboard.

As the smack draws rapidly near, the telescope is again used, and this time the skipper is heard to say, half under his breath, “God bless her! the dear auld soul,” while a tear rolls down his weather-beaten cheek.

“Who do you see?” says Jim, the mate, who has charge of the tiller.

“I see my auld womun stan’in’ at the vera pier-end, wi’ naethin’ but her mutch on her heid, watchin’ for her auld man,” and another tear or two fall on the deck.

“Div ye see my missus te?”

“Nahum Jim, I canna see her; maybe she’s there, but she’s no visible.”

By this time the staunch lug-sail boat had neared the harbor, and loving salutations pass between the old couple, culminating in a warm embrace as the skipper steps ashore.

No special greeting has awaited poor Jim, who, rather dejected, trudges up to the back of the village, where lies his home. Peeping in at the window, he sees his wife sitting at the fire, deep in a book.

Jim opens the door. She hears the latch, and looking up, says, “O Jim, my dear, I’m real glad to see you back; I was waiting for you.”

“Very like, but the auld skipper’s missus was watchin’ for him at the pier-head.”

Is there no difference between waiting, and watching, for Jesus?

God give you and me to be true watchers for the return of His Son. Amen.

We wait for Thee — Thou wilt arise

Whilst hope her watch is keeping

Forgotten then in glad surprise

Shall be our years of weeping:

Our hearts beat high, the dawn is nigh

That ends our pilgrim story

In Thine eternal glory!

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