Mark - Commentaries by Walter Thomas Turpin

The Great Servant-Prophet: Addresses on the Gospel of Mark, Mark 6: The Unwearied Yet Rejected Servant

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Mark 6:1-4, 7-9, 12-16, 30-37, first clause, 45-51

I have read the different portions of this scripture, beloved friends, to which I invite your attention for a little this evening, intending that by the grace of God you should fill up the parts of it that are left out for yourselves at your leisure. I think you will find that the portions we have read are the portions that convey to us the three great facts or truths which I desire to bring before you tonight. The first is the unwearied yet rejected Servant; that is how the scripture opens. He Himself is presented in His unwearied yet rejected ministry. The second is the mission of the twelve, and its effects; and the third is the Lord's absence, and the vicissitudes and trials that His servants during that period have to pass through. These three subjects I desire to bring before you this evening as a kind of finish to that part of the gospel which has been occupying us these last few weeks, and may form a suitable termination to our thoughts upon it so far.

Now it is blessed to begin with Christ, and I need not say it is blessed also to leave off with Him. He is the first and He is the last; and this characterizes this chapter in a very remarkable way; it begins with Him and it closes with Him. It begins with Him rejected, and yet, as I have already said, unwearied. He is a contrast in that way to every other servant that was ever known in this world. When persons are refused in their service, a kind of mortification comes over them, a kind of spirit which is natural to us as fallen creatures with the taint and nature of Adam in us; so that we, as it were, retreat into our littlenesses when we suppose that there is some sort of slight passed upon us. If we are refused in our anxieties to serve, if the very persons that we delight to minister to, decline the purpose of our heart in it, the tendency in every man as such is to retreat into his own smallness in a sort of self-mortification. But you never find that with the true Servant. And, beloved friends, it is not only that there is that great contrast, and it must ever be so, between us and the One who was in His own blessed nature a man and as a servant in this world—a perfect man, yet unlike all else, a man of His own order as a man, the one solitary exception to every other man here, the God-Man I need not say, blessed for ever be His name; but you find that combination in Christ that is peculiar to Him, and that is most blessed to dwell upon, rejected yet unwearied in service; and indeed, not only unwearied in service, but, if possible, more earnest; if possible, devising other means and other modes of expressing His goodness and kindness and grace in this world, even in this rejection; so that the very refusal of Him in His prophet character, which of course is the subject of the Gospel of Mark, elicited and brought out the infinite depths, the largeness, the fulness, the completeness that was in His heart; shall I call it, beloved friends, the infinity of love that marked Him here. I trust through grace we are all ready enough to own the infinite power, but it is most blessed to see infinite love, infinite goodness, infinite kindness, infinite mercy, unwearied even though refused and despised and rejected and scorned of men. And that which makes the Gospel of Mark in that way so striking is that whilst in Matthew it is the rejection of the king, in Mark it is the rejection of the servant. This is a very striking analogy between the two gospels, He is as much rejected in Mark in His prophet and servant character as He is rejected in Matthew's Gospel as the Messiah of that people. He was rejected, beloved friends, everywhere; He is rejected as king in Matthew, He is rejected as Servant-prophet in Mark, He is rejected as the Man amongst men in Luke, and He is rejected as the light that shone in this world, the true Light, a divine Person, in John. Only there is this difference, that in John He is rejected from the outset; in Matthew He is presented to Jewish responsibility; in Mark He is presented in His ministry to the responsibility of men generally; in Luke He is presented as the Man amongst men in His compassions but in John it begins with "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own things [J Ç'4"], and his own people received him not." That gives the Gospel of John its peculiar character; from the very outset He is refused; but in all the other gospels He is presented to man's responsibility in various aspects of His gracious mission here in this world.

Now, beloved friends, you will observe how distinctly it comes out in the beginning of our chapter to-night. And I desire that you should take particular notice of the expression they use, the terms of their rejection, as I have a special object in my mind in speaking of it. They saw His wonder- working power, they were astonished at His doctrine and wisdom; this made itself felt and could not be denied; but you remember what they said, because it is given us here by the Holy Ghost, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses?" Now that one scripture is the only scripture I know of where you find that word at all; it is not in any other gospel; you will find "the carpenter's son," but nowhere else will you find this expression, "Is not this the carpenter?" Now it is well for us to bear in mind how that this was a jeer and a taunt of His despisers and rejectors, and I can have no hesitation in asserting my conviction that I believe it is going too far to attach to that taunt which these unbelieving Jews flung at Him in the enmity and hatred of their heart, any divine intimation that He ever really was a carpenter. It was clearly their taunt; it was what they said; and therefore is recorded as such. I would say for myself that I feel increasingly in all that relates to our adorable Lord and Master, whether in His glory, or in the vail of His manhood, through which it shone, we do well to tread softly, with unshodden foot and reverent approach; let us never forget what has been so blessedly and touchingly thus expressed

But if indeed it is so, if indeed He did work at the carpenter's bench, and He was pleased in the grace of His heart not merely to take the lowly place which He did take, of being the reputed son at least of a carpenter, and the son of a woman that was poor in circumstances and lowly in origin—if, I say, along with that He was also pleased to be a carpenter by trade and to work, then all I would say is, my soul adores Him for it when I think of it, I bow down in holy worship before Him as I contemplate it, and I say to myself that trade is to me for ever consecrated by the fact that the Son of God, my own Savior and Lord, having become a Man, was pleased to humble Himself so as to work at it. I feel that it is important that we should hold these things in that way, and that we should have in our hearts all that affectionate reverence due to His blessed Person.

Now look for a moment at the other side of this. We are confronted at the present time with all kinds of divergence from the truth in various ways. Some, and perhaps they are a very large class comparatively speaking, and for a very considerable time, have hesitated and stumbled

over His divinity. You know there are those who have not hesitated to refuse the Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ; that is now an old blasphemy against Christ as well as a departure from the truth. Such persons will allow Him to have been the first of teachers, they will allow that His moral instructions were magnificent, beyond anything that was ever known or heard of in this world; they say there never was such a teacher or such doctrine, there never were such words or such works of mercy and kindness but they limit the whole testimony that is conveyed in it to the fact of His position as a teacher and as a man here in this world; and they positively refuse to believe that He was, whilst man, truly and as really God. Now, beloved friends, I need not enter into any argument with regard to that, but I do earnestly press this one fact upon you: if Christ was not God, truly and really the mighty God, "God over all, blessed evermore"—if it be not true that we—

—if He was not really and absolutely and positively in His own nature very God, as we know He was very Man—then all I say is, I cannot understand the argument which seeks to present Him as in any sense exalted; because, remember this, His whole claim, His whole testimony, His whole life, His works, His words, were always given as the proof of His divine origin. Therefore if any one rejects or has a question about the fact that He was God (though I trust there is no one here through grace that has the smallest tendency in that direction); then I say, beloved friends, you cannot dwell upon the excellencies and merits and worth of anything that is connected with Him as man, because all these were laid claim to by Him in proof of His divine nature. To my mind that argument is unanswerable; I do not believe it can be overturned. Christ through His whole ministry, and in His whole life and testimony in this world, appealed to His works and to His words that He was God. Thank God, we know that He was God.

But look at the other side a moment more. What we are confronted with more in modern days is not so much a question of His being truly and really God; but, beloved friends, we have to grapple with another error and on another side, and that is with regard to His being truly and really man. Now we cannot affirm of our Lord Jesus Christ's divinity and of His Godhead glory in such a manner and in such a way as to detract from the reality of His manhood; as on the other hand you cannot affirm of His manhood and of His ways in this world in such wise as to detract from His glory as God. Therefore, what we find in scripture is this, that though unique in His own blessed character and way down here, apart from man and of an order peculiar to Himself "the second man," says the scripture, "is the Lord out of heaven"—yet that He was as truly and as really a Man here in this world as He was truly and really and always "God over all, blessed evermore." And we have to hold both; and when we assert the reality and the glory, too, of His manhood, we do not in any wise oppose another part of the glory of Christ to lessen the truth of that. This would be to set one glory of His Person against another. The truth is, we adoringly bow and hold both, we do not separate and divide His blessed Person; we hold and own in our hearts' most reverent and tenderest affections, too, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was both God and Man, and that His divine nature shone forth in Him as truly and really as the perfection of His human nature as man was also seen.

"Is not this the carpenter"; was then, as I see it, the taunt of the enemy, and I only refer to it to give to you my own thought and interpretation of the passage. I do not dogmatize; God forbid: I dare not go beyond what I see as to any part of God's word, and would only present to you what I have myself received; and as I have said, to me it seems going too far to assert that because those who refused Him and rejected Him in consequence of His lowly origin called Him "the carpenter" that the Lord necessarily worked at this trade. Scripture as to this is silent; it gives us their taunt, but it does not say He was a carpenter; but if He did work, then all I say is, He ennobled and consecrated and exalted that trade for evermore.

There is one other little thought which connects itself with this. I earnestly wish to press it upon you, and it is a practical one, too. I learn the lesson of His grace as I look at this manner and way of refusing Him—as I see Him rejected, as I see that they stumbled over His lowly blessed path here. Oh! the perfection of Christ's humiliation, and the perfection of His abasement in this world! If He were not the mighty God, He could not have humbled Himself. Remember, the point of departure in His humiliation was Godhead; "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not an object of rapine to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant." Divinity was the point from which He came down to be a man; and they- stumbled over the lowliness with which the Godhead glory was veiled in His humiliation. But apart from that altogether, I believe there is a wholesome lesson and word for every one of us with regard to that very fact. No doubt they were accustomed to come in contact with Him as a child at Nazareth; no doubt His blessed, holy, wondrous life both of childhood and manhood so far was before their eyes. I have no doubt they saw Him every day, they were witnesses possibly of the humiliation through which He passed; but mark this, there is a kind of familiarity which comes from an unholy and undue acquaintance with divine things; and I feel assured we need to guard against it, and I desire very earnestly to press that upon my beloved brethren here to-night. I believe we need to watch against this, we who handle so constantly holy things. You may rest assured of it, beloved friends, all undue familiarity of that kind with the things of God correspondingly weakens the effects of those things upon our souls. One of the greatest ethical writers and thinkers perhaps this country has produced, the great Bishop Butler, has laid down this as truth, that I do not think can be disputed, a principle of very great importance, namely—that "passive impressions, by being produced, grow weaker." By "passive impressions" he means impressions produced that have no active outlet, as it were, in the shape of relieving the distress which produced them or ministering to it, but simply and only the sight of it. The illustration would be that of a person every day accustomed to sights of distress; the first feelings that would be created by those sights of distress would gradually give way, and the tenderness created in the heart at the first, by constantly beholding them and coming into contact with them, would, without any active operation with respect to them, soon diminish. If you were to look at some terrible sight day after day, the first feelings of revolt or fear or terror or pity or concern that were in your heart would all gradually give way. So it is, beloved friends, with regard to divine things. If our souls are not maintained in fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, the constancy of our occupation with divine things without this communion will promote in us a carnal familiarity. I feel that is a thing we ought especially to guard against, and therefore we can never touch or deal with the things of God apart from our own actual state and condition of soul. There must be a state of soul suitable to occupation with them, watchfulness and prayerfulness are called for, a sense of our own insufficiency to touch these things, a sense of their infinite nature, a sense of their being beyond us. Who am I, or who are you, or any mere mortal, save as God is pleased in His wonderful grace by His Spirit to reveal these things to our consciences—who are we, to "rush in," as the saying is, "where angels fear to tread," to rush in with our minds and reasonings on the things of God as if we were competent to deal with them? And therefore we do need to watch, and I think this simple incident of our precious Lord and Master's life at Nazareth, and His rejection by His own people, and His refusal by those who witnessed His holy childhood, and saw Him there every day before their eyes—I say that incident has a very special and pointed voice to us, and is calculated to lead our hearts into deep exercise with regard to it, that we should be guarded and preserved and kept by His grace from all such unholy familiarity. That is the first thing which I see presented to us here.

The second is just one of those cases that prove His unwearied kindness and goodness though He was rejected; for in the mission of the twelve, you find that, though rejected, still for all that He is the patient blessed servant. Further, when we look at this mission of the twelve and see Him sending them out, and the character in which they are sent out, too, it is such a contrast, for instance, with the history of the fiery prophet of Israel of old. You know that when Elijah was threatened by a woman, he longed to die; he was no better than his fathers, he said, and he asked God to take him away. And it is one of the most remarkable instances of how the grace of God comes in and overrides all those unbelieving fears of our hearts; because he did not die, he got something a great deal better than death, he was taken up to heaven without dying; but you remember how chafed Elijah was, how he sat down under a juniper tree; you remember the sulk the prophet got into, how he was ready to give up his ministry and retire from it. But when I look at this great Prophet, this great contrast to all other prophets, what I find is, that though personally rejected Himself He continues His blessed mission in others. That, I believe, introduces the mission of the twelve, and they are sent forth.

Look, too, at the manner in which they are sent. I will only note one or two things I regard as exceedingly instructive about their mission. First of all, they are sent out two and two; that is the divine order, and I can well conceive what cheer and what help and what comfort two servants of God truly and really yoked together in His service would be to one another. It is, remember, a peculiar mission; it contemplates tremendous opposition, it contemplates a certain measure of solitariness and loneliness and isolation, which must ever be the case with the servant of God in a world like this. Therefore I see the greatest consideration for the servants in pairing them off by two and two in that way. That is the first thing.

The second is—and here I must expect but little sympathy—they were sent out in exactly the sharpest contrast to all modern modes of mission work: they were sent out bereft of everything, without the ordinary common provision of what people are pleased to call in these days indispensables—though I do not know what the meaning of an “indispensable” is; I only know one “indispensable,” and that is Jesus Christ. What I mean by that is, that you may positively do without everything else but Him. O that we might believe so thoroughly in His divine sufficiency and power that we could go bereft of everything but Jesus Christ, and find in Himself our all. Now they were sent out without any supply; they were to have no scrip, and further they were to be without the great world power of to-day, namely, money. Money is what is worshiped by this world, yet they were not to carry that. Why? Because, beloved friends, they were being sent out by the One in whom all true provision was found. Would to God the church of God would awake up to the great reality and truth of that. O that the mission of God’s servants had in the eyes of the church a more divine character about it, that it is not merely that people go forth to preach or to work or to labor, blessed as that is, but that they are sent. Now I want to press that on you; I feel there is just now a sad lack of that amongst Christians generally. “How,” says the apostle, in Rom. 11, “how shall they preach except they be sent?” It is not enough for a man to say, I would like to preach. The point is, are we sent? Have we a mission? I join issue at once, for I am assured any thought such as the church sending persons to preach has no foundation or authority in scripture; the church is taught and is instructed, but the church does not teach or send to preach; it is the Master who sends the servants to preach, it is the Master who selects the servants, it is the Master under whose authority the servants have to act. It is a very important thing to hold these things in their true proper connection and order. Jesus Himself sent them forth, He was the Master of His servants, and therefore He both called and commissioned. If you will show me anything to-day that can positively claim His divine rights and authority in that respect, I trust one is gladly ready to own and recognize it, but, failing this, we must stick fast to what the scripture saith, and again I assert there is only One who has divine right and title to send His servants in this world, and that is the exalted, glorified Man at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. He is the source of all true ministry, it is with Him they who minister have to do. But this helplessness as to man’s resources, this absence of all human ways and means, so that they were entirely and wholly cast on Him, is to me exceedingly instructive.

Again, their preaching was not of a very ordinary nature either. They had neither money, nor purse, nor scrip, they were what would be termed destitute men; but yet they were the men that moved hearts, they were the men that got at people’s consciences, these were the men that smote the seared conscience of that despicable man, the Ahab of the New Testament, as he has been rightly called, Herod, a monster who had gratified his carnality and his lust, and then had been guilty of a foul, vile, mean murder; that man had got rid of the forerunner of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the moment the tidings reached his ears of the fame of Jesus through the ministry of His servants, that moment his conscience got awakened, and he said, Ah! that is John! Have not you often found that when the word of God has come in power to your soul, and there is some hidden sin lying there coiled up and concealed like a snake, then how it has been brought out by the light and heat and power of the word of God? That was Herod: “It is John,” says he at once when the word reaches him. And what adds to the strength of that is this: that Herod was simply steeped in Sadducean notions, and the Sadducees believed in no resurrection or angel or spirit or anything of the kind. Yet, steeped though he was in those ideas, a very Sadducee in theology, as we should say, notwithstanding all, such is the power of the truth preached by these servants of Christ upon his conscience, that the witness within, now awaked, asserts itself and he says, “It is John whom I beheaded.” Ah! how God can bring men’s sins to light before them! How God can wake up a slumbering conscience, and can deal with people’s souls in that condition! This then is the first great proof of the power of this divine mission and ministry.

There is only one thing more upon this, and then we will pass on to the last subject. I want you to notice, and I think it is most solemn, even though a real awakening comes into a person’s conscience under divinely-sent ministry and power, yet how gradually it can cease, as it were, to take account of the first springs and movements that touched it. There may be the deadening and stupefying of conscience, the drugging of it by the devil’s drains. That is what we see in Herod, a hardening process goes on; at last it ceases to sting altogether. I do not know how to speak of Herod of Galilee; I have the most supreme contempt for such a character—an unmixedly wicked wretch was Herod. You see in him the first movements of terror and fear and of slavish horror when his sins have found him out; but mark what happens afterwards; how that is all lulled into quiet and into rest; and then what takes its place? Curiosity! First fear, and when fear is drugged or rocked to sleep in the devil’s cradle, then curiosity. Oh, what an amount of curiosity there is at the present time! Men that were once afraid are now curious. That is what marked Herod, a wretched, prurient curiosity. What he wanted was to see Jesus; he had heard often of Him and would patronize Him, he thought he would see some work of wonder, some miracle done by Him; and therefore he sent for Him to commune with Him. Now I want you to observe this. You may be deceived sometimes, perhaps, by mistaking mere curiosity for some divine interest; I am sure I have often seen it; people may mistake mere curiosity for some spiritual awakening, whereas it is only mere empty curiosity that has seized the person’s mind, just as it is in this world. Now mark what succeeds that—you will be struck with it if you take the gospel history of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially on the very eve of His passion—namely, mocking. Terror being quieted down, curiosity succeeds; that in turn changes into mocking. “Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate.” Just think of these two men passing the Lord of life and glory backwards and forwards one to another! What a history it is! My brother or sister here to-night, let me entreat of you not to trifle with conscience; cultivate it—thank God you have it; do not drug it; one of the most solemn

things is not to have a good conscience. Every man and every woman in this world has acquired it by the fall. God in His infinite grace and mercy help us to be sensitive about it, tender about it. It can be lulled, it can be stupefied, until it ceases to act altogether, as in this sadly solemn case.

Now these are the great points which the mission of the twelve brings before us first of all, its divine character, then its effects, and its effects in a certain case, this case of Herod.

Now I want to speak to you for a few moments about our last subject here, that is our Lord's figurative departure from the scene, and the vicissitudes of His servants. That is introduced by a most touching incident, and one that has a special voice to us to-night, which I want you distinctly to take in, through grace. There was a large multitude of hungry people around Him, and the time was far passed; circumstances were pressing, and the disciples come to the Lord and say, "Send them away." Now I am afraid the disciples were very like some of us in these days. "Send them away," they say; "we do not want to be burdened with this hungry multitude, we do not want to be troubled with their wants." Observe how their wants are not questioned, their need is not denied, there is no doubt but that hunger and distress were fully represented. "Let them go," say the disciples, "into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: there is nothing here; send them away"; which meant, send them away from Jesus. O beloved friends, do we say that now? Well, I am afraid sometimes we do. "Give ye them to eat," says the Lord. May God make our ears hear that to-night. My beloved friends, do you ever think of giving other people to eat, or do you think only of eating yourselves? Have you ever thought that there are spiritually hungry men and women in multitudes at our doors, that there are people all round about you starving for the bread of life? And have not you heard the Master's words, "Give ye them to eat"? These blessed, gracious words of His might well be an everlasting reproach upon the church of God, an ever- lasting reproach upon the saints of God; words which might well ring in our ears for ever, "Give ye them to eat." They were thinking only of their miserable provision, and they say, How can we poverty stricken people give to them? Then we find what is so blessed, and gives us the contrast between Him and all else beside. Hearken to His blessed words, "I have compassion." I love those words; O the sweetness and tenderness of those words to the heart, "I have compassion on the multitude." O that our blessed Master would give us more of His compassions! O to think of this great city, with its millions of immortal souls; here we are surrounded by a multitude of perishing ones; we are positively living in a kind of modern heathendom. Alas! that is what Christianity, so- called, is; thickly-populated places, cities and towns teeming with multitudes of immortal souls perishing for the bread of life. And think of our unconcern; I marvel at our little thought about it. I ask you affectionately to-night, do the walls of your room bear witness to your pleadings with God about it? I think I hear you say, "Oh! I am not sent." Ah! what a very convenient way to escape from your responsibility; numbers of people think they get out of it like that. "I am not sent." Shall I tell you what strikes me? It is this, whether you would go if you were called! Bear with me in the plainness of the words, but the one who says "I am not sent," be assured of it, that person would not go if he were sent. I see this very same unwillingness manifesting itself in the excuse. But what I do press upon you is this, while I fully grant we are not all sent to do the same kind of work, and are not all sent to preach, what I maintain is, that if the love of Christ were in our hearts as the grand constraining power, no need, or misery, or distress, however great or pressing, would hinder us from seeking in every way to give the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is the true bread of life, to every hungry soul with which we come in contact. I confess I do not understand what Christianity and the religion of Jesus Christ is, nor what the ways of Jesus Christ were, if one of His own true, beloved people in this world, let them be ever so simple, let them be ever so feeble, refused to follow in His ways—- assuredly they could by grace tell of what had satisfied their hunger and of what had met their thirst; assuredly they could say, "I know what met the cravings of my soul, and I can tell you it will meet yours. Who do you think knows the value of bread? The chemist? Not he; but the starving man that has eaten it. I have eaten that bread, he says. There is too much mere head-work, I fear, about us; hence our reasonings and our speculations and so forth, in reality a poverty-stricken state of soul. "Give ye them to eat" rings in our ears to-night. The Lord in His grace give us to hear it, and to heed it as well.

That is what introduces His departure in figure here; He sends His disciples, and He goes up into a mountain to pray; He goes on high, as it were—that is what is represented by His going up into the mountain—and the disciples cross the water in a boat, and you have their vicissitudes. O how blessed it is to think what it says here, "He saw them." Now I want my brothers in the Lord here to-night to share with me the comfort that passage brings; "He saw them toiling in rowing." Ah! brother, you are laboring, it may be in some sphere of service or work, and it is very uphill, very hard, and it takes a great deal out of you, and you are very often depressed. Now think of this, "He saw them toiling in rowing." Not the shades of night, nor the earnest vigil, which He kept in prayer on the mountain-top, nor the storm-lashed lake that they were crossing, none of these things had hidden His poor servants from the Master's eyes: "He saw them." O what a comfort that is! What a comfort for us all, whatever may be the character of the "rowing," whatever may be the character of the labor or danger as we sail over the sea of life, "He saw them." O what words these are! Those blessed eyes looked down in a tenderness which was all His own! And now mark this, in the darkest part of the night Jesus came to them. That is always the time Jesus comes. The fourth watch is just upon day dawn, and the dawn of day is, as we know, preceded by the darkest part of the night. Have you never watched by the bedside of some beloved one, and have you not witnessed (I know some here have) the struggle between darkness and dawn? There is a sort of struggle between night and day at the very moment just preceding day dawn. That is the time Jesus comes. And observe how beautiful it is; He came walking on the water. Let us delight in contemplating the majesty of His love! It is not only that I see His divine power as He steps the waves, but I see the majesty of His mighty love. They could not be upon the stormy sea without His walking those waves too; they could not be, as it were, in difficulty and in danger without His drawing near to them; they could not be surrounded by the fury and hurricane of the tempest that came down from the mountain side and threatened to destroy their little bark, without His going near to them too. He came to them walking upon the water. There is a little touch here of great beauty; have you ever thought of it? "He made as though he would have passed by them." What do you think the meaning of that was? Do you think it was a mere accident that this is recorded for us here? Do you think it is a mere little trifling circumstance in the history that the Spirit of God brings out? I believe it is exactly the same thing that you find in Luke 24, when He joined those two poor, heart-broken, weary ones upon the morning of His resurrection, as they walked and were sad, and had given up all hope in this world, and said, "This is the third day since these things were done"; it says, "He made as though he would have gone farther." It is the same kind of action here; He "would have passed by them." Why? To call out from them the faintest cry of want and need of Him; that is what it is. It was not that He was indifferent, that He did not feel; oh, assuredly, it was not that!

It could not be as to Him of whom it is so sweetly said,

oh no; He was never insensible to the distresses of His poor servants in their vicissitudes; but He delights to draw out confidence. Oh! if there is the feeblest confiding of trust in any of your poor hearts here to-night, if nearly everything has fled but this one hope in Him, small though it be, be assured He wants that. That is the meaning of this action here; He would have passed them by; but only that He might awake up, and

draw out, as it were, and minister to, the dying embers of that faith which was in the heart. Then they “cried out” How grateful to His heart that cry! Was not He attentive? Did He not delight in that confidence so expressed? Mark what He says; there are three words here, “Be of good cheer,” “Be not afraid”; but note especially the words between them. Our beautiful old translation has it, “It is I”; but that in reality means “I am,” ¦(f ,Æ:4, the same as in John 8, “I am.”

Mark the connection, “Be of good cheer”; “I am”; be not afraid.” O beloved friends, what a trinity of blessedness there is in these three expressions! “Be of good cheer”; might not that well wipe away every tear from every eye? “I am”: the mighty God in the glory and dignity and majesty of His own person walking the waves and waters. “Be not afraid”: the very word He is saying to us to-night. Now, brother or sister (thank God we can all of us be engaged in work in different ways), you are “toiling in rowing”: God in His infinite grace give us that blessed confidence in Christ’s care and love, that amid every wind and storm and our toiling through them, we may ever hear Him say, “Be of good cheer”—“I am”—“Be not afraid.” Oh the luxury of being the means of blessing to some poor heart! The one who is so used knows its sweetness; but it must be tasted to be known and thus enjoyed. “There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty.” But remember, in all the vicissitudes of service, and in all the ups and downs so-called of life, whether it be at home or in the service of God, in the world or in the church, whether it be in the counting house or at the counter, wherever you are, remember this, there will be “toiling in rowing” while Jesus is absent; but in the darkest part of your night He is near, so we can sing,

And “He talked with them.” How blessed the rest of that intercourse! the divine familiarity; oh how precious the intimacy expressed in those words, “He talked with them.” O to hear those beautiful words, those wonderful words! The Lord in His grace just use His own precious tidings to-night to encourage our hearts, beloved friends, that we may all go forth with a little more of the fire of Christ’s love in our souls, and that we may have the comfort, whatever position we are in, as we toil through this world where He is not, of knowing for ourselves the solace and cheer of Himself, for His name’s sake.

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From Helps in Things Concerning Himself: Volume 4 (1894), Labor and Rest

There is a word of great sweetness and comfort in Mark 6:31, 32. We are introduced to a scene of real labor and toil. The Lord had called the twelve, and sent them out two by two, without anything for their journey save a staff. They went forth without scrip, or bread or money: they preached, they cast out devils, they raised the sick; it was a time of diligent service and incessant toil, but a time of labor which resulted in fruit. After this we find the apostles returning, gathering themselves together and rehearsing to their blessed Master all they had done and taught. He had sent them forth, as it were, empty handed and destitute of all man’s resources, and now they have returned and are spreading at His blessed feet their acquired treasures, the fruit of their work and toil; He, with all that tender grace and kindness which were ever His own, accepts it all, and in the divine and blessed love which ever sought the good of His own, He says, “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile.” Let us note it well. He does not say, “Go and rest,” but “Come and rest.” Ah! it is not the desert place that could furnish the rest, if so it might have been “Go,” but it is Himself there, there where no distraction can intrude, no surge of worry, no blast of care can for a moment enter. Oh! how blessed His company in that sweet retreat, made so by Himself alone! How well may we sing of that –

No soil of nature’s evil,No touch of man’s rude hand, Shall e’er disturb around us That bright and happy land.The charms that woo the sensesShall be as pure, as fair,For all while stealing o’er usShall tell of Jesus there.

But there is a further precious thought here. Our own Master and Lord knows the snare of active service, even for Him—the danger of giving it that place which alone belongs to Himself—the temptation to His poor, weak child and vessel to be more absorbed with it than with Him; hence how often do we hear Him say, “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile.” We are told that “there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.”

In this busy day of ours, with its confessed and crying needs on all hands, how true the picture before us is; yet while recognizing fully our clear, distinct duty to the church and the world, and not in any wise seeking to clothe our indifference or selfishness with a religious sanctimonious garb, let all who love His blessed service, which is indeed perfect freedom, bear in mind the lesson of our passage, which is plainly this, that the quality of our work will be poor and attenuated indeed, if it be not connected with Christ, from Christ, for Christ. Those who really and truly work for Him, must first of all be sustained and fed by Himself, as they hear Him say, “Come and rest.” And oh! how gracious of Him to take His poor wearied worker by the hand, as it were, aside, apart into a desert place with Himself, shutting Him out from all but Himself, that with mind undisturbed and heart undistracted, all may be gone over with Himself, in rest and quietness, and fresh thoughts of Himself and His love thus impressed upon the heart, producing renewed vigor and energy for further service for Him.

After this we have recorded a delightful instance of the deep compassion of that heart which was ever touched by distress and need. We are told the people “outwent them and came together unto him.” Oh! how He did attract the weary and wanting ones! How He also met and taught and filled them! How He made the desert place to yield bread enough and to spare, and then having finished all in His compassionate tenderness and goodness He Himself departed into a mountain to pray; His meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him and to finish His work. But we must bring these thoughts to a close by a glance at the end of the chapter. In the departure of Jesus into the mountain, we are shown in figure His taking the place of intercession on high; His disciples cross the water in a boat, and we have their vicissitudes; it is such a comfort to think of what is said here, “He saw them toiling in rowing.” Not the shades of night, nor the earnest vigil which He kept in prayer on the mountain-top, nor the storm-lashed lake that they were crossing, none of these could hide His poor servants from the Master’s eyes. Then He who “saw them” came to them in the darkest part of the night, walking on the water in supreme majesty, but in love, and spoke such words of comfort, “Be of good cheer,” “It is I” (,(T ,4:4), “Be not, afraid”

In darkest shades, if He appear, My morning is begun –

Lastly, observe it is said, “He talked with them.” How blessed the rest of that intercourse after all the toil and labor.

The Great Servant-Prophet: Addresses on the Gospel of Mark, Mark 4: The Sower and the Rester

Mark 4:1-23; 35-41

I am anxious, beloved friends, to bring before you a little this evening the blessed Lord in both these scenes here. In the first part He is the unceasingly laborious Sower of the word; in the last part He is the weary, resting man. You find Him perfect in both positions. It is very striking to see Him setting forth the new place that He had taken Himself consequent upon the breaking off of all earthly relationships with His own people, and no longer looking for seed or fruit in this world from men, but now Himself sowing it to produce fruit by His doctrine and teaching in this world; and as we have noticed in the other scenes of His blessed ministry and service that we have looked at, sowing it assiduously, unweariedly, in acts of mercy and ways of goodness on every side. Then in the close of the chapter we see Him, I have no doubt, seeking for rest and repose as far as His blessed frame and body was concerned. He says to His disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” I have a little word to say as to what I am assured is a deep moral and spiritual lesson in it for us, but still the fact was that for Himself, as a man, he would rest. I am speaking of Him now as the servant; He was wearied with His journey, as we know He was when He sat on Jacob’s well. He proposes to them to go across to the eastern shore of the lake. We will, by God’s help, look a little afterwards at the circumstances with regard to the storm, how it found Him and how it found them.

First of all, with regard to the seed-sowing. Notice the way it is introduced; it is the first beginning of His ministry in parables. What we have had before us up to the present have been works of mercy, ministry in acts rather than in preaching, though there was preaching as well, there was also teaching; but still, for the most part, what we have been considering these weeks past have been works and acts of mercy in which His goodness was displayed. But here now you have, more properly speaking, ministry itself, and ministry after a peculiar form, even after a parabolic method; He is teaching by parables. I think there was an especial reason for His doing that. First of all, as the opposition to Him in His service is increased (for we find it increasing as we go on in the gospel), as this opposition was growing on every hand, and the hatred and dislike of His enemies met Him more at every turn, He has recourse in the wisdom and blessed knowledge of His own mind, to this method of imparting instruction in the face of the opposition. Also, I have no doubt at all, it was the governmental dealing of God with a people who had always rejected the plain words and plain truth that had been set before them both by His forerunner and Himself. Hence this passage quoted from Isa. 6 is a very solemn passage; He gave it as the reason why He taught them in parables; He expounded them to the disciples, but He taught the people in parables: “That seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand.” That is to say, there was, in the manner of instruction, and in the mode of conveying the doctrine, as far as the people were concerned, a judicial dealing with them. The people had positively refused Him. You must remember that His forerunner had set Him forth in the plainest way, and His own acts and works of mercy declared distinctly who He was, and yet He was rejected; and as we saw last week, He rejects and breaks off all associations with His own people after the flesh. He says, “Who is my mother and my brethren? And he looked round about on them that sat about him and said, Behold my mother and my brethren; for whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and my sister and mother.” That is to say, He recognizes in a self-willed generation and in a self-willed time, when all minds passed over to their own way—He recognizes, I say, as in the dearest and tenderest ties to Him those who were governed by the will of God. Now, beloved friends, that is very blessed for our souls, even that He counts in the dearest and tenderest and nearest relationship to Himself in that way the one who by grace does His Father’s will. You can see at once how this opened distinctly the way for what we may call this new action here. He is not looking for anything from man; after that I should not expect that He would seek to find any thing, even in Israel here. Now He takes this entirely new place; He is now the producer of what He would have; He is not seeking for it now, He is about to sow; He takes the place of Sower; He sows this seed, falling upon different soils, and with different effects.

He begins it with this: “Hearken.” And that is a word that is peculiar to Mark; you will not find it in the other gospels: “Hearken.” I believe He had a reason for using this word; first of all as a caution against anything like levity of mind with respect to the simplicity of the figure under which He would convey the most profound truth—“Hearken”—He has something to communicate which, perhaps, at first sight would be of little account to those who listened or heard, and therefore He would impress upon them the importance of what He is about to convey.

Then there is another word, and all these are important to notice—“Behold.” I think that justifies the inference that has been drawn from it, that there was such a scene going on there under their very eyes, that is to say, there was a sower sowing his seed. The Lord was in the boat on the sea, and the people were on the land, and it is more than probable that there was such a scene before them there and then, for we know how often the Lord drew His parabolic instructions and lessons from things in nature as they passed before the eyes of those to whom He was communicating His mind. So it might be that there was within their sight a husbandman engaged in his field with his seed, and therefore the Lord says, “Hearken, behold, a sower went forth to sow.” Yet it is His own case; it is the place He has taken in this world.

But there is one other little word before we pass on which connects itself with that. We must remember, beloved friends, that the seed here is distinctly the word of God, the word is what is really sown, and sown broadcast; He preached the kingdom of God, His servants since have preached; but that was what was really sown here broadcast in this world. And that which makes it so very important, is, there is no expectation now from man at all, there is no looking that anything could now be produced even from Israel, which was the best specimen of humanity in this world; it must be now an entirely new and divine thing, that is, as it were, planted in this world. Hence you get seed, heavenly seed, if you so like to call it; because everything in that sense that really is for God in this world is heavenly, has come from heaven; you cannot get anything from man or from the earth, it must all come from above. And hence it is not only a new action, but there is an entirely new seed now which is about to be sown, which is the word of God: “the seed is the word of God” He tells us Himself when He interprets it.

Now we have the different classes, and I think you will notice three things in them. The first class is indifference; there was the wayside, and as the sower sowed, some of the seed fell by the wayside. The meaning of the wayside was the hard footpath that had been trodden down through the cultivated field, and which had become hard by the constant pressure of the feet upon it. Some seed fell upon this footpath and the fowls of the air came and devoured it: that is indifference, and that is what we see continually and constantly. But there are two things that are very momentous for us to take account of; there is not merely the badness and unprofitableness, so to speak, of the soil upon which the seed fell; not merely the sterility and hardness and barrenness of the soil, but there is a distinct power of the devil as well which acts here. You will observe the two things, the wayside and the fowls; and we must not forget that, because the blessed Lord when He interprets the parable tells us that the fowls really correspond to and set forth the evil influence of Satan, the devil, the adversary of God and men, the accuser of men too, the devil is watching and waiting at every moment to snatch away the seed that is sown. And, characteristic of this

gospel of Mark, that word I have pointed out to you as so frequently occurring in it is here; “immediately.” When this seed falls on that soil there is nothing in the soil that is in kindred character to produce anything from that seed, but on the contrary it is the very place where Satan can come and “immediately” snatch the seed away. That is the in- difference one continually finds with regard even to the truth of God in this world; we are confronted with it every day, a sort of callous, cold, hard, stoical indifference to the whole thing. There is a very remarkable illustration in the apostle Paul’s ministry of this “wayside”; I was struck with it in looking at it recently. Read at your leisure Acts 17, when the apostle was at Athens. What did he find at Athens? That they lived simply to cultivate some fantastic novelty for their mind, and to listen to and gather up some new thing, but there was the most absolute indifference with regard to truth. When the apostle pressed it upon them you remember what they said, “He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods, because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection.” And not only that, but they mocked, and they were perfectly ready to defer the preacher of that gospel to another time. It was “the wayside.” The word was sown by the servant of God; it fell upon a surface trodden down by the feet of natural interests. That is what the wayside hearer is; it is a surface of mind that the feet of natural interests have trodden hard. That is what the Athenians were; the devil came and took away the precious seed at once, and there was nothing at all produced. What a word it is! And it is for us as Christians and believers in our Lord Jesus Christ to learn lessons from such a word as this. You see, beloved friends, what indifference leads to; we can see it, perhaps, a little more plainly in its wide general sense in the world; but the same thing, the very same principle, will work with us as regards the truth of God, that affects the worldling and unconverted person. If you get to be a wayside hearer, if you get a hard, stolid, stoical mind and heart, so that the word falls on it and produces nothing, but on the contrary is snatched away by Satan, you will find the very same thing in principle; you will find that there is a measure of indifference.

If you hang your hands down in slothful ease, if you simply give yourselves to this principle which has been promulgated to a very great extent of late, and which is considered to be a very good and just thing to press upon people, that you have nothing to do but just simply to open your ear in a sort of listless way and take the thing in, that there is to be no exercise of soul or heart, no subjective process in your heart by the Spirit of God, you become practically in principle wayside hearers of the truth of God. I do not say in fact, because of course in fact we are speaking of that which is outside; but the principle of it. If your heart is uncultivated, if there is no tenderness and softness of soil there, if it is merely trodden down by those feet that constantly pass over it every day, there is nothing to receive the seed; and not only that, but the devil is at hand; and mark this, the very best bit of truth that falls upon your heart, if it does not receive through God’s grace a lodgment there, and if it does not by His mighty power get a place in the soul, that is the very truth the devil will take from you. Therefore you find these two things (I am speaking now to saints for a moment, to try and draw lessons from this), there is the state of the mind and the state of the heart, and there is also the bird of prey that is ready to take the seed away. And I have observed, and painfully observed, oftentimes, that when that is the case, very soon the terms of the truth disappear; that when people have simply rested in the terms, by-and-by there was not a shred of the terms left with them. I have seen often that the very outward expression, the very outward name that is attached to certain truths of God has gone as sure as the truth itself has not pulverized the soil of the soul and received a lodgment there by God’s Spirit. The truth is gone, and the state becomes the most appalling deadly indifference, even in the children of God. The Lord help us to watch against that; it is a most dangerous condition of things. Therefore I call that first principle here indifference: the wayside hearers are indifferent hearers; there is no softness in the soil to receive the word; it is hard and trodden down, and the bird of prey is on the alert, and the seed is taken away.

Now look at the second for a moment. “And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: but when the sun was up it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.” Now if what we have already looked at is indifference, this is shallowness; here you get a shallow order of things. If you get carelessness and recklessness and insensibility in the first, here you get want of root, want of depth, shallowness and emptiness; and that is what the stony ground hearer is. The expression “on stony ground” does not mean exactly, perhaps, what we mean when we use the word conventionally; it is not ground in which there are stones, because that of itself would not hinder the root getting down into the earth; but what the blessed Lord means here by stony ground is a positive surface of rock, over which there was a very slight and thin coating of earth. It is not the ground or soil that has stones merely scattered about in it, as you may have often seen as you pass through the country, but here it is a hard surface or bed of rock, over which there is a slight coating of earth. And the Lord says in His parable, there is no depth of earth, there is no root. Look what happens; the seed falls there, and—it is a very remarkable thing—immediately it springs up. Now, beloved friends, we have often seen that; and we have to watch against that kind of thing. Immediately it springs up; that is to say, that the growth in the first instance is as rapid as the withering at the close. It springs up with a rapidity in proportion to the absence of depth. I daresay there may be a great deal of feeling about it, but it is only feeling; and there may be a great deal of sentiment connected with it, but it is only sentiment; the solemn point here is, that there was no depth of earth and no root. Now what is that, beloved friends? I believe firmly if there be any truth that needs pressing more earnestly than another upon our consciences and hearts it is this, that there must be a deep root in conscience, a work in conscience in our souls before God. Oftentimes you will find that people take up a thing for the delight and joy of it, and, as has often been said, give it up afterwards for the trouble it may bring; the conscience has never been penetrated and pierced through and through, it has never been pulverized by light. Conscience must be gripped and grasped by the light and truth of God; that is the way it enters in; if it does not enter in that way, it may perhaps affect a man in two other ways, both of which are profitless. If it enter in merely by the mind, it remains a cold, icy, powerless, unproductive, unprofitable thing: if it enter in merely by the feelings, that perhaps will express itself like the noisy pebbles of the brook, loud in proportion to its shallow- ness; there is a great noise made, but there is no depth of water. It must be deep down in the conscience, for in that is the root and foundation for all the truth of God; conscience is the avenue to the soul; there is no other way by which truth can really get into our souls except by the conscience; and therefore the first effect of the truth of God upon a person when it comes in divine power, is to make a person not glad, but greatly cast down, not to lift a person up or to elate him; it is not to make a man go about and say, What a beautiful word this is, how lovely it is, how precious it is! and so forth. That is only vox et proeterea nihil—a sound and nothing more. When the word and truth of God reaches our consciences in divine power it must judge us; the entrance in of light must find out the darkness that is there; we must be subdued by it. The stony ground hearer is exactly the opposite of all this; the whole thing is rapid; the process is rapid, growth is quick, externally it looks beautiful to an untutored and unpracticed eye; but mark the effect, “They have no root in themselves”; and observe the interpretation the blessed Lord gives of this, “These are they likewise which are sown on stony ground, who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, imme- diately they are offended.” How often, beloved friends, if we take that out of the parabolic representation that is given of it there, how frequently have we found that principle working. It is not merely in regard to the truth in the world and the consciences and souls of men in the world, but how often have we found that working in ourselves. Perhaps there is somebody here to-night to whom this word comes, and fits them exactly. How often have I heard people say with regard to the truth of God, “Oh! I thought it

was all so nice, it sounded so sweetly, it was indeed as a lovely sound and as one who can play well on an instrument, but now the whole thing is changed as to my judgment, and I give it all up.” Do you see the shallowness and emptiness of the way in which the truth—any truth you like, whether truth about the church, or truth about Christ, or whatever else it may be—the shallow way, I say, in which the truth has got hold of a person, the entire absence of all real root and depth of earth there? The consequence is, the moment trouble comes and pressure comes, instead of that root being deepened the whole thing is abandoned. That is the history, I grieve to say, of many a person tonight; they gave it up for the trouble it entailed; they took it up for the joy, but they gave it up for the trouble; the moment there was pressure for it they abandoned it; they never suffered for it. It is a grand thing to suffer for the truth. I believe in my soul that if the truth had been more suffered for by us in these last days, we should cling more tenaciously with all our hearts to it: I believe it has all been too easy, instead of being like the Christians at first and in New Testament times, when they had to suffer on every side, and were cast out and despised, and when the taking up the part of the crucified Nazarene, and professing themselves to be His disciples, and following in His ways, put them outside everything that was accounted respectable, the friends and disciples of a crucified Man, scorned and hated of all men for His sake. We have not got that now, and are we not correspondingly weak without it? Be assured, friends, that for which a person suffers is the thing that is valued. If it were possible to shed a little of your blood for the truth, if you could conceive such a thing as a person going to the stake and suffering for the truth because it was dear to the heart, if one could come away from the stake, O what an inscription that suffering would make of the blessedness of the truth upon one’s affections and heart. The spirit of martyrdom and the spirit of the martyrs is not in this age. The more I think of it the more solemn it is to me; people will not suffer for any- thing; the principle of the day is, let us have it all with the greatest possible ease and the greatest possible luxury, let it be all a smooth way, the absence of all contrariety in every shape and form. Alas! I fear this is the principle, and in proportion to it is the shallowness. That is what the stony ground hearer brings before us; the shallowness, the emptiness, the rapid growth that so quickly passes away.

We have an illustration of it in the Epistle to the Galatians, as well as Paul’s ministry at Athens in Acts 17. I think his ministry in Galatia strikingly illustrates the stony ground hearer, and is it not quite evident that in Galatia there was very great exuberance of feeling and heart? Does he not say, “I bear you record that if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.” They seem to have been perfectly entranced with the truth he brought before them; but now he is obliged to say, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another.” He says, as it were, You have given it up, or were on the eve of giving it up.

Now let us look at the third class here, that is, the thorns. In the thorns I see the effect of mixed motives. I believe the first is indifference, the second is shallowness, and the third mixed motives. “And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.” The Lord explained it in this way, “These are they which are sown among thorns, such as hear the word”—now mark—“and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.” There is a double action in the thorns; there is the light-excluding power of the thorns, and there is the terrible grip which the thorn growing up has over the plant, so that it chokes it; it has neither light nor fruit. The light is excluded from the plant by the power of the thorn, and it is choked before it can produce fruit under the enormous tenacity and grip of the thorn upon it. Now mark what the Lord calls thorns when he takes this out of parable and puts it into reality for us. It is a very strong word that is used in the original for “cares,” the very strongest word that can be used; it means corroding, perplexing, care, care that, so to speak, would cut a man in two! I believe that is really the thought of it, “the cares of this world.” I want to press that earnestly upon hearts to-night; because you know we should all accept the other part of it, we should all say, “I know something about the deceitfulness of riches,” though we might like to have them for all that, and I quite believe there is a danger of the “lusts of other things” coming in; but I am quite sure many of us tonight might speak humbly before God about cares, for we know what it is to pass through terrible anxiety about cares till God in His infinite grace freed us from them. But there is nothing that has so destructive an effect upon a Christian as care, and for this reason, because we think in a kind of way, and reason to ourselves, that we have a right, and that it is correct and proper for us to have cares.

Now where have we learned that it is right and proper for us to have cares? Oh, the terrible pressure of anxiety and fretting and trouble and difficulty that too often settles down upon us, “the cares of this world” do indeed corrode. Have we not a Father in heaven whose heart delights that we should roll our burden upon Him? Is there not a bosom and a heart where if you put your head you can lose your care? Does not He invite us in the love of His heart really to cast the thing upon Him, really to roll it upon Him? As the apostle says, “Casting all your care upon him.” Why? In order to get free from it? No, but because “He careth for you.” “Be careful for nothing,” that is the same word.

Do you say, How? “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts.” It is these cares that wear people out, these anxieties that press upon us. And more than that, often it is not so much cares about the present, but cares about the future. How do you know that you will have that future? What right have we to talk about to-morrow? Look here, beloved friends, we oftentimes put before our minds a to-morrow with some sort of perplexing worry we have to meet, when today or to-night we might be with the Lord. It is not to-morrow and the burdens that we imagine, but it is to-day. How do you know to-morrow will ever come. Alas it is not only to-morrow, but we hear people constantly say, “I do not know what I shall do next year.” Why should we trouble ourselves as to next year? Rather let us hearken to what the scriptures bring before us, “Now we beseech you brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and by our gathering together unto him.” This is the proximate, immediate hope before us. We have to do with Him to-day, and He may be here before to-night. A person said not long since to me, “I did not think of that.” The Lord help us to think of it, how it disposes of all anticipations. May we not well dread about ourselves, and fear as to how far the truth and doctrines we assert are practical with us? For instance, this very truth of the Lord’s coming, that precious, blessed present living hope for our hearts. What is the value of our assertion of it in words, if by it we are not delivered out of this wretched, miserable, corroding care with regard to the future? If it were in our hearts in power I believe it would thus work. I say I may not be here, yet if I am here, and if the trouble is there, thank God, there is One whose heart is sufficient, whose tenderness is unbounded, whose power is unlimited, and whose grace knows no end and no let; and is He going to desert me?

I believe in my soul it is a simple question of our knowing Him, and knowing His heart, so that we can trust Him. To know Him is to trust Him. I see all that in connection with this word, “the cares of this world.” O my dear brother or sister, perhaps you have cares in your family, and cares in your household; beware that they do not press you down; do not let them be like the thorns that choke the living truth of the word of God in your soul. “The cares of this world.”

“The deceitfulness of riches” I need not dwell upon; but I remember being struck with the fact that cares are put here with these things, and put first, too: “The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in; choke the word and it becometh unfruitful.”

Now I think I see a very remarkable illustration of that, too, in the apostle’s ministry; I believe his ministry at Corinth was a perfect illustration of the thorns. If you make yourselves acquainted in detail with the circumstances of the assembly at Corinth, and with all the things that were there, you will see how striking it is. There they were at Corinth, setting up factions and rival teachers, as if they wanted to bring the schools into the church of God: one said he was of Paul, another said he was of Apollos, another said he was of Cephas, and most sad of all, another said he was of Christ. To make Christ the head of a party was disgusting and revolting in the extreme. Not only that, but they got drunk at the Lord’s supper; there was at Corinth immorality and drunkenness, faction and party spirit; and together with all that, when you come to the end of the epistle, you find that they were positively wrangling and disputing about the resurrection. If ever there was a thorny field it was Corinth; there was every sort of evil there, “the deceitfulness of riches,” “the lusts of other things”—because lust was rampant at Corinth—and there was the apostle’s word choked in that assembly, and it became unfruitful. God in His infinite mercy and grace wrought through His servant, and brought them to their bearings; but it is a striking illustration of the thorns. I think those three illustrations are most illustrative of those three conditions—his ministry at Athens of the wayside hearers, his ministry in Galatia of the stony-ground hearers, and his ministry at Corinth of all that takes place in the thorns.

The Lord in His infinite grace give us to be exercised before Him, that we may not have the word choked. How many a one I have seen where alas! it is so. It is a most expressive phrase, “The word is choked, and it becomes unfruitful.”

Then we have the last, namely, they upon good ground. “Other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.” Then He gives the explanation of it, “These are they which are sown on good ground, such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit.” I need not dwell upon that, only this, that what marked those on the good ground was loyalty to the truth. Mark the three things that are said here, they heard, they received, and they brought forth; three very important realities. They heard; many a one hears; do you receive? They received, and then they brought forth fruit, that is to say, they practiced it: they heard it, they received it, they practiced it; some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred fold.

One little word more, and then we will look at the last scene. Why does this next illustration follow the parable of the sower? He says in v. 21: “Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad.” What is the meaning of that? Why should it come there? What connection has it with the sower? You observe how He passes from the similitude of the sower and seed and various kinds of soil to a lamp-stand or candle-stand, and He says, “Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel or under a bed?” I believe it was the custom amongst the Jews to have in each house one bushel and one bed. It comes in very strikingly, and to me it means not only has the Lord sown the seed in this world, but His intention is that it should shine, and that it should be openly seen and manifested here, so that the light of it should spread on every side. Hence He says, If you light a candle, you do not go and put it under a bed or under a bushel. I am afraid some of us are inclined to do that: what is wanted is that the light should be seen, that it should shine, that it should go out on all sides. If you light a candle, you do not put it under a bushel or under a bed, you put it on a lamp- stand, that all may see the light. I think it is most remarkable that that symbol and that figure should come in immediately after the sowing of the seed, indicating to us, that His truth is to be continued in this world as a light that everybody may see, and that it should shine out, blessed be God, through His people; through us, if it has got into us and that people should see it, and that it should not be hidden away, as it were, but brought out in open day, shining before men. How blessed to see the clear, bright light of truth shedding its own rays on all around. Oh that it may be so placed, as it were, on a lampstand, that it may give light to all that are in the house. I think that is the connection between the lamp-stand and the sower.

Now let us look for a little at the end of the chapter, because the varied glories of our dear and precious Master are so comforting to the heart to dwell upon. We come now to a different scene entirely. After all the instruction given by Him here, and after all His toil, He says a little word that has a great deal of comfort in it; He says to His disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Beloved friends, I believe He says that to us, and I do not believe there is any rest elsewhere but “the other side.” I believe this side is for toil and I would to God there was a great deal more of it, hard, laborious toil, toiling in the interests of Christ in this poor wretched world but “the other side” is where the rest is, and oh, the sweetness of it. He says, “Let us go over to the other side: He is inviting us over to the other side to-night. It is so blessed to see that He proposes it; it does not come from them, it came from Him. He says, as it were, “I know where the rest is.” I believe “the other side” here in this chapter is as significant as the “mountain” was where He chose His disciples; we were looking at it the other evening, and I fully believe the mountain is symbolical of the fact that all true ministry in this world comes from on high. So here, for all rest in the midst of service, for all repose in the midst of toil, for all real refreshment of heart, we must, brethren, “go over to the other side”: you will not find it this side. This is the expenditure side; that is the side where your heart can bask in all the fulness and refreshment of His rest. O how blessed to think of it! What a strange thing it is that some people do not like to go to the other side; they even resent it. Let us never forget we must go to the other side for rest. “Let us go over to the other side.”

Now observe what happens. (Of course I am taking the thing out of figure to press the great truth and reality upon you.) They crossed this lake, and as they crossed it a great storm arose. Mark how it found them; you get the contrast between Jesus and His disciples in a remarkable way here. There He is; it is a picture that causes the deepest homage and worship to spring up in the heart, to see that blessed, weary, lonely, perfect man asleep upon a pillow. Oh! to think of it, beloved friends, the perfection of the God man in His manhood glory! He was asleep on a pillow in the hinder part of the ship; no storm could disturb Him. No waves and no wind could wake Him out of His sleep: He rested there in the perfection and blessedness of all He was. Now let us look at them! They were in a panic—that is the word I feel which describes them—a perfect panic. Of all the dreadful things in this world is a panic: may we be kept from panic. The panic that some people raise is ten thousand times worse than the trouble that caused it; the panic-stricken condition in which we find the children of God about things, is far worse than the danger which is dreaded as ahead. The disciples then are in a panic, and they come and rudely and roughly awake Him out of His sleep, and with what I believe must have touched and wounded His heart to its very depths, “Master”—(Luke repeats it in a very striking way, “Master, master”)—“Master, carest thou not that we perish? Then he arose, and rebuked the wind.” Now look at the contrast, from a “great storm “there was a “great calm”; you get the two “greats,” a great storm and a great calm. “Peace, be still.” Oh! dear brethren, do we not want Him to say that to our hearts often? Our hearts are at times far more perturbed than even this lake; waves and winds are often there. How we need that He should say that to our poor wretched, troubled hearts; “Peace, be still.” “And there was a great

calm.” Now I tell you what comes before me very much in this. There is something so divine, and supernatural and blessed in the scene; because after a storm at sea, you do not get a great calm at once; you know very well that after a storm of great violence has swept over the sea or the ocean, it takes often days before the sea or the channel or the ocean returns to its usual serenity; the water has to go down, as it were. But there was nothing of that here; it was “a great calm” at once; “Peace, be still.” The literal force of the word is, “Be muzzled”; the same word that is used in ch. 1 for what the Lord said to the demon, “Be muzzled, and come out of him.” “Peace, be still; and there was a great calm.”

Look at them for a moment more. They are full of astonishment: they might have worshiped, but they are astonished; instead of being worshipers, they are confounded; they fear. Is it not a wonderful thing to think how men are afraid? They are not afraid of the devil; they are not afraid of evil or sin; but they are afraid when God comes near them. What a remarkable thing it is! They fear. We find the same thing in the history of Jacob; when Jacob found God was there, he says, “How dreadful is this place.” Why? God had come near; he was not afraid when he was alone there, with the stones of the earth for his pillow, although it must have been a dreary, desolate spot for him, all alone, overtaken by darkness and night; but when God came near and made Himself known, and when he heard that wonderful voice, and saw that ladder from heaven to earth, then awaking, he said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” So here the disciples were afraid; and their word is, “What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?“ Our hearts reply, “Yes, they do”; and we bless Him: we do not say, “What manner of man is this?” We say there was never one like Him; He is matchless; His equal is not to be found, the Man that came from heaven and the Man that is gone to heaven now! And what is so blessedly comforting to the heart, He is the same Jesus to-night, the same in His tenderness, the same in His love, the same in His kindness, the same in His pity. O that God in His infinite grace might just acquaint our hearts a little better with Him, and that we might have recourse to Him, and use Him, as we know Him, and know His accessibility in every distress and need of our hearts, for His blessed name’s sake.

The Great Servant-Prophet: Addresses on the Gospel of Mark, Mark 2: The Palsy and the Publican

Mark 2:1-17

I desire, beloved brethren, to bring before you this evening both these cases. They are very different in themselves, so much so that it would be, perhaps, difficult at first sight to discern what the real connection is between the cure of the palsied man and the call of the publican; and yet I think we shall find that there is a much closer connection between the two than you would at first sight suppose. In the one case it is a diseased man, in helplessness, and weakness, and powerlessness; in the other, it is a man, as esteemed by his fellows, disreputable, without character; because that is what the publicans were; they were, as you know, the leviers of the Roman tax, and were detested by their own people, partly because they were the standing witness of their subjugation to the Roman yoke; so much so, that none but the very outcasts amongst the Jews, and those who would be supposed to have lost all sense of respect, not only for themselves but for the dignity of the chosen nation, would be found occupying such a position as a levier, or perhaps more strictly a farmer, of this Roman tax. Now I think you will see in a moment that there is a great point in the Spirit of God putting both these cases here, in close position, in connection with the ministry of the great Prophet in the midst of God’s people: because whether it was the case of helplessness in a man’s body—which, after all, according to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ here, proceeded from the great root of all, which is sin—or whether it was the position of disrepute and lowness of character which a man was supposed to occupy before his fellow men in this world, the same grace and kindness, and the same consideration and tenderness that dealt with one dealt with the other. And that is a reason, I believe, why they are put together on this occasion, to show that, in the great Prophet—and that is who Jesus is, as presented to us in the Gospel of Mark—there was not merely tenderness of heart for the needs and distresses and wants of the bodies of people, but there was also consideration, kindness, grace, compassion, and even more than that, beloved friends, there was favor bestowed upon a man who was supposed to be, by his occupation and by his position amongst men, outside all consideration of every kind. Hence, I believe, you have them both linked together.

And I will further tell you why it seems to me to be so.

Oftentimes we are affected by sights of misery and distress in this world; the sight of a person with a weak and helpless and worn-out frame and body would affect wonderfully some people who seem to be insensible altogether to a condition of things, which is just as great, only it is moral. You will find that there are persons who are greatly affected by the external bodily wants of those in distress in this world, who seem to have no sense at all of the desolations oftentimes that the souls of men are in; and that is a reason, I believe, why both these are brought together here. He can touch the one as He can touch the other; and it matters not how varied the kinds of distress are, nor how diversified the kinds of desolation that came in His blessed pathway as He moved through this scene; still there was a heart in Jesus Christ that entered into all the circumstances and all the sorrows and all the difficulties; and everything that made men what they were before their fellow men. He entered into it, He saw it, He touched it. Hence, I believe, you have both these apparently diverse and opposite kinds of cases put in juxtaposition, as it were, in our scripture to-night.

Now I want you, beloved brethren, to look with me, seeking God’s help, at both these for a moment or two. And first of all, when we speak of this man with the palsy, it is exceedingly solemn and interesting to remember where it was. He was at Capernaum. Every time that word comes up before us there seems to be an exceedingly solemn voice in it to every one of us. Capernaum, you know, was the most exalted city of its time; as He says Himself, exalted to heaven; “Thou Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven.” It was privileged; it witnessed the greatest acts of Christ, and the most marvelous displays of His goodness and kindness here in this world; it was at Capernaum that some of His mightiest and greatest works were accomplished. Now ought we not to remember that? Quite true that we do not live in the days of the ministry on earth of the Son of man; quite true that we do not live in times when He might have walked even through this great city, and when His works of mercy and His acts of kindness might have been witnessed in this great city; but, beloved friends, we live in this time when God in His infinite grace and mercy, has unfolded to us not merely the goodness and kindness of God manifest in flesh in Christ incarnate here in this world; but when God has unfolded to us the glories of the exalted, heaven- crowned Son of man. And remember that that title, Son of man—and it is used here for the first time in the Gospel of Mark—Son of man, takes in not merely all that He was in lowly grace here in this world, but Son of man is equally applicable to Him in the place of glory and the circumstances and scenes of glory in which He is. There Stephen saw Him when he said, “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man,” &c. So that in a certain sense, and I would like to press that upon my brothers and sisters here to-night, we really are in this day in the full blaze of the light of truth as God has brought it out (and there

never was a time when truth was more distinctly brought out in all its fulness and brightness than at the present moment), I say, we are solemnly responsible; increased privilege is increased responsibility; never let us forget that. For mark this, if we forget it, the tendency of the heart is to pride oneself upon the acquisition or the possession of the truth; and if we do not allow our hearts to come under the full weight and full influence of the fact, that to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required, and if the closer and the nearer we come to the truth and light of God, and the more it shines round about us, and the oftener we see it, and the more we read of it, if, I say over and over again, if we have not the sense in our souls that it lays us under the most weighty responsibility, we shall certainly turn round and pride ourselves upon the possession of the truth. And that will be no better than the Jews were in their day. Did they not turn round and cast it in the face of the Lord of life and glory when He was here, “We be Abraham’s seed and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou then, Ye shall be made free?” Where did that come from, beloved friends? It came from the terrible pride and vanity, of their hearts. They could pride themselves upon being the genuine descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the very offspring of the patriarchs, and of Abraham especially, the friend of God, and could turn it round to their own purposes without a sense that the people of God in origin are expected to be the people of God in practice. And I see the same danger now; and therefore I think this word Capernaum has a loud voice to us; it was “thou, Capernaum,” of all cities and of all places “exalted to heaven.” So much on the place, and on the way the second chapter opens.

Now I want to call your attention first of all to another beautiful touch here of the writer of this gospel, and it is how this chapter brings us specially into contrast with the attractiveness of Jesus Christ. I wish I could—I know I cannot, but I long that I could—give your hearts some little sense of the precious attractiveness of this blessed One. O how He drew poor needy hearts to Him; how there was in Him a response to every desolation that could sweep its withered leaves over the heart! And mark how beautifully you have it here, “there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door,” the press was so great. What made it? Ah! there was One there whose fellow was never to be found, whose equal was never known, who was, in every sense of the word, a stranger here. That is what it was. I quite own that there was need and want and difficulty and distress; but do you think you would find need and want and difficulty and distress collected round the door of the great magnates or potentates of the earth at the present moment? Never. What brings need and want and distress into circumstances such as are depicted in Mark 2, is that there was a heart there who could enter into all the details of the need. And I want to press that upon you, my beloved brothers and sisters, here to night; there is in that blessed heart in heaven that which no other heart has; you can go and confide in Him when you feel as if you deserved the earth to swallow you up; you will never find a reproach from the lips of Jesus glorified, any more than from the lips of Jesus humbled; you will find in Him One that will enter into all the circumstances and details and history of your sorrows; One who can guide you out of them; One who can comfort you in them; One who will receive you, One who will welcome you, One who will be gratified by your confidence. That, beloved friends, is what is so wonderful to me, One who is gratified by the confidence of an outcast! Think of that! And that is what collected this company of people round the door here.

My mind is called back, when I think of that scene, to that touching incident in the gospel history, when the poor man, with his child torn and lacerated by a demon, came to the disciples of the Lord, supposing that men that were in such close proximity to the great prophet would imbibe something of His spirit and something of His power; but he was bitterly disappointed. “I spake to thy disciples, that they should cast him out; and they could not.” Ah! dear friends, that is the history, not merely of the people of God ever since, but that is the sad history, alas! of the church of God. No ability to use the power that is there. But this is the word that always attracts my heart in that scene; He says, “Bring him to me.” Thank God! Now do not despair, dear brother or dear sister here to- night; if you have an aching brow, a broken heart, if you have sorrows or desolations or pressures upon you, and nothing has ever relieved you, do not despair; there is One that says, “Bring him to me.” Now, beloved friends, that is a great thing for our souls, and I feel that is just what we want. Woe be to us if the day should ever come that in our extreme clearness of doctrine we should lose the sense of a living Christ! And I feel that in this lies our great deficiency; we do not seem to get hold of His Person. It is the common condition and state so often of the church of God everywhere, a living Christ is not known. People say, Oh! that is true of Him; these are wonderful things about Him. Yes, quite true; no question of that for a moment; there are wonderful things about Him in the past as in the future; scenes of moral glory in the days of His humiliation, and scenes of literal glory to be enacted and displayed in the day of His coming kingdom. But, beloved friends, that is not Christ; very blessed, but that is not Christ; and that will not satisfy your heart. Your hearts long for—all hearts do, the human heart does, and He knows very well what our hearts want—our hearts long for a Person, and that Person as the object. That is peculiar to Christianity. The whole power of Christianity is in an object, and that object is a living Person. Further, this is the attractive power of Christianity; it is the dis- placing power of Christianity; it is the forming power of Christianity, it is the strengthening power of Christianity. And where that is not really laid hold of in the heart, you find desolation and trial and defeat and disappointment and vexation. And here it meets us exactly; here was a living person, a living man; He was the great Prophet-Teacher, but it is the Person.

And another thing, it is not only that He gives the instruction, that is the second part, but I do not think it is the greatest part. It is a peculiar word in the original, it is “He preached the word,” it is more the sense that He spake the word; still it is set before us in His ministry in a very blessed way that He was a preacher; and it is a great thing to think of, that our own blessed Master was the great preacher in this world. But this point I press on you, the accessibility of Jesus Christ is so wonderful. He was the most accessible of men; any one might go to Him; there was an open door for all who came to Jesus Christ; the vilest was as welcome as the least vile; indeed, the greater the need the greater the welcome; the greater the vacuum in the heart the more the excess of the grace there to fill it immediately. That is what meets us here, the accessibility of Jesus Christ. He instructs, He teaches, He preaches; but there is many a man who stands upon a high elevation, as it were, and does that, but you could not approach him in the least. Here is One you can always approach, and He will never misunderstand you, never put a different meaning upon your words from what you intend, never keep you on the torture and the rack of a hard, cold suspicion; He is gracious, accessible, tender, considerate, long-suffering. Oh! how blessed it is to think of Him! That is the scene of Mark 2.

And now let us look at this first case. There comes into His blessed presence a most harrowing, a most depressing case, that of a poor, needy creature, who is brought to Him. And, beloved friends, what I think is so interesting, at least to me, was that this case was one amongst the poor. What proves that beyond question or doubt is that the word that is employed for “bed,” or “couch,” is the word that is always used to describe the miserable pallet upon which the poor lay; therefore it is a case of extreme poverty. I say, Thank God for that: because, you see, that brings the grace all the more clearly out before our souls. Look at it for a moment; look at the many things that combined; look at the remarkable way the Holy Ghost, by the evangelist, throws them into what I call a divine picture in these verses. Here was a poor, powerless, helpless frame, a weak, shattered, palsied body, and there were willing hearts that brought this case of distress to Jesus. Look at their earnestness; they do not adopt any ceremony; they do not ask any permission, as if they were intruders; the place was full and He was occupied, but they read that heart so well, and understood the affections of that heart so clearly, that they knew that all times and

circumstances were alike to Jesus to show mercy in. And these men come without ceremony, without leave, without formality, and break up the roof in the earnestness of their hearts, to get the case of distress into personal contact with the great Prophet, and they lay him down there. It is one of the most wonderful scenes I know of in scripture! Oh! dear brethren, would to God we could do that with our cases of spiritual palsy and spiritual distress. O that we had such a sense of the heart of Jesus Christ, and the readiness and willingness of Jesus Christ, as well as the power of Jesus Christ, that we could go and break through all difficulties and all opposing things, so as to get the objects of mercy into personal contact with the only one that can bestow mercy. That is what they do here. I do not question for a moment that the sick of the palsy had faith himself; I believe "their faith" alludes to all, takes in all: "Jesus saw their faith." Do you not think that was grateful to Him? Do you not think that sorrowing, lonely heart, that found so little cheer in this world, that met so little response to the grace and the kindness that was in it, was pleased by any confidence? I am sure He was. I love to think of how that confidence gratified the heart of my blessed Lord and Master here. What it was to Him to be trusted, to be looked to, to be used by distress and misery! "When Jesus saw their faith," look how He vindicates it. What a comfort to us! May we learn from this. "When Jesus saw their faith" what does He say? The first word that comes from His blessed lips is "son." Oh the sweetness of that! Did not that fall like showers on the parched grass on the ears of that poor, helpless man? "Son, son." What divine goodness and divine grace were there! I was speaking to you last week about the divinity of love as well as the divinity of power; here is the divinity of kindness. Oh! dear friends, let us learn, through grace, to be kind, for I must say to my brethren to- night, I think if there is anything we are deficient in, it is just in that—kindness. I fear there is a solemn lack of it amongst Christians, a sorrowful want as to it somewhere. Indeed, some people seem to me to think that there is some sort of merit attached to being hard; where it is, I cannot divine nor understand. It requires no great effort or self-denial to be a stick or a stone; I doubt not it is more or less according to our nature: but, O to be like Jesus Christ! O to have the compassions and the tenderness of Himself in our souls, and to have been so touched by it ourselves, to have come so in contact with it ourselves, in our own histories, that we understand what it is to deal with others in the same way that we ourselves have been dealt with by Him. And this is where the great want is, a personal dealing with a personal Lord—"Son." Beautiful word. And there is not merely that beautiful expression which implies relationship and which carries love with it—because this word of relationship has words of grace and love and kindness couched beneath it. But mark how He goes to the root of the disease that is here. There is no question about the palsy, because He deals with it; but first of all the great Physician and the great Prophet deals with the root of the thing, and therefore He goes at once to the needs of the man's soul. Now we are living in a day when the needs of people's bodies seem to have a greater interest to many persons' hearts than the needs of their souls, and I think we have to watch much about this. It will be a poor thing for us merely to be philanthropists in this world; it would be a poor thing for us if we merely thought of the needs and distresses and wants—though I know they are many—of the bodies of men in this poor scene; of the desolations, and the death, and the woes, and the pain, and the pressure, and the rack, and the misery that abound all around us, and especially in this great city. I have often thought and said that it is well for us, perhaps, that we live so far away from its sorrows: there are but few who could really face it so as not to be affected by it, and so lose the balance of their hearts, if not of their minds. But while that is true, I think it is a great thing for us to see here that the first thing, and that which lies at the root of all the misery that is in this world, the root-tree of all the woes and miseries of men, was just this, "thy sins": and therefore He goes to the root of the thing first, He deals with the man's soul first—"thy sins," He says. How instructive that is for us; and does not it call our thoughts back to what was said of Him to His parents after the flesh with regard to His name when He was about to be born into this world? Very instructive were those words, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus," which, you know, is Jehovah-Savior, Jehoshua, Jesus. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus." Why? The Jews would have been very glad to have accepted Jesus if He came to save His people from the Roman yoke, and the pressure of their enemies, under which they were lying under the governmental hand of God; but, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." The miseries of men's bodies do not shut them out from God, but the weight of their sins would. "He shall save his people from their sins," because sins unforgiven, unwashed, unpardoned, will shut for ever a person out from God. Therefore that comes first, because, as I have said already, it lies here at the root and is the producing cause of all the misery that is in this world, even with regard to people's bodies. Sin entered into the world, and all the sins and woes of men's bodies and death along with them. And therefore it is so blessed to look at it, and to think of the great Physician here of both the souls and bodies of men, for He applies that title to Himself. It is not like what some one has said of the physicians of the world, namely, that they are men who put drugs that they do not know much about into bodies that they know less about; but observe what we have here; mark the wonderful skill, how every part of the divine blessedness and perfection of this blessed One is displayed in its proper place; how the inward state, the inner man, so to speak, is dealt with, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."

Then you get the reasonings of the rationalists of that day; and the scribes were the rationalists of the Lord's days, the most heartless of people, and they began to talk about blasphemies. And it is a wonderful thing to me—I cannot help saying it in passing—how quickly and readily people can use that word; there seems to be a marvelous acquaintance with it with some people. "This man speaketh blasphemies." Ah! many a word of that kind is a revelation of the state of the person that utters it. How little people think of that! "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." And mark the way the Lord meets this. He says, "Whether is it easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up to thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man"—now mark this, I beseech you; the title is used here for the first time—"that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth." I suppose the Jews would own there was power in heaven; of course they recognized that God only could forgive sins, and so far they were right; but they were blind to the very last degree in not seeing that Jesus was God. The fact was that the blindness of their heart would not permit them to see it, and the obstinacy of their will, that awful tyrant of man, which you cannot put over on God's side and which you cannot subdue, and which will not resign nor abdicate—that fierce, unsubdued tyrant of man, his will, so blinded and deceived them that they could not see in that lowly Man who was before them the veiled glory of the Godhead. Hence they say, "Who can forgive sins but God only?" Perfectly true; but He was God. But mark what the Lord says further. "But that ye may know"—that ye may have the tangible, visible proof before you—"that the Son of man"—that title, "Son of man" is connected with the place He was pleased to take as becoming a man here in this world—"that the Son of man hath power on earth"—wonderful words these are—"to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go into thine house." And "immediately"—you get not merely forgiveness, but healing for his body, and power; you get forgiveness, healing, and power, all combined here, "Son, thy sins are forgiven," "take up thy bed"—healing; "go into thine house"—power; "that ye may know"—now that is an immense thing for our hearts to take in, and there is a peculiar blessedness in it—"that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." Thank God! That is the great truth, that there was power on earth. It is quite true that the great work of atonement had to be wrought; and the claims of God in holiness met in the atoning work of Calvary; but Jehovah Himself could administer that blessing, as He could administer every other blessing, in the Person of the One who was there, who was in after-time to do the work; and, beloved, it is an immense thing for our souls to get hold of this; "that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house."

Now let us look for a moment or two longer at the second case. The first case brings out the grace and kindness and goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ; but the second case is not quite such a one. It is not a case of helplessness like the palsy; it is not like a man that had to be borne forth, and have the roof broken up and be let down into the midst before Jesus, in his weakness and feebleness, but here is the case of a man who was engaged in the most detestable of all occupations amongst the Jews, and therefore would be looked upon as a man that had lost his character. He is a publican, the tax gatherer, the levier or farmer of the Roman tax. And Jesus passed by and called him. What a comfort that is to our hearts, to think that Jesus Christ calls disreputable people. What a comfort for you and me to-night, beloved friends; disreputable characters, people without name, are welcome to Him! And not only that, but He actually calls them, as you see here. And mark what He says: “As he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alpheus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me.” Do you think I thank that man for going after Him? I do not. Do you think I admire Levi for responding to that call? No, what I admire is the grace that called him, the kindness that could look upon him and say, He is not too bad for me. It was a saying of Luther’s, the great reformer, that Jesus Christ received the devil’s outcasts. Thank God, He did; it marks the exceeding riches of His grace. “Follow me,” He says to one esteemed as a disreputable man engaged in a detestable occupation. Do let our hearts just drink in the sense of grace that is in that.

And not only so, but look how He proceeds further in it, because a little while afterwards we find Him actually sitting down in company with publicans and sinners. I do not know anything more sweet than to see the combination set forth here between the grace of Christ that would accept hospitality in such a company as that, and the knowledge that this Roman tax gatherer must have had of Jesus Christ when He entertained Him suitably to that knowledge. You know we entertain people suitably to what we know of them; and so Levi says, as it were, Well, I could not get together a company with which to entertain more suitably this blessed Master according to His own heart, than to bring together the very lowest class of society, the publicans and sinners. How it speaks of His grace; and how well that man read the heart of Jesus Christ; how he had profited by all the grace that shone in Him. How precious are those words that we often were blessed in hearing from a tongue that is silent now, “there was not a grace in God that He did not bring down into man, and there was not a sorrow in man that He did not take up into God.” He brought every grace in God down into man; He took every sorrow in man up into God. O how blessed to think of that, and how blessed to see the effect of it upon hearts where it entered in and abode!

And mark this, too, a moment more; now you have the devil’s congregation. The devil always has his congregation, and here it is. What do they say? Now mark it well, I beseech of you. First of all, they hurl the charge of blasphemy at Himself, and now they seek to undermine the authority of Jesus Christ with His disciples. These are very sad yet instructive ways of evil for us to get before our thoughts. These wretched scribes and self-righteous Pharisees, these proud sticklers for the law, actually now in an underhand way attempt to undermine the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ with His disciples. And I believe, beloved friends, all mischief more or less is underhand; spite and malice and hatred are all underhand, crawling things; and that is what you find here. They come to the disciples, and they say to them, “How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?” That is an insinuation, designed to cast a slur upon the authority of Christ with His own disciples. His answer is perfectly lovely. He says, “They that are whole have no need of the physician.” It is beautiful that He should apply that word to Himself. I think that there is a reference there, which you can search out at your leisure, to a verse in the fifth and sixth chapters of the prophecy of Hosea, and that it was in the Lord’s mind, too where it is said of Ephraim that Ephraim was conscious of his wounds and of his sores, but that he flew to other resources except to God; and then when God wrought on Ephraim’s soul, according to the first verse of Hos. 6, they say, “Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us.” And I believe the Lord had that prophecy with regard to Israel in His mind, and that He applied this word to Himself, “They that be whole have no need of the physician.” It is the sick man that needs the physician; it is the man that is sick in soul that needs the great Physician of souls; it is the man that is diseased, that has got festering wounds and sores, either in his body or else in his soul, that needs the great Physician. “They that be whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick. “I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” And how welcome that must have fallen on the hearts and ears of poor things that were there. If there was a weary, broken, miserable heart, just think of what that must have brought to it. Think of the warmth and comfort and cheer those words must have brought to a poor, disconsolate one. Beloved friends, I know I am speaking to saints of God here to-night; but believe me, we need that too for our poor hearts, just as much as poor, wretched creatures out in this world need the grace of Christ. Do you think saints do not need the grace of Christ? It is just the very thing they stand in need of. And I will give you a touching little illustration that came before me a short time ago, which will help to show the blessedness and kindness and goodness that were in that heart, that made every poor, needy thing welcome. I believe it is an ascertained fact, and naturalists will tell you so, that sometimes in the state of the atmosphere in storms, small birds are driven very far out to sea, and get out of their reckoning altogether, and almost lose themselves. It is related by a traveler, who was crossing the ocean, that on one occasion, after a very severe storm, there was a little lark seen hovering over the vessel, as if weary and worn out and longing to descend and rest itself, but seemed too afraid. At last, through sheer fatigue, the little creature did alight upon the deck of the vessel, and was in such a state of emaciation through fatigue and hardship that it was easily captured. But when this little bird was in the warm, kind, gentle hand that grasped it, the poor little thing, after a moment or two, began to enjoy the warmth of that hand, and sat down upon it, and got its poor little frozen feet under its feathers, and looked about with its sharp eye without the smallest fear. And there is a hand, my brother and sister, that you may go into to- night, in the fatigue and weariness and sorrow and trial of your heart; and there is a warmth, a tenderness, a gentleness in that hand; and not only that, but there is a protection too. It is the very figure that He uses Himself. He says, “I give unto them eternal life”—what a precious gift that was—“and they shall never perish, neither shall any”—it is not any man, but neither devil nor man—“neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.”

The Lord in His infinite grace just give our hearts to take the color of this grace, first of all to enjoy it for ourselves, and secondly, to remember His own words—and I leave them with you—“Go and do thou likewise,” for His name’s sake.

The Great Servant-Prophet: Addresses on the Gospel of Mark, Mark 1:40-45: The Leper Cleansed

Mark 1:40-45; Leviticus 13:45, 46

There was nothing, beloved brethren that was more dreadful to a Jew than leprosy. The very mention of the dreaded name produced a horror in his mind. It was stealthy in its beginning, but it was irresistible in its progress; and the peculiar nature of it was, that it thoroughly and entirely mastered the whole subject of it until every part was corrupt. And another feature likewise connected with it, that is well for us to bear in mind, so that we may learn a little as to what is presented in scripture by the disease itself was this, that at first it seemed trivial in

appearance, that of which we might call small consequence and small moment in the appearance; but with the deadliest and most awful results sooner or later to be developed. And more than that, the children of the one afflicted with leprosy were doomed to the disease. Now what do all these things point us to? Be assured it is not merely the question of the disease itself, or of how the blessed Lord here, in the wonderful grace and mercy of His heart, dealt with it, as we shall see presently but there surely is a spiritual voice in it, there is a moral lesson as we think of it and dwell upon it, that speaks loudly to us. I suppose it can hardly be questioned for a moment that leprosy in scripture is the picture, the type, of sin not so much, perhaps, in its condemning character as in its utterly defiling nature. And all those peculiar characteristics of the disease, and especially the ones I have just touched on, help in a very distinct way to bring before us the truthfulness of the moral nature of sin, what sin really is to us. No Jew could contemplate the fact that the children of the leper were doomed to be the subjects, sooner or later, of the disease, without at once being reminded of this great fact, that the taint of Adam and all that was connected with that taint, as the result and consequence of the fall, permeated the whole race, and was transmitted through the whole human family.

And then, beloved friends, there is more than that, though I put that first, because that is one of the most important features in connection with sin for us to bear in mind, and all the more because at the present moment there is a very vigorous attempt by the enemy to get rid of the reality of that taint, and to destroy, if possible, by getting rid of it, not merely the fact of the moral disease of sin itself, but by destroying it, to thrust if possible at God's marvelous provision in our Lord Jesus Christ to meet it. I think it is Calvin who says that the three great chapters of the Bible go in threes: the third of Genesis, the third of John, and the third of Romans. He labels, so to speak, those chapters in this way—the third of Genesis, the total departure, the utter ruin of man before God; the third of John, the necessity for regeneration (that is the way he speaks of it, and we can accept it knowing exactly what the meaning of it is); and the third of Romans, the great chapter which unfolds to us propitiation by the blood of Christ. Now, beloved friends, that in principle is true, and I do not think any severe criticism of expression, if I may so say, ought to hinder us from accepting a statement such as that, that has, on the broad issues of it, truths so vitally important at the present moment. Those are really the three great chapters of the Bible, and they are what is commonly called a test whereby the orthodoxy of persons with regard to the great foundation truths of Christianity are really now put to the proof. Do you hold the three R.'s, that is the question? You say, What do you mean by that? Do you hold the utter ruin of mankind? Do you believe that without a man being born again he cannot see the kingdom of God? Do you also equally believe that, save through the propitiation which our Lord Jesus Christ has made by His blood, there an be no purgation or cleansing from not merely the guilt of sin, but from the defilement of sin? You see how important it is clearly to assert and clearly to hold fast what I call these great, grand foundation truths of Christianity and of God's word (though God in His grace gives us to add to these things as He has unfolded His truth further in His word), and not to have them loosened, or become unimportant, or out of the place of prominence and pre-eminence in our souls at this present moment. And surely, beloved brethren, if the devil sees his gain before him, and that he can more thoroughly accomplish it by loosening the great arch of the truth in that way, if he thinks it worth his while to cast a slur upon Jesus Christ and upon the truth of God by attacking these great foundation truths, verily it is worth our while to hold them fast by God's grace. The attack of the enemy oftentimes is a better indication to us of the value of any possession of the truth than merely our own minds and thoughts about it, because that which is attacked is not of small moment, you may depend upon it. And if Satan considers it of the first moment to loosen the hold of these truths upon people (and there is no creature that is so far-sighted and none so intelligent externally as he is), it is because he sees that the way is opened for him to permeate and vitiate with his malice all the truth afterwards.

That is one reason why I lay stress on it for a little this evening, because this leprosy that meets us here in the first instance is in scripture constantly and continually set before us as the great picture and type of sin in its defiling nature and character. And that is the reason I read from Lev. 13. Leprosy shut the afflicted person out from the haunts of men, and all intercourse and all communion, so to speak, was interrupted where that disease asserted itself; and the man that was afflicted with it proclaimed to every one who, far and near, approached him, not only in his person but by word of mouth in his testimony, the fact that there was that upon him and in him, preying upon his vitals, which was loathsome and hateful and detestable both to God and men. That is how our scripture opens to-night. It brings before us the great fact of leprosy.

Now, beloved friends, there is another point that I would like to interest you with for a little. I do not for a moment enter into any detailed argument whether the leprosy of scripture was contagious or not—we can leave all that aside. But this is clear at any rate, that amongst the Jews to be afflicted with the leprosy was to be ceremonially unclean, that a person who had leprosy was ceremonially shut out from intercourse with God's people and intercourse with the camp. And that prescription of the law is one of the most remarkable exceptions to its kindness and its consideration. The very fact that a poor creature in the condition of a leper with an incurable disease eating away his very life, as it were, and with no possibility of any relief or cure, being brought to him from man (for no one but Jehovah Rophi could deal with the leper), the very fact that such an one was shut out by the law and placed alone, outside, to be in misery and wretchedness, that very fact brings before us how loathsome, and how detestable, and how hateful in its own nature that disease was.

Now, having stated that by way of introduction, let us look further for a little at the particular case that is brought before us here. You will notice the way that the writer of the gospel presents it. He says, "There came a leper to him, kneeling and beseeching." What an object of misery! And I am anxious, beloved friends, to press it upon all our hearts this evening, not merely the picture itself as it is here, but that we should learn by God's grace a little of something that is practical in relation to misery as it comes before us here in scripture, and as we see it in this world. Just look at this object for a moment, a repulsive object, and I suppose up to this moment in despair, a man avoided by every one, a man without, shall I say, the shadow even of that principle in the human heart without which it is almost impossible to go through such a world; he could have had no hope in his breast, not the dimmest ray would ever cross that poor desolate heart—pushing his way, no doubt, through the crowd that avoided him, and getting down at the feet of Jesus, kneeling down there a suppliant in his misery, a suppliant upon the very borders of the land of despair, and then beseeching Him. Oh! I do not know any picture that helps to bring human wretchedness more before us than that, beloved friends.

I would like to say this to you, for I have thought of it very much of late. I think there is a way in which we may look at human wretchedness and human misery very different from the way in which it is, generally speaking, regarded, even by persons who are more or less affected and touched by it. You know there is a sort of philanthropy abroad that I am perfectly certain is not the philanthropy of the New Testament, and is not the compassion of Jesus Christ nor of truth. But there is a sort of pity and a kind of compassion attempted to be created in the heart of men by presenting pictures of wretchedness and of misery; persons are supposed to be more or less touched by these pictures as they come before them, and out of this consideration and out of this compassion, as is supposed, for such objects, they are to address themselves in some way or another to their relief. I do not see that in scripture, beloved friends. Yet what I see is the most unbounded compassion and the

most unbounded kindness in our Lord Jesus Christ. But this I see, and I thank God for it, and I have seen it recently, perhaps, more than ever—that there is a bright side to distress and to human misery and human wretchedness. Oh! beloved friends, if we could only get one another a little under the light of this for an instant, so as to read the blessing that is in it! I believe that God has, in His wonderful grace, permitted the misery and wretchedness of mankind, and the desolations that are upon hearts, as a rebuke to the awful selfishness of our nature. Take, for instance, this great city, completely surfeited with luxury as it is on the one hand, and yet at the same time completely steeped on the other in misery and wretchedness. What do I see in it? I see this, that God in His infinite mercy has allowed all that as a rebuke to the awful selfishness of men. And I believe that is one of the great things that He would impress upon our hearts at this present moment, that He leaves these objects amongst us, and that He brings these cases of wretchedness before us, in order that this principle, this hateful selfishness of our nature, may be rebuked and checked as we see these cases day by day. So that it is not merely the fact of pitying a man because he is a man like ourselves, afflicted with these trials and pressures and wants and woes—this, I think, might very soon sink down into a sort of sentimentalism that would be of very little use or practical good—but I say this to my brothers and sisters in Christ here to-night, we are brought positively into contact with the misery of this world that we might be here, through grace, the reproduction and the continuation of the life of Jesus Christ in mercy in it. It is not merely that men might be relieved—though I fully admit men are relieved; it is not merely that misery might be alleviated—though I fully admit misery is alleviated; but that His own blessed life of those three and thirty years might, at least in the shaded and dim distance in which it could be represented in any of His poor people, be continued in His saints, now that His blessed Son is no longer in this world. So I see these two things in it, and this picture brings it before me—I see in misery a rebuke to human selfishness, and I see in the wretchedness in which mankind are held in consequence of sin, that God has left us in a world where sin is rampant that we might, even in regard to the bodies of men, and not merely their souls, be here in some little way to set forth our Lord Jesus Christ as He was here in this world.

Now see how this comes out in connection with this case. This poor, wretched creature comes, and kneels, and beseeches Him. Now here is another thing, in the attitude itself, the condition of the man, the place he takes. And then look at his words for a moment, “If thou wilt, thou canst.” Oh what words these are! You see I am passing now from the literal object of distress to look at the moral state, for I believe we find both here. And, beloved friends, I am able to say this to you to-night, that the moral state is far more affecting to me than the state of his body. The state of this man’s mind touches me a great deal more than the state of his poor frame. I admit everything that you can put with regard to his body; but look at the state of his mind! The malice of Satan and the cruelty of man had sowed in that poor heart distrust of the heart of Christ. That is what you find here.

Ah!” he says, as it were, “I do not question your power; I have seen that. I have witnessed your works of greatness” (as I have no doubt he had, for they were in abundance; Jesus was ever working in grace in this world); “but,” he says, “I doubt the will, I doubt the love, I doubt the interest; I know you can do it, but I call in question whether there is sufficient readiness of heart and willingness of mind, whether, in other words, there is sufficient interest in my case to lead you to bestow upon me in my misery the mercy which I know you have.”

Now, beloved friends, how very instructive that is to us! Do you not see that brings us back exactly to what was the root of the beginning of all sin? And I am thankful to be able to say a word about that this evening, because we are met at the present moment with very crude thoughts, superficial, shallow ideas about sin (that is one of the things that are pervading the people of God on every side), and consequently shallow, crude, superficial thoughts about holiness. They always go together, false and shallow thoughts of sin are sure to precede shallow and false thoughts about holiness. Hence you have them going hand in hand; the one paves the way for the other. And when I say that, it is in order to bring your thoughts for a moment back to the very root-principle of sin. What is it? You have got it here in this poor leper—I do not mean in his disease, but in the wretched state of his mind. I trust most in this company tonight remember what the principle was that the enemy sowed in the heart of the woman at the very commencement of the history of our race in the garden of Eden. It was just exactly that. The serpent said, as it were, to the woman, “Ah! but you see there is one tree God has kept back from you.” “Yes,” she says, “we may eat of all the trees of the garden but one.” “Ah yes,” he says; “you may eat of all the trees of the garden, but there is one tree your Maker has kept back; you have got all the rest, but still there is one reserved.” Do you not see there was direct and deadly insinuation against the heart of God? an insinuation against his kindness and goodness and wisdom; all His being was called in question by that insinuation. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took and she ate—that is to say, she helped herself to that which she did not believe there was goodness enough in the heart of God her Creator to give her. Ah! there is the root-principle of sin, and there is a lesson to those who talk to-day about its being discernible in its acts. There it is in its root, there it is at the very bottom, there it is in the beginning of its history. What is sin? Now, you know how it is brought down to mere acts; it is spoken of as gross acts, and so forth. Sin is in the creature, a will independent of God. And when people say—well meaning, I have no doubt, God forbid that I should say a hard word with regard to any; I fully admit the good intention, though I see the falsity that is at the bottom very often—but when it is said, “The way for a Christian to get free from all this is to put his will over on the side of God,” the advice that they are giving you is simply this, to put over on the side of God, as they say, that which in principle is sin. Let us never forget that, beloved. Because the will of the creature is sin in its essence, sin in its principle. The principle of sin in the creature is a will of its own. And, beloved friends, how that came and how that was sown in the woman, was by a slur upon the character, the goodness, the kindness of God. The leper has it here, and he comes out with it in his distress and misery. His heart, I believe, is more leprous than his body. The moral state of that man is a great deal more leprous than his external condition. “If thou wilt, thou canst.” Oh, dear friends, what a picture we have before us!

And now let me say to my brethren (and that will bring it a little more home to all of us; and let us search our own hearts and allow the word of God to search our hearts to-night), have we not often said that in our hearts? Have we not, my beloved brethren, oftentimes been brought into circumstances in our history, circumstances in our family perhaps, or in our business, or in our daily life, circumstances of difficulty when we have come to what is called the parting of the ways, and we do not know what will come next, and have we not often thought, Well, I know that He has got the power, I know He has the ability, “I know thou canst do all things,” as Job says—but, but! Ah! that is just where this poor leper was. Oh, dear friends, let us through God’s infinite grace learn how ready we are to reflect on that heart! Oh! how ready we are to discredit that love, and oh, what love! to discredit the goodness, the kindness, the compassions that are not small, the compassions that are “new every morning.” That is what confronted the great Servant-Prophet here in the very first instance in connection with this leper, “If thou wilt thou canst make me clean.”

Now how is this met? That is the next thing we have to look at, “And Jesus, moved with compassion.” I love that word, the “compassion” of Jesus Christ. O the compassion of His heart! If it had been anyone of us there would have been a shudder, a shrug of the shoulder, as we retreated from the revolting object of misery. You see we cannot avoid contrasting ourselves with Him. I think that is one part of the

blessedness of our blessed Lord's ministry and work here in this world, that the contrast between Him and every one else stands out so wonderfully before us. I know well how we should have turned away from an object so loathsome, and if there had been ever so little a trace left of the kindness even of human nature in us, the refusal of this poor man to acknowledge the goodness of the heart though He owned the power would have left us without a shred of compassion for him, and we would have turned away to leave him in his wretchedness still more wretched. But ah! that is not what we read here, "Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand and touched him." He put forth that ever open hand of kindness, and mercy, and goodness, and touched that death in life (for that is what it was), and said, "I will." Oh, what was there not in that sentence! Oh, what those two little words brought home to the heart, "I will." You doubt my affection? "I will." You doubt my readiness? "I will; be thou clean." Now do you notice, beloved friends, the two blessed points that come before us in the act and word of Jesus here? It is a great thing to dwell upon the acts and words of Jesus. The act spoke of the love of His heart in a way that no word could. Oh, the touch of that hand, that blessed hand, that hand of mercy! Oh, the tenderness of that touch! Do not we know something about it when it comes and touches us? If there is a tried or an afflicted one of the Lord's people here to-night cannot you witness to the tenderness of that touch? When He touches you, how tender His touch is!—no roughness in it any more than in His voice. It was not even like Joseph. Joseph spake roughly to his brethren, and it was good for them to be probed to the bottom of their hearts with regard to their state; but though he did speak roughly his heart was breaking over them all the time. But oh! beloved friends, Jesus neither speaks roughly nor touches roughly. God help us to remember that. Sometimes I think some of us imagine there is something very noble in rough speech, or unloving look—that it is Christlike. Do not let us falsely consecrate things that are not after Christ. It may appear very clever to be severe and cutting in tongue, and it may appear very exalted to be haughty in bearing, but you will look in vain in the history of the great Servant-Prophet Himself to find that. I dwell upon it, beloved friends, because I love to think of it. "He put forth his hand and touched him." Now I say the act proclaimed the heart in a way that no word could. The word proclaimed the mighty power of God, "Be thou clean," and the touch, too, for who could touch a leper without being defiled unless He was God? A mere man would be defiled at once. A mere man like any other man would have carried away the defilement of the leprosy with him. What happened with the touch of Jesus was not what would have taken place with anyone else, God forbid such a thought in any heart; cleansing to the leper was what happened. "He put forth his hand, and touched him and said, I will, be thou clean." "He spake and it was done." It is the mighty God, beloved friends, manifested in a man. I know no scripture that more beautifully and more wonderfully presents Him in His Person as God and man than this does here. Do you not see the tenderness of the man in that touch? Do you not also see the compassions of Him who was perfect man? As the old confession rightly and truly says, "very God, and very man"; but do we not also see here the mighty God, the Creator of the ends of the earth? Do we not see Him who made the worlds by His word? "I will, be thou clean." What a new thing on earth this was! What was it? Was it law or was it love? What is it that is brought before us here? These two things come before me, beloved friends, in this little scene in a wonderful way—the divinity of love, if I may be allowed to use the expression—and the divinity of power. I see the divinity of power in the "Be thou clean"; I see the divinity of love in "I will," with a touch.

Now for a few moments more, just look at what we may call the attendant circumstances. I will not dwell long upon some of them, because we have already had them before us, but we get the word "immediately." I have pointed out before how that is the characteristic word of the Gospel of Mark, occurring frequently under different names, not always translated "immediately," but "instantly," or "quickly," or at "once." But it is the urgency and the absence of all delay in the rendering of service, or in the effect of the works of mercy, whichever it may be. And so in this case, "Immediately the leprosy departed from him and he was cleansed." As I was saying on a previous occasion, man is very well up in the healing art now, but he cannot do this, he cannot bring about a result like this at once. There are stages of cure, and progress, just as there are stages of disease; but instantaneously the whole order of things changed—that is the mighty power of God. And that is what this word "immediately" brings before us.

There is another point of great beauty here—indeed there are two points. Observe what he says to this man. "He straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away, and saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man, but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded for a testimony unto them." Now first of all we learn from this, beloved friends, how the Lord Jesus never left and never surrendered the place of servant that He was pleased to take. That is the first great thing that comes before us in connection with the case of the leper here, how entirely He maintained the servant place. I need not say to you that we find elsewhere how entirely He always maintained the place of man that He was pleased to become in this world; indeed He will never give up manhood, He will never cease to be a Man; having become a man, He is a man for ever, a man in glory; but I do not dwell on it now, we shall have another opportunity; but what is so blessed is that He is set before us as a girded Servant in heaven, He says so Himself in Luke 12, that in that scene when He will have it all His own way, He will make those who have followed Him, and waited for Him, and watched for Him, sit down, and will gird Himself, and come forth and serve them. But what we see here is, on earth He never ceased to be a servant. No effects of His ministry, no consequences of His works of power were ever claimed by Him so as to reflect any honor or any glory upon Himself To me that is one feature of His ministry which is most precious. "I came from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." And hence you see Him here sending this poor leper to the priest in order to fulfil the requirements of the law of Moses, and that he might go and offer for his cleansing, and might be a witness really to them of the mighty power of God who was still Jehovah-Ropheka to His people. Observe how the blessed One does not claim any honor for Himself; but this poor leper lost the opportunity of carrying out the thoughts and wishes of our Lord Jesus Christ, and went and proclaimed everywhere what Jesus had done; and the retiring, gracious, blessed ways of the great Servant-Prophet were broken in upon, and He could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places. You see how entirely He kept His retirement. And I commend that, beloved brethren in Christ, to all our hearts. The very essence of a good servant is to render service and to retire into the servant's place. And you see the perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ in this very thing that so distinctly and peculiarly marked Him as the great Servant-Prophet in the midst of Israel—that having become a servant, and taken the servant's form, He never departed from it.

But now there is another point that is even more touching, and that you will find all through His history—He never claimed for Himself, on the score of His services, any one whom He had healed, or relieved, or blessed. It is beautiful to trace the history of that in scripture. See, for instance, how the daughter of Jairus was left in the bosom of her family. See how the son that was healed at the bottom of the holy mount was handed back to his father. See how the widow of Nain's son was restored to his mother. And you remember how He would not let the poor Gadarene follow Him or be with Him, but sent him home to his friends. I do not know any thing that is more precious than that aspect of our blessed Lord's ministry in this world—that on the score of mercy given He never claimed. It was as if grace would be offended not to confer the thing sovereignly, without the surrender of any other thing in return; that is what I see in it. May I say with all reverence—it has been said before, and I therefore only repeat it—that He did good, hoping for nothing again. In that aspect you see it in a wonderful way in our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He had rendered the most wonderful service—a leper cleansed, a dead man raised up, a poor dumb creature

with her mouth opened, no matter what it was, excessive though the case might have been in human wretchedness and human misery, still the Lord Jesus rendered His mercy and His grace “freely,” as He said to His disciples, and I believe it was the spirit He put upon it, “Freely ye have received; freely give.” The Lord in His grace give us to take that in. I believe it is a great thing not to hamper grace with any conditions in the shape of a return. There is one scripture that throws immense light on that, and that is in the healing of a leper, too. Do you remember in the case of the prophet Elisha, how he resented it with Gehazi? Do you remember what Gehazi said? Gehazi was very like the people of the present day. He said, Naaman is not going to get everything from my master without paying for it; he says, My master has spared Naaman, this Syrian, I will go after him, and I will take somewhat of him. And you know what he did; I need not go into it. But do you remember the words of the prophet? Is it a time to receive garments, and silver? and so on. “Is it a time?” after the display of such marvelous grace of God, the sovereign pure grace of God, “without money and without price.” “The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave to thee, and to thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.” And why? Because with an avidity and a greed for money, and a lie to sustain it, he sought to hamper and to tarnish the free sovereign cure of God through His servant the prophet.

See how beautifully the opposite principle shows out in our Lord Jesus Christ. The contrast in Him is so beautiful in all these instances; and not only that contrast, but the blessedness of being permitted to dwell on that side of His character and nature, the perfection of the man. I do love to dwell upon the perfections of the Man Christ Jesus; I love to sit down and think of them; I love to go over them in my own heart; I love to think of Him handing over that poor young man to his mother. Is it not blessed to see the perfection of His heart, the perfection of tenderness, even that of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so you find it, beloved friends, everywhere throughout in every instance.

But there is one other point. Some one here might object, and say, Well, but what do you make of this? Had he not servants, and did not He call His servants? Were you not speaking to us about the call of the apostles a few evenings back? Ah! but that is quite a different case. These were not persons that had received any favor from Him; He did not heal them; He did not bestow bodily strength, or power, or cure upon them. They were called, of course; that is quite clear; but how were they called? His charms called them; He charmed them to Him; He never made a claim; He charmed them; they could not help coming, the charm of His call was irresistible for leaving everything in this world and going; for leaving net, and fish, and father, to follow such an one as Jesus Christ. The point, beloved friends, is this, that they could not resist it; there was an attractiveness about Him, He drew; He was the great heavenly magnet here, even as a man in this world, that drew hearts after Him, charmed them, kept them, sustained them, held them. It was not merely that they went out after Him, but they stayed out after Him. Do we? that is the question. I was reading the other day, and was struck with it afresh, what is said of Abraham. It was the God of glory that charmed and called him out, and you admire his going out, do you not? We often dwell upon it. How beautiful to see Abraham rising up and going forth, and the God of glory, as it were, shining him out of everything, and death removing the hidden difficulties out of his way. Glory and death conducted him out. Glory beckoned him out, and death took the great tall cedar trees, as it were, out of the path. But, beloved friends, there is something else in the history, even this—he stayed out. Many a one has gone back; that is what is so solemn. Many a one has gone out, and the going out has been beautiful, but the staying out has failed. Ah! it is the staying out. Now I tell you nothing will keep you out but the heavenly glory of Jesus Christ. A great many things may call you out in the first instance. Oftentimes, in the history, particularly of young Christians, there is something that looks to them very beautiful, and somehow the more it is in the distance the more beautiful it looks; it is not perhaps quite so beautiful when you come near to it, but, as is said, “distance lends enchantment to the view.” But oh! nothing will keep you out but the glory of Jesus Christ.

I just say that, beloved friends, in connection with this little history. He did not claim any one whom He served in the way of mercy for Himself, but He called His servants, and charmed His servants, and His heart educated them, and they learnt—poorly, I admit—the art of Jesus Christ in mercy, and in kindness, and in goodness, by being with Him. God in His infinite grace grant that we may learn the art by being with Him. You never can educate a person to be kind, and gentle, and affectionate, and forbearing. You cannot cultivate and educate a hard, severe nature into a kind, gentle, tender nature. There is only one thing can do it. If you keep the company of our Lord Jesus Christ, you will learn it by being in His company.

May God, by His grace and Spirit, read those lessons out to us this evening, that we may understand His compassions. And this I say to my beloved brothers and sisters here to-night—bear with me as I press it upon you—let us go into this world, and seek by His grace to continue that life of mercy. And of all things, may the Lord keep us from being hard and censorious. This is the serious part of it, for us there is plenty of talk, a great deal too much boasting of our wealth, and yet very little done. What we want is this—practical manifestation of the mercy of Jesus Christ, not only in word, but in deed and in truth. Oh, that He in His grace might use His word to call us near to Himself, to sit before Him and learn that grace a little more, for His Name’s sake.

The Great Servant-Prophet: Addresses on the Gospel of Mark, Mark 1:21-38: His Ministry

Mark 1:21-38

We have arrived, beloved friends, this evening, by God’s help, at the actual ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. We were considering together the last two evenings His preparation for service—not only how He was greeted from heaven and sealed as Jehovah’s servant in relation to His service, but how also He specially met Satan at the commencement of it, in the wilderness, with the wild beasts, in all that made the scene itself weird and desolate to Him; further we thought of the contrast to the manner and way in which we find Adam the first man presented to us in Genesis in the garden of Eden. And more than all, we dwelt on the contrast in Jesus the victorious Man, and the ministry of angels to Him, which did not go beyond His body, as soon as ever the temptation was ended. And then we had last week as well how He associated others with Him, and how His call (and I love to dwell upon it again for a moment) charmed them; “Come ye after me” was enough.

And I would again repeat, beloved friends, to you, a point I think of the very greatest moment, and specially for us to remember, and that is that not one of those whom the Lord calls ministerially here were idle men. I tried to show you that this is the ministerial call, not the personal call. The personal call of course must precede the ministerial call. Does that sound strange? Is there then such a thing as a call to the ministry? Assuredly there is. There is such a thing as being sent on the service of the Lord, “How shall they preach except they be sent?” Sometimes, I think, beloved friends, that is in danger of being a little forgotten. However genuine and however true a desire may be—and God fosters it and may He foster it more in every heart—yet a true desire does not of necessity suppose a divine call. I quite admit that there

would be, along with the divine call, a genuine and truly spiritually fostered desire, but there must be a distinct call, there must be a distinct mission.

And more (and may God help us to remember it in these days) this mission is a mission distinctly from heaven. And if you want to find the great type of it, and the one in whom it was first of all, so to speak, exhibited, take the history of Saul of Tarsus, and see what was said to him, and how he recounts it in the first moments of his conversion, when God said to him, “Taking thee out,” that is the force of the word “delivering,” “taking thee out from the people,” that is, from the Jews, “and from the Gentiles, to whom now I send thee.” So that he was positively cut off from all nationality upon earth, and from all connection, so to speak, with the scene here, before he was regularly sent back into it. But he came back into it from heaven, and in all the endowments of heaven; and that is what true ministry according to God is now. True ministry according to God’s mind is a ministry from heaven for people down here in this world.

Now I am led to that, you see, in this way, in speaking of the Lord’s call of these disciples here. He called them to follow Him in ministry, so that He associates them with Himself in the service that He came to perform for God, whose servant He was, Jehovah’s servant specially, though the servant to all in this world as well.

Now we had that last Wednesday evening, how they went, how they followed, how they left. But let us dwell upon this one point still further for a moment, for I would like to reiterate it as earnestly as I can—that all those persons who were thus called and sent by Him were every one of them occupied with something or another previously; they were not idle men that had nothing to do. One was casting the net, another was mending nets, others were, in filial respect and reverence, ministering to their father Zebedee; but whatever it was, they were all found at some occupation, and they were called in the charm of that blessed word of Christ, “Come ye after me.” That indeed loosed all ties, and, thank God, it does so now. And, beloved friends, we do not for one moment question the claims of Christ; we know the word is a familiar word, and a favorite word in people’s mouths; but let us love to proclaim His charms; there are charms. No doubt there are claims; but charms—O how blessed! “Come ye after me” was that charm; and they left everything, they forsook all, nets, fish, father, everything.

Now let us look for a little to-night at what we may call in these verses the ministry proper; we have reached the ministry proper now. And the first thing you find here is the directness, the rapidity, the quickness, the absence of all delay, that characterized Him as the great servant of Jehovah. And hence you find that word that we have seen is continually used all through this gospel of Mark; that is to say, “straightway,” “directly,” “immediately,” “quickly”—there is only one word in the original, but it is translated in many ways; but it all points to no lingering, no hesitation, no procrastination, but to the quickness, the rapidity, so to speak, the directness of the true servant, whose whole thought, and mind, and heart is bent upon the service to be performed. And so we are told here that immediately He enters into the synagogue and teaches.

And look at the place spoken of, because it is not a little important to find this very place, Capernaum, coming before us in connection with the ministry of the Lord. It casts a very interesting light on the woes pronounced by the Lord on some of these cities, “Woe unto thee, Chorazin; woe unto thee, Bethsaida,” “and thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven.” Now it is a very remarkable thing to find, in connection directly with His service, that the very place that witnessed, so to speak, the first goings forth of His wonder- working power, and also His words, the teaching, of the great servant-prophet in this world, was this very place Capernaum. And it was that which peculiarly constituted Capernaum’s great exaltation; it was exalted to heaven—how? Because it witnessed His mightiest works, it was permitted to see the divine manifestation of power that was in the words as well as in the works of our Lord Jesus Christ. And hence it was privileged. But Matt. 11, where this very verse I have quoted occurs, shows you how little they profited by it, and shows how it was all, so to speak bestowed upon them in vain. And it was at that intensely interesting moment of His blessed history here in this world, when, as it were, everything had failed around Him, when the cities where His mightiest works were done, did not repent, when John doubted Him as to whether He was really the Messiah or not, when there was not anything to minister to Him—it was, I say, at that moment, which brings Capernaum before His mind, that Jesus says, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father.” You can see at once what a place of responsibility that puts Capernaum into, what exaltation it received from the very fact of this privilege. And, beloved friends, so it is now. Increase the grace, multiply the privileges, afford the opportunities, and you correspondingly lay those on whom such favors are bestowed under immense responsibility. It is always so; it is privilege that really creates responsibility. You must ever keep the two together. Let privilege be bestowed, then responsibility is created. Increase divine opportunities, and favors, and blessings, and you correspondingly must look for all that which would naturally be expected to come forth from them. So it was here with Capernaum; and I only mention it because I think it is striking to find this city con- fronting us at the very first in connection with the great service of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now mark what is said directly about His ministry there. It says, “they were astonished at his doctrine.” Why? What was there peculiar to the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ as the great servant-prophet? This—that He taught with authority. Now I believe, beloved friends, that is peculiar to Christ. I do not question for a moment that every servant of Christ to-day is bound to speak according to the written word of God; and if there be any power or any force in the utterances of any of God’s messengers, that force and that power are all derived from the fact that they are giving utterance to what God Himself has propounded in His own word. This is the true force of the testimony and witness of every faithful servant of Christ to-day. It is very different with the words of the prophets in olden times, though I could not say they spoke with authority as our Lord Jesus Christ did. For instance, how interesting it is to remember that prophet after prophet gave forth their utterances in this way, “Thus saith the Lord,” “The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” They begin and they end the whole roll of their prophecy with utterances of that kind. You never find that in our Lord Jesus Christ’s words. “Verily, verily, I say unto you”—is very different, that is what I mean by authority; and that I believe is the true signification of authority here, namely, that He spoke, not merely as the servant of Jehovah in this world—because He is the servant-prophet in this gospel—but albeit that He was the true servant-prophet and maintained that place distinctly all through, and never left the place of subjection and dependence as man or as servant, yet, at the same time, He was “very God of very God.” And even in the lowly place He was pleased to take in the grace that marked the humiliation of the position and the servant’s form that He was pleased to assume there was this grand and blessed contrast between His utterances and those of every other servant before and since, that Jesus spoke with authority, because He was God. And that is what amazed them and aroused inquiry here in their synagogue. Mark what they say, “What new doctrine is this?” Now it would not have been a new doctrine to them, to hear a person saying, “Thus saith the Lord God,” or saying, “This shall come to pass, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” But to hear One speaking as the Great I Am, as God, commanding as God, announcing as God, revealing as God, uttering as God, that was what was new. And oh! it is well we should cherish

in our souls these contrasts between Christ and all else. I long that we should be equally balanced, for I confess to you I am afraid lest we should lose it on one side or the other. Let us always hold fast—and we cannot hold it too tenaciously fast—what I am pressing upon you now; but let us equally hold fast the other, that although He was the mighty God, and spoke as God, and revealed His mind, yet still He did take the place and position of servant as Man, and that whilst He was never less in the glory of His divine nature as God, He was equally never less than the perfect subject Man.

Beloved brethren, our place by His grace is, neither to confound the person, nor divide the substance, but reverently to hold fast both. Now what we find is, that there are those who are ready to part with either the one or the other. And I believe that, where the spiritual mind, the mind of the Spirit of God in the child of God, shows itself is, in being able to see where He is presented in the glory of His person either as God or man. I believe true spirituality consists in the adoring discernment by the Holy Ghost of the mind of God, specially in relation to the presentation of the truths that lie around the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let me call your attention to another word for a moment. It is said that He “taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” You will bear with me in saying it, but to my mind the most contemptible kind of people that were ever in this world were the scribes. And I am prepared to tell you why. I was reading not very long since, and the passage struck me greatly, the account of the blessed One’s coming down here into this world, His having been pleased to become man, and reading it in the gospel that presents Him in Jewish connections too. And I do not know any passage that gives us the true character of these men, and shows them exactly as they are, like that passage which tells us of the conversation that took place between Herod the king and those scribes. They could tell accurately everything about the birth of Jesus, they were conversant with all the facts of the Old Testament prophecies, they were the keepers of the law, the copyists of the law, and they read and expounded the law (I believe they are the same persons that are called “doctors of the law”), there was not a recondite mystery connected with the law, that these scribes could not unravel before men; but, with all that, they had not the smallest personal interest in the things themselves. That is what they were. May God keep us from being scribes! They could descant upon the prophecies, could tell the place where Christ was to be born—they did—they could quote the very words of scripture, they were as clear, as it is said, as the moon, but as cold; their hearts were not on fire. What did they care about Jesus of Nazareth, what concern had they about the truths that connected themselves with Him? They were simply there as the formal, cold exponents of the law and the prophets. That is why I affirm that the scribes were a despicable class of men. And therefore you see the contrast in a moment. “He taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.” The scribes had no authority; they were merely copyists, they only repeated the thing. And not only this, but what characterized the scribes was their perverse rendering of the law, their fanciful inventions oftentimes, their perverted notions, the manner in which they twisted things and manufactured things according to the sentiments and working of their own minds. They could argue, but they could not reveal; Jesus revealed; He “taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

So far in connection with what I call His words of authority. That is the first thing that marked His ministry, though I believe, as I have already stated, that the ministry of the great prophet was more in works of mercy than even in words of mercy, though, thank God, there were both.

Now let us look for a moment at these works of authority here, because that is what comes next. Just read the verses again, and mark the way it is presented. “And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone.” It is not a little remarkable that immediately upon the impression which His authority produces in word, Satan confronts Him through one of his emissaries. No sooner is there amazement at His word of power than the demoniac comes at once upon the scene. How striking! This man was a possession of Satan, an agent of Satan, and was under the thralldom of Satan. And you will observe how that all that characterized a man under the possession and power of Satan, is presented in a very solemn way here: “he cried out.” O the awful despair of devils and of the devil! I believe there are many demoniacs, but there is only one devil. Therefore this man is spoken of as a demoniac, he is an emissary of the devil, an emissary of the great opposer and slanderer of God and men: as I was saying to you last week, Satan is all that. And so here you find all the elements of misery and of wretchedness about this poor demoniac, a poor devil-possessed man. Look at the words of misery for a moment. “He cried out, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.” Dear friends, it is very solemn to think that it was only man that did not own Him. Devils owned Him, disease owned Him, sickness fled, misery gave way; man alone would not own Him. Winds and waves obeyed Him, all the whole power and course of nature bowed to Him; but not man. Is there not something very solemn in that? There is to me something unearthly and weird in that cry of the devil here, “Art thou come to destroy us?” Oh! think of that lament. The destroyer even to the utmost of his power resents interference with his domain, “Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God”—a recognition which the Lord does not accept. He will not accept such homage, the acknowledgment of the devil. I believe it was the very same spirit that was produced in His servant in after years, when Paul would not accept the patronage of the Pythoness. I believe it was the spirit of Jesus Christ in His servant that refused to be announced about the place by the girl possessed with a spirit of divination. “These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation”; and the blessed servant, following the example of his Master, acts there just as Jesus does here. Jesus says, and it is a very strong word, an important word, Hold thy peace,” literally, “Be muzzled.” You will find the same word in Mark 4, used in another connection, in reference to the Lord Jesus Christ stilling the tempest. He binds the winds, as it were; precisely the same word in the original. “He arose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still,” be silent. And so here, just as if it were a wild beast that was being subdued and overmastered by a superior power, He who was ever tender and gracious in all His ways and works and words in the midst of men, speaks with a stern coldness here to Satan, “Be muzzled [N4:f20J4], and come out of him.” (See 1 Cor. 9:9 and 1 Tim. 5:18; the citation is from the LXX. of Deut. 25:4.) And so you have in act and fact the display not merely of the word of authority, but of the work of power. The word of authority called attention to Him, and now the outstretched arm is as mighty to deliver from Satan’s power as the lips of grace were ready to proclaim grace on every side, “Hold thy peace and come out of him.”

Satan, the devil, bowed before that authority, but yet exhibited the frenzy that is peculiar to him, whilst owning the defeat that he suffered at the hand of the God Man. We read that when he had torn him, he came out; that is to say, he exhibited the hatred of his nature, the terrible violence of his will, both against God and man. Satan always does that, and yet at the same time was overpowered and bound. Because the obedience of the perfect Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, binds the strong man, and then his goods are spoiled. The strong man owns the power of the binder, and is obliged to let free the captives of his hands, and to loose the chains that he had tied around them in this world, though at the same time exhibiting all the malignity of his nature: he tore him.

Now observe one thing more. “And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority

commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him." Oh how blessed, beloved friends, it is to think of Him! How blessed to dwell upon these wonder-working powers of mercy in our Lord Jesus Christ to poor things afflicted by Satan.

There is one little point that suggests itself to my mind just at this stage of our meditations, namely—that in the Epistle to the Ephesians you see the very principle brought out afterwards by the servant that was exhibited here by the blessed Master Himself. Here He first of all confronts Satan—though we have not the details of it in Mark, yet we have the fact of the temptation—and having confronted Satan, having been victorious over him, having bound him by obedience, then He becomes the deliverer of those who were under his power. Now it is a very interesting point for our hearts to remember that that is exactly the way in which the gifts of ministry in Ephesians are presented to us, that the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world to-day is presented exactly in that connection. For what has He done? "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men, that is to say, He takes out from under the power of the devil poor things like you and me that were once his slaves, held in captivity and in chains by him, and then is pleased to use us against the very power that previously held us. Now it is most blessed and most interesting to see ministry in that connection. He breaks the thraldom and the chains of Satan's power over the poor slaves and vessels of his will and malignity, and having broken that power and delivered them from it, He takes them up to use them for Himself, according to His own love and heart against the very power that formerly held them in captivity. And we can see the forecast, the announcement of it as it were, in the ministry of the great servant-prophet Himself in this very first instance.

But there was not only the subjection of Satan and of demons to Him, but we find even more in connection with His works of mercy. After this, we see sickness coming before Him, and sickness in an individual case, and then a number of cases of disease brought together, what we might call a considerable company of impotent folk. Now why is this special peculiar case presented here? It is the very scrip- ture which lets us into the understanding of the mind of God—that Peter, who was supposed to have been the founder of the Papacy, and to have been at Rome for that very purpose, was really an apostle who was a married man: That is the object, I believe, of its being brought in here specially. It is an instance of the mercy and power of our Lord Jesus Christ; but it so happens that it was Peter's wife's mother who was sick of a fever. It is not said what the nature of the fever was; Luke 4:38, with the exact diagnosis of one who was a physician, still guided by the Holy Ghost, calls it a great (:,(V8å) fever. It is enough for us that it was a severe sickness, and that all sickness and feebleness of disease are part of the fruit and misery of sin in this world. But this I do know—and that is what I think is so blessed, however grievous the case might be, and however difficult, or as men would say hard, there was no case that was not all easy to Him. And therefore we find what might be called the most extreme cases, the most severe cases presented where His works of mercy and of power are before us, to show the blessedness and the might, as well as the grace, and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But there are two little touches here that are peculiar to Mark, which I should like to dwell upon for a little. "Anon they tell him of her." O how sweet that is! I know nothing more precious than the holy familiarity that existed between the Lord Jesus and poor things like ourselves in this world; and not only that, beloved friends, but His precious accessibility. A man has a sick mother-in-law, or a sick child, or a daughter dying, and they are all welcomed to the most accessible of men here. They can all go to Him; there was nothing about Him that repelled, I say it with all holy reverence, there was no cold distance or reserve about our precious Lord Jesus Christ. Truly He was, even in His human nature here, in its perfection, very man amongst men, a solitary man as well, yet was He the most accessible of all who were by this, as it were, attracted to Him, all were made to realize how welcome they were to Him; there was that confidence which I am convinced was impressed upon them by the perfection of His own nature and love, so that they could go and pour out their plaint into His gracious ear: "Anon they tell him of her." Now I would ask our hearts here to-night, if we are practiced in that holy confidence in Him now? Do we know what it is to tell Him of our sickness and our weakness, of our sorrows and our trials, of our pains and pressures? Do we bring them to Him, as far more interested in them than even we are. It may be that we might think, who could be so interested in a dying wife, or a sick child, or an aged father, as a husband, or a father, or a son, or a daughter? Ah! there is One more interested, and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. "Anon they tell him of her." O the beauty of those words! Do they not remind the heart of another portion of this blessed book, which has been such a prop and stay to many an anxious and sorrowing heart, namely, that precious passage in the Epistle to the Philippians, where the apostle by the Spirit says, "Be careful for nothing"; difficult words we often think, as many a time we have looked at them, "Be careful for nothing." Now, perhaps, I may be speaking to some poor afflicted heart here to-night. There may be just such a pressure as I have described hanging upon your poor heart, or you may have a greater sorrow than that pressing you down perhaps, God only knows. But I am conscious of this, that there are numbers of people in this great city to-night whose circumstances are such as at any rate humanly speaking to cause them abundant anxiety, and yet if they belong to Him, here is His word, "Be careful for nothing" Then, do you ask, how can that ever be brought about? What panacea is there that can discharge that load of care from my heart? Here it is, beloved friends, "In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." I think "made known" there is exactly like "anon they tell him of her" here. There is a heart up there in heaven to whom you can communicate it all, and all you need is, in the confidence of the love that is there, just go and tell Him of it. Remember this, He knows it long before. Do not be under any deception as to that. You are not informing Him as to anything; He knows it. But yet tell Him of it, He loves to hear, make it known to Him, pour it out to Him. O, beloved friends, we would encourage one another a little more in those holy exercises. O, that we knew what it was in our distress, and wants, and needs, just to turn to Jesus in the first place! How often we think of human aids, and human helps, and human arms. Alas! these are the first things that come into our mind oftentimes. If we are in distress, and difficulty, and sorrow, we think of what we can do, and how we can get help, and we run here and there and everywhere else; but how blessed: "Anon they tell him of her." Now that is peculiar to Mark, and I earnestly call your attention to it.

The other word that is found here is also peculiar to Mark, and is one that shows the beautiful perfection of the servant—the man, and yet the servant. It says, "He took her by the hand." Oh! that is so exquisitely tender; and yet there is a power too—there is also a skill about it. Did not He know how to grasp that hand? Do not you think that that touch was the tenderest touch that could be conceived to that poor, sick, fever-stricken woman there? I have often thought when I have been speaking about the good Samaritan—the Lord Jesus Christ in figure, the unknown stranger, out of sight and out of mind—a certain Samaritan, "as he journeyed"—from heaven to earth, "came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine"—I have often thought there was only one hand that could touch those wounds, the hand of our Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore I believe that little word is brought out here, and it is exceedingly precious, "He took her by the hand."

And then we read of her, that "immediately the fever left her." Now man is pretty well up in the healing art, but he cannot do what we have here. There is an immensity of skill in healing just now, but there is nothing like this "immediately." That is peculiar to divine power, though it was divine power ministered by and witnessed in the servant-man.

One word more before we leave that—“she ministered to them.” I do not believe she went about the place as a great preacher. I do not believe there was anything of that kind. The words have not got that on their surface or in their sub- stance; but I believe that she arose in all the beautiful simplicity, but in all the beautiful reality, and in all the beautiful retirement that marked her position, to minister to them, and now she that was fever-stricken is relieved and raised, and, instead of being ministered to, she is ministering.

And then we read of the other cases. There were numbers brought when the sun was down; and there is one point in the verses I desire to dwell upon. “And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.” So that you find what I have just referred to, namely, how perfect all His works of power were—just as perfect as His words of authority. Works of power and words of power marked His ministry.

Now the last point I will bring before you to-night is this. In the middle of that activity, and with all that pressing, surging need of men upon Him, we come to one of the most beautiful of touches, one of the most beautiful of scenes, “Rising up a great while before day”—ah! what a rebuke to many of us that is. I know all are not able, beloved friends, I do not want to be extreme, I know all cannot do it—happy the man that can, that is all I say. “Rising up a great while before day”—“a great while”—do you see the way Mark puts it before you? Distinctness of narrative is one of the peculiarities of Mark, he lets you into the scene, as it were, he makes the thing living before you. Hence you get “rising up a great while before day,” going into a desert place, there alone, and praying. You see how he draws attention to all the important points in this great retirement of Jesus Christ here! And how suitable that the one who depicts for us His activity should also show His retirement, His solitude. How blessed to dwell upon the solitude of Jesus! God in His infinite grace and mercy help us to tread softly here. Let no rude step intrude here, and no speculation. But what I do say to you—and to myself—is this; and I believe it is the lesson God would have us learn from it—If He who was very God as well as very man, but who ever kept the place of perfect man in this world, and perfect subjection as servant as well—if He, in the midst of His activities of mercy, in the midst of His wonder working powers of grace here in this world, sought the solitude of the mountain side, and the lonely place, and the desert, and prevented the dawning of the day if He, who possessed all things, bent His knee and prayed, how much more you and I! To me it is a wonderful thing to think of the possessor of everything, bowing His knee in prayer. I go no further than that. I confess to you honestly, it is a subject where one takes one’s shoe from off the foot, and worships. But this I do say, and I feel certain, that this is its voice to us. I see His perfection in it, I see the perfection of the place He took in this, I see the glory of His dependent manhood, and I see the glory of His perfect subjection as servant in it; but speaking now of ourselves, and speaking especially of those who serve the Lord in any way, but speaking to all, I say, O, dear friends, how is the river of life in us to be supplied, what springs are to feed it, if we neglect this? Where is the supply to come from if we do not have it first given us? That is what I think is so solemn, and particularly in this busy day, when everything is at high pressure speed, and when there is no time almost to draw one’s breath. Ah! and that too gets into the church of God just as much as it pervades the world. O, what a thing it is to “prevent,” if we can, the dawning of the day. I love that word in the Psalms. “Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.” And here we find the great prophet, “a great while before day,” seeking the solitudes of the desert and there praying—how blessed! May God give us to lay that to heart and think of it, and to adore Him for the perfection of the grace that is presented in such a scene.

One word more on this point. Not only do we find this here in the progress of His ministry, and in the midst of His activity, but you remember the very same thing in the garden of Gethsemane, “He kneeled down and prayed.” Would to God that we kneeled down a little more in our public meetings and prayed. It is not without reason that that is presented. “He kneeled down.” “Oh!” you say, but you are making a great deal of the attitude.” Am I? Is there nothing in it? Could I make too much of it when He did it? Is it for no reason that it is said, “He kneeled down”?—are not subjection and dependence expressed in attitude as much as in fact.

And then I call your attention to one other point for a moment—He is here intruded upon. And there was always that rude want of spiritual refinement which constantly broke in on the blessed Lord and Master in the course of His ministry here. And so here a very strong word is used. Simon and others pursued Him, for that is the meaning of the word. The word that is used here only occurs in this place in Mark in the whole of the New Testament. It is, generally speaking, used in a bad sense. The only place that I know of where it is used in a good sense is in the Septuagint version of Psa. 23, “Surely goodness and mercy shall pursue me.” It is the same word here that the Septuagint translates “pursue.” They broke in on His retirement. And do you notice what they say to Him? “All seek thee.” There is a sort of sadness about that, just as if—though He was in retirement, and solitude, and prayer—just as if He could forget any one, just as if He could neglect any one. There is something peculiarly sad to me in that word of Peter’s to Him, “All seek thee” And mark, beloved friends, His reply, I think it is very significant. He says, “Let us go into the next towns.” How different that is from what pervades so-called Christendom today! O, how different! He would not be made the center of admiring multitudes. He would not be, as it were, placed upon a pinnacle by men for fame in that way. I feel that I have His authority from His word for saying this, that nothing repelled the Lord Jesus Christ more than mere sensationalism. Misery attracted Him, wretchedness drew Him, but sensationalism, and all that spirit that works in so-called religion today, repelled Him. And is it not well for us to remember that word in these days of demonstrations, and conventions, and missions, and armies, “Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, for therefore came I forth”?

May God, by His grace and Spirit, just give our hearts to ponder and weigh these beautiful ways of the great servant- prophet, for His name’s sake!

The Great Servant-Prophet: Addresses on the Gospel of Mark, Mark 1:12-20: Sealed With the Spirit

Mark 1:12-20

We were looking, beloved friends, last week, at the end of the time we were together, at that wonderful, marvelous display of divine favor to Him, the blessed One, in His path and place as a servant here—the opened heavens, the Father’s voice, and the descending Spirit, all setting Him forth, and expressing to Him, in that place of service which He was pleased to take, how perfectly and how fully He had met all the mind, and all the heart, and all the affections of God. He was sealed with the Spirit, He was anointed with the Spirit, the heavens opened to Him, and the Father’s voice from those heavens saluted Him as His beloved Son, in whom was all His pleasure.

Now we have another expression in the verses we have read this evening which I desire to call your attention to for a little, and to connect with that one which we dwelt upon last week. You will notice in v. 12 The very remarkable way in which it is said—and it is peculiar to this Gospel of Mark also—that “immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness.” Now I think it is important, to the right understanding of the position the blessed Lord was pleased to take here, really and truly as with God, to apprehend the divine significance that is attached to His being sealed with the Spirit, and His being driven, as it is said here, by the Spirit into the wilderness, and tempted of the devil. I want to call your attention to both those expressions, not merely because of the expressions themselves, but because I believe a great deal of truth, and of truth that very deeply concerns the glory of the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, hangs upon these expressions. And I am certain, beloved friends, that if we do not, as by the teaching of God’s Spirit, rightly understand the application and the meaning of certain words that God has been pleased to use with regard to His own blessed Son in any place or position that He was pleased to take here in this world, we shall lose an immense amount of blessing. Because you must remember this, that blessing does not only connect itself with the things that relate simply to us. I believe that is a very great mistake. I am quite certain that persons have lost an immensity of blessing because they have imagined that unless they themselves were prominently the subjects treated of in any given portion of scripture, there was no comparative interest attaching to that scripture with regard to them. That is a selfish way of looking at the things of God, and that is moreover a sure way to lose the blessing after a divine sort. All real blessing connects itself with this—that we see how everything in scripture, and everything in the mind of God, relates to Christ, and there is rich blessing as we see how Christ is set before us; first of all how He is before God, and as to the mind of God, and then how God has been pleased to present Him to us in scripture. And so here. Let us look reverently and in God’s fear for a moment at these two remarkable expressions.

I need not go over again, for we looked at it last week, the form that the Spirit of God was pleased to take when He descended in a bodily shape like a dove and abode upon Him. But I particularly want to press this point upon you, beloved friends, that we ought to jealously hold and tenaciously guard in our souls this great fact, that though He was sealed by the Spirit, and anointed by the Spirit (for you get both expressions in scripture, “Him hath God the Father sealed,” and how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power”), yet that it was simply and only in relation to the ministry and to the service that He was pleased to undertake and to perform in the position which He took when He emptied Himself to become man. Now I feel that is a very important thing to press, and I will tell you why in a moment. I do not see how any person could traverse or challenge it with the scripture so plainly before us. But there is a danger, and I maintain it has increased of late (and I am responsible simply to God, beloved friends, for my utterances), that whilst we through grace understand and appreciate the wonderful place of favor that we have been brought into, there is a danger of our putting ourselves on an equality with our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us note that, beloved friends, for I believe it is a very important point to keep before us. I repeat it, that is a very real danger, as we see through grace the blessed position He has won for us and has set us in before God; for His place before God is, through His rich grace, our place. He won it for us; it was His by virtue of all His own glories and rights; redemption secured it in sovereign grace for us. But while that is perfectly true, do not let us speak of it in such a way as to equalize ourselves with Christ. We have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us if we are washed from our sins by the blood of Christ, and it is that which constitutes us Christians; and you cannot speak of any persons properly in scripture language as Christians until the Holy Ghost is dwelling in them—scripture never does. I do not for a moment mean to find fault with the conventional use of the term Christian, but really I think it is of the deepest moment that, whilst we understand one another in the conventional use of language, we should also try to encourage one another to speak of things in the language of scripture. For instance, we say, “Such-and-such a person is a Christian,” to distinguish that person from one who is not moved, or touched, or turned to God at all, one who is really unconverted; that is, the term Christian is conventionally applied (and rightly enough, I do not find fault with it in the least) to a converted person in con- tra-distinction to an unconverted person, to one who has no interest at all in the things of God. But let us not forget this scripture in its use of terms is far more defined and far more distinct and pointed than perhaps we think; and when the word of God speaks of a person as a Christian, the word of God has marked out that person as sealed with the Holy Ghost, as the result of the forgiveness of his sins through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, beloved friends, that is a great thing to hold fast. The Lord in His infinite grace grant that the simplest and feeblest of His children here to-night may plainly understand, that if our sins are washed away in the blood of Christ, if we have through grace the knowledge of the forgiveness of our sins through faith in Him, the Holy Ghost dwells in us, the Spirit of God takes His place in us in virtue of accomplished redemption. But observe this, and that will bring us to our passage, our position is marvelously changed by the fact of the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, but the position of our Lord Jesus Christ was not changed one whit by the fact of the Holy Ghost coming upon Him. Now I want those two things to be held, but I want you to keep them distinct. Hold the Christian position, and that which gives it, tenaciously, but do not let us hold it in such a way, or speak of it in such a way, as to equalize ourselves with Christ. Christ had the Holy Ghost who descended upon Him, He was sealed by the Spirit of God, He was anointed by the Spirit of God. Such is the way scripture speaks of this great reality. He had the Spirit of God on Him, that is the scripture here, the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove and abode upon Him for service, as a servant, but not to add to His person, not to communicate anything that was not there before.

You see, I trust, beloved friends, the immense importance of all this.

There is a great difference in the Christian when he has the Holy Ghost from what he was before he received the Spirit. His position is changed. Until a man has the Holy Ghost, I repeat, you cannot speak of him in scripture language as a Christian, you cannot speak of him as a son, and you cannot speak of him as being united to Christ. Therefore, the position of one who is washed in the blood of Christ, and sealed by the indwelling of the Spirit, is in con- sequence changed, it is a change of position; and that is the very thing that comes out in connection with the fact that Christ baptizes with the Holy Ghost, because the whole new position is involved in it. The baptism of the Holy Ghost brings the Christian into a wholly new position before God. But you cannot speak of our Lord Jesus Christ in that way. If you do, you lower His person; and I am jealous about that, and I warn you as to it, because latterly there has been a tendency to do it, to bring down His person to the level of the position that God in wondrous mercy has put us into in Him, the risen glorified One before God.

I was reading not very long ago a passage of scripture that conveys the very same thought to one’s mind. When this new position was first unfolded by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, you remember the language in which He made it known, the wonderful communication He passed on to His disciples through the woman that broke her heart because she could not find where His body was in this world—to whom the world was only a tomb because she could not find Jesus. Do you remember the words He used when all the work was over? “Go to my brethren”—the new relationship—“and say to them”—now mark the words, does He say, “I ascend to our Father and to our God”? You see, beloved friends, the object I have in bringing that before you—“I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.” Now if you were to put in that word “our” there, and think it is all the same, it is because Christ’s unique, special, peculiar place and glory have not got their distinct prominence in your soul. And therefore I feel it is of the deepest importance to understand the difference between the Holy

Ghost dwelling in us as the seal of redemption and the Holy Ghost coming down upon the great servant-prophet as the power of ministry; and this is what we have here in this scripture.

Now we will go to the other expression for a moment, and I think you will see too, the force of the word here, because it is a very peculiar word. In the other gospels. Matthew and Luke, you will not find it used; it is only in Mark. “Immediately” is the word characteristic of Mark; it is constantly used. I believe it is the urgency of service, and everything is in the rapidity of the demand of service. “Immediately” He goes into the house; “immediately” He is here; “immediately” events take place as He moves; He does a thing, it is done; “immediately” the Spirit drives Him into the wilderness. That word “driveth” is a very strong word. This is the only gospel where it is used with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? For this reason, that the first great work and service of our Lord Jesus Christ as the prophet- servant in this world was to destroy the works of the devil. It is exactly what it is said He came to do—“to destroy the works of the devil.” Therefore, in the first instance, He meets the great adversary Himself. The first great part of His service in connection with His ministry here in this world is to meet the great adversary of God and men before He destroyed his works. That is why you have the expression used here in the gospel of Mark. And I will tell you what even adds to that, and gives it a sweetness, I think, beyond all conception. You find this very same word—and those who understand the original language can consult it for themselves—in Matt. 9, where the blessed Lord says to His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will drive forth [or thrust forth] laborers into his harvest.” There unmistakably it is the service of His servants in this world. He does not say choose out laborers, or educate laborers, or raise seminaries or colleges for laborers; but He says, “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest”—the harvest belongs to Him—“that he may thrust forth or drive forth laborers into his harvest.” Here the word is distinctly connected with the service and ministry of the Lord in this world. And is it not very precious to our hearts to see the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to see how our God brings the Lord Jesus Christ as the great Servant before us?—because the very same word, the identical word, is used here in the gospel of Mark, in connection with His first meeting Satan, and conquering and vanquishing him, as is used for what they were to pray for, that God would send forth in His own power laborers into His harvest.

Observe this too, “Immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness” does not go beyond His service and ministry. And it brings before our souls this great fact, that this great prophet-servant, this servant beyond all other servants, was so distinctly in the place of servant that it was part of what He became. You remember that blessed word in Phil.

2. He took upon him the form of a servant.” What does that mean? That everything that belonged to a servant as such, maintaining His own unique position and glory (ever keep that clear and distinct)—but all that belonged to a servant, acting in subjection to the One that sent Him, ministering by the power of the Spirit as servant of God here, Christ, in the perfection of the place that He took, maintained that, and that it was part of the emptying that He was pleased to undergo. I think some of my beloved brethren forget that word and the force of it—that He emptied (¦6,but do not forget that He emptied Himself.

Now so far with regard to those two points, and I think there is an immense importance in both of them—the fact that He was anointed and sealed by the Holy Ghost for service, and also the fact that the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness, that He might there meet the great enemy of God, and might meet him in conflict there, and that in the first instance, before destroying the works of the devil, He might bind the strong man and then spoil his goods.

Now let us look at the position that is defined here; and it is very touching to the heart to think that the blessed One was pleased to take it. It says that He “was driven into “the wilderness,” that He was in “the wilderness.” That is what everything had become here in consequence of sin. Sin had reduced this fair creation of God to a wilderness, and the second Man is found in the wilderness which the fall of the first man created. The departure from God of the first man made the circumstances into which the second Man was pleased to come—namely, the wilderness. You cannot conceive anything more desolate, or more dreary, or anything that more appeals to your heart as to the loneliness and the solitude that this blessed one was pleased to undergo in His preparation for service. For all that is here is preparatory to service.

And then, in order to increase and enhance that picture, there is another word, also peculiar to this Gospel of Mark, and which you will not find in the other gospels, that is, He was “with the wild beasts.” O beloved friends, think of that! Men were not His companions there; we do not read of human beings surrounding Him in that dreary solitude where He underwent all this; but He was “with the wild beasts,” in order to give our hearts a deeper sense of the loneliness and isolation through which the great servant-prophet passed in this preparatory moment ere He definitely began His ministry. I believe all this is crowded together into this scripture. He was in the wilderness, and alone with the wild beasts.

And now you get another word which I want you to meditate upon for a moment—“forty days tempted of Satan.” I take it that the evangelist brings our hearts into connection with this fact, that during the whole of those forty days He was under the fierce fire of the great enemy of God and man, alone in the desert, “tempted of Satan.” O beloved friends, may our hearts get, as it were, the sense of that. Think of the grace of Him going into such a position, that He might be the true and real servant, that thus He commenced—because we have not as yet touched a single part of His ministry directly. And I believe you will find the ministry in the Gospel of Mark is more of deeds than words, that is to say, his gospel took the character more of action than of words. You will assuredly find His preaching, but generally throughout the gospel it is His mercy, His releasing mercy, His showing forth kindness and grace to every character of need that He came in contact with, loosening every chain, drying every tear—it was the acts of Jesus. I fear we forget that sometimes, when we are thinking of the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, because when we speak of ministry it is more by word of mouth than it is in act. But with Him it is more acts of mercy and of kindness, acts of grace and of power, in a scene of need and desolation. And therefore I believe all this is heaped before us, as it were, in these verses.

There is another word I want to call your attention to for a moment, and I do not think you will say it is unimportant when we look at it. Notice the expressions that are used. And oh! beloved brethren, do let us note these expressions of scripture, and that there is a design in using expressions in certain places and changing them in others. Look at that verse again, “He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan.” In the other gospels, Matthew and Luke, it says, He was “led up” in Matthew, and “led by the Spirit” in Luke, to be tempted, not “of Satan,” but “of the devil.” Now you think perhaps that is unimportant and you may think, also, such a distinction is a little fine-drawing, and a little harping upon words? Well, beloved friends, it cannot be if God is pleased to use one word in one place and another in another. And more than that, you must recollect that there is a different meaning attached to the word. And although it speaks of that most hateful of all beings, and I believe in my soul the most miserable of all created beings as well, the devil, still “Satan” conveys to the mind and to the heart a different aspect of his vileness from what “the devil” does. Satan is the adversary—that is the thought here—he is the adversary of God and man. Whereas the devil is the slanderer and the accuser; he slandered God to man in Gen. 3, and he slandered man to God in Job 1. He does

both, he is the slanderer both of God and men; he is not only the father of lies, but he is the great engine for propagating slander. And that suggests a very solemn reflection to my soul when I think of it. A slander emanates distinctly from the devil. He is the father of slanders as he is the father of lies. Now God help us to remember that, beloved friends. When you or I unwittingly, if God in His grace does not keep us, permit ourselves to pass on a slander, we are doing the devil's vile work, we are, unwittingly perhaps, allowing ourselves to be his emissaries and his agents. How solemn! I do not for a moment mean to say, nor do I think that any one of us, through God's infinite grace, would willingly permit it. I should not like to think that of any Christian, and by God's grace I do not think it of any Christian. But then, beloved friends, there is a point as to which our souls need to be on the watch, because if you are not with God, you are very likely to be used by the devil. That is the point, and therefore it raises the question as to our moral condition of soul. Because you may depend upon it that if there are lodgings to be let in your heart, the devil will find persons to take them, mark that! There is an immensity in it—I am speaking now in relation to ourselves—there is a great power in being occupied with good. If the heart is under the power of another object, and is in the interests of another Master, and in the secrets of another Lord, it is saved, not by anything that is in itself, but by the One who retains it in His interests. If it is not, then there is one who is the most acute and skillful observer of people's ways—thank God! he does not know our thoughts, only God knows the thoughts of the heart—but the devil knows your character from observing your ways; and if he sees that there is that about you which he notices in your actions, he says, That is the man that will suit me for this vile business I have in hand. Now that is very solemn for us, and once again I ask you earnestly to watch, remembering there is this adversary; he is against God, he is against Christ, he is against us, he is against the truth, he is against all that is good. It is a solemn and striking word, "Your adversary, the devil"—the slanderer, the propagator of slander – "as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

Now here it is Satan, the adversary, and suitably so in the gospel of Mark; and he confronts Jesus in this very moment when He was anointed by the Spirit and saluted from heaven; here in the wilderness too, with nothing to minister to Him, in isolation and in dreary circumstances, then it is Satan comes to oppose every inch of the way with Him. I can well conceive how he would have said to himself, as it were: No man has ever yet been able to stand before me; I worsted man in innocence, and I overcame servants of God afterwards, and I am the conqueror of all. I have no doubt he thought that in his heart, and that all that is in this thought of the adversary here. But now he meets One who, whilst He is truly and really man, was a contrast to all men as such. I love that hymn of Hart's, though it speaks of Him as a man in heaven. "A man there is, a real man." Ah! there is a real man in glory, as there was a real man on earth, and the real man in glory to-night is the Man that was down here in reality on earth; now, then, Satan meets One who although He was a man, very man and very God, was as a man a contrast to every man. Mark does not give you anything more than the mere fact, he does not give you the details of the temptation, he merely announces this fact, He was for forty days tempted of Satan; because, I believe, the great point here was to show that Christ went through it before His direct service commenced. You get the details in Luke in connection with His perfection as a man in dependence and obedience, and in Matthew you get the details in relation to Him as Messiah; but in Mark it was enough to say that for forty days He was tempted of Satan. The fact was that before He dealt with people under Satan's power, He had confronted the great adversary Himself, and He came away victorious.

Then notice this—it is a beautiful touch, "the angels ministered unto him." Now that did not go beyond His body and His service, but note in connection with it the contrast between the defeat of Adam and the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ, the second Man out of heaven, over Satan—a contrast, let me say, not only striking and glorious, but full of comfort and consolation to the heart. You remember how, when Satan bore away the palm of victory in Eden, the angels were, so to speak, the ministers of that which followed in consequence of that defeat; there were cherubim, and the "flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life," to bar man's return, so to speak. Here, the second Man is the victor, and the angels come and minister to Him.

O beloved friends, these contrasts of scripture are most blessed and most precious; they set Jesus before us, even as man, in all the priceless preciousness of His Person.

He was truly and really man, in Him was seen manhood in perfection, a man according to all God's thoughts and purposes, a solitary man in all the blessedness of the perfection of His perfect human nature here in this world; thus angels come and minister to Him. This, then, is the preparation He was pleased to go through and accept for this service.

But now note for a moment more, the next point here. He begins His ministry at once. John is removed off the scene, as far as the history is concerned, I mean in the record of it, though not really till afterwards. But the blessed Lord comes Himself, and you will notice how beautifully He commences His ministry. There is a little word in the verse which gives great emphasis and force to it. "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel."

This is the first precious note of His ministry. And it is exceedingly interesting, too, in this way, because He says, "The time is at hand." There was no more need for any delay; He does not bring in the law, John came in the way of righteousness to call attention to Him, but you could not have any one calling attention to Him when He appears on the scene Himself; Jesus bears witness to John: Jesus is "the truth." You will never find any one else said to be the truth except Jesus. God is true, but you will not find in scripture God spoken of as the truth. Jesus is "the truth"; that is, He is the declaration and display in His own Person of everything that was according to God. John was not that, and no man was that; but Jesus is that, and therefore Jesus does bear testimony to John, but John is not said to have borne testimony to Christ; he called attention to Christ, and his ministry was preparatory to Christ's coming, being that of the messenger before His face, and also because of the moral condition in which Israel was. But Jesus is the One who bore testimony. "I receive not testimony from man," He says, but He bare testimony to the truth. He is the truth, He is the One who displays things as they really are. Now He says, "The time is come," there is no question of law now, there is no reason for delay. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel"—literally, "cast yourselves on the gospel."

It would be beside my purpose to pursue this in detail; but I will say this, it is very important to distinguish between the kingdom of God and the perfection of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ once for all. Do not confound those two things, because they are quite distinct. I will say enough in passing to convey the distinction to you. For instance, in speaking of the gospel of our salvation, no person would ever say, The gospel of everlasting salvation is at hand. First of all, it would be unmeaning, and secondly, it would be untrue. You can say, "The kingdom of God is at hand," because it was not yet established, and His rejection put it, so to speak, in abeyance. I do not go into the dispensational aspect in which it is set forth in the Gospel of Matthew after His rejection, but I am speaking of what the Lord speaks of here. He does not speak of the kingdom of heaven as such, but of the kingdom of God, "the kingdom of God is at hand"—it had not come, it was about to

come—“repent ye, and believe the gospel.” But now, beloved friends, when we come to speak of the gospel of our salvation, or the gospel of eternal salvation, that is not a thing that is at hand, that is a thing that is accomplished, that is a great reality that subsists in virtue of what our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished on Calvary’s cross. There is no question of “at hand” now; that is the great eternal “now,” and the great effects of that “now” for all that believe. “The kingdom of God” means that God has claims and rights upon men, and God will have that kingdom, His own kingdom, established in power, and His rights set up by and by. But meanwhile, there is the gospel of your salvation, which is entirely distinct from the kingdom of God. “Repent,” He says, “and believe the gospel.”

Now that is the first note of the Lord’s ministry; He begins it now; He preaches; He is the great preacher. It is very blessed to think of the Lord Jesus Christ preaching. I think there is not a preacher here to-night whose heart ought not to be touched with the blessed thought, that our blessed Master and Lord was before us in this great work. I think it is a wonderful thought—the great prophet is the great preacher in this world. What a wonderful thing, and how little we think about it oftentimes! People talk about preaching, and say, “Oh! that is only the gospel.” I am always grieved when that is said. There is a solemn misapprehension somewhere low down with those who say such things. It could never be a small, light, insignificant thing, that which is so distinctly the display of His own nature who so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.

There is one thing more I would dwell on before passing to the next point. You do not read of preaching in the true sense of it in the Old Testament. You find a law given there, and you find the proclamation of the law and the heralding forth of the commands of God upon men. But I do not believe you read of preaching. Why? Because there was nothing to preach. God was claiming and demanding from men, and establishing His rights in the claim; but when God comes out, the whole thing being completely ruined and all gone, and when in the grace of His own heart He brings in good news, then you have something to preach, and then you get preaching—I mean in the sense of evangelizing. There are two words in the original—one is to proclaim as a herald, and the other is to bring good tidings, and that is what I mean by preaching, it is evangelizing. You may do that to one person. Philip opened his mouth in the desert, and evangelized Jesus to one man. And the Lord was specially and distinctly in that sense the great evangelist—I say it with all reverence—He was the great preacher.

Now the third point is to me very blessed, even that now He associates others with Him in that work. Now that ought to have a great charm for every servant of Christ; it has, may I say, an unbounded charm for my heart. He is pleased to associate others with Him, and I want to call your attention to the way in which He does it, and to see the difference between it and all that prevails in the world, and almost amongst ourselves.

It is not a personal call here; that is elsewhere; here it is the ministerial call, the call to service. I beseech you earnestly to take note of that. It is not the call of persons to find their part in Christ and to find Christ everything; it is the ministerial call. You find the personal call in John 1, and the ministerial call is here in Mark. And notice what it says—a beautiful word. Is it, “Go out and preach ye”? Not a word of it. “Go out into the streets and lanes”? Not a word as to that yet. “Come ye after me.” O the sweetness of that! Ah! beloved fellow servants of Christ, that must be before all service to men. It must be first to Him in our own souls, “Come ye after me”—this is the school, this is the college, this is the training-house, this is where everything is adjusted, “Come ye after me.” Is it not the case—for we give it all against ourselves—that that element is sadly wanting oftentimes in our ministry? Do not we very often leave the impression upon the hearts of those that hear us that we have not been very much with the Master? “Come ye after me,” He says—that is first. Oh, the loveliness of that is beyond all expression. And mark what follows, “And I will make you to become fishers of men”—how instructive that is to us!—that is to say, I will train you. There is only One that knows the art, and that is Jesus. There is but one blessed Master of the art of catching men, and that is Jesus. Thank God that He trains others in His grace, “I will make you to become.” But it is “after me” where all that intuition is gone into; it is “after me” where all that is picked up, where all that is learnt He educates, He is the One that initiates, “I will make you to become fishers of men.”

I do not dwell upon the figure, but I am sure you know the pains, and the care, and the patience, and all that is necessary to make a man a really good skillful angler. And do you not know what a difficult thing it is to win persons? Is it not too often that we try to drive people? God knows it is not very difficult to repel people, though sometimes it would seem from the very earnestness with which people set themselves to it, that they think it is a hard thing to do. It is very easy to wound, to repel, to knock down; but to win, and, may I say also, to warm, and to catch—these are the words here in the gospel, “I will make you to become fishers of men.”

And observe this one word of the Savior here, “come.” That is a word you constantly find, “come.” Oh the power that there was in that word! And I will say more—oh the charm there was in that word! How that word must have fallen on their ears! Some of us, I fear, prefer the word, “claim”; but as for me I love that word “charm.” But I think I hear you say, Does not the Lord claim you? Ah! but does He not charm you? They were charmed, and that is exactly what you find. And “immediately,” you get the word of Mark again, immediately they left property, ship, father, nets, everything. Now take particular note of this. Do not think for a moment that those men were idle, men that had nothing to do. I was struck with this in coming along to speak to you to-night—all these men were busy men, every one of them was occupied; it was not that they were do-nothings; for my part, I cannot, beloved friends, see where the virtue is in people that are do nothings. Not one of those men were of that character; they were all engaged with their nets, or their fishing, or with their father, either drawing the nets, or mending the nets; they were all engaged in some way or another with their occupation. But oh! there was a heavenly charm in that come from those precious lips of the Lord Jesus Christ, “out of heaven,” and so all was left—the father, the nets, the fishing, everything.

Again once more, remember they were not called to great office, to a high position, nothing of the kind, beloved friends. Assuredly catching fish was a great deal more lucrative than catching men, as far as that goes, far more would be made out of fish-catching; but that was not the point.

There was no consideration with regard to the lucrativeness of it, or with regard to their position. As a matter of fact, the position was a far lower one than the one they were leaving, for they were to be the off-scouring of all things—despised, rejected, hated, like their Master, to receive the portion He got in this world. But that only enhances this to my heart, for though they were called out into a position which would expose them to all the hatred that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself had, and to all the thanklessness of this world, sad though it be to say it, even of those who profess to belong to Him, still to come after Him was the highest glory. In that, without a question, they were recompensed, to come after Him, and learn His skillful love and grace, and catch men for Him—that was all. O may He give our hearts that are in any poor way allowed to be in His service here to-night to do likewise. I hold it a sacred responsibility to say to you, I do not believe in my soul that there is a child of God here in this company tonight that He would not privilege to be a servant with Him in some way, if only the heart be true to Him. I hope my beloved brethren will allow me to say that, for I do believe we need to be thus reminded. Thank God He has His servants here in

this poor world, and earnest servants too; but the heart longs to see more of them, to see the number increased. I believe there is not one here to-night that is not privileged, through His grace, to be in some sense a servant of Christ, under Christ, assuredly not all in the same way, that could not be, but all servants in some way having something to do for Him. And oh! who can express the sweetness of it! You say, What can I do? Listen to me—there is a hovel away down in one of those miserable streets, and in a back room in it, there is a poor thing lying upon a pallet of straw; go and win her heart for Jesus Christ. Will you do that? I feel, beloved friends, we need a little melting and thawing of the heart as to this. And when I think of the service here of the great Master and the great Servant, and when I think of His work amongst men, and how He was distinctly the servant of God, I do feel how the Lord would touch the hearts of His people here, first of all and most of all by "Come ye after me." I believe there is the lack. If you would only go after Him, He would give you something to do. Only keep His company, only follow Him, and you would learn the skill of love from Him; and your heart will never be satisfied and will never rest until it is in some way expressing the grace and kindness of His heart among men. I do not say "for men," because I think that is a caricature of service, and a gross caricature as well, which, whatever else it does, leaves all of Christ out and only thinks of men, and I would desire for myself and for you to be kept as far from that as possible. But let us hear Him say, "Come ye after me," and then it is after Him, and for Him, and to Him.

And now may God in His infinite grace bless the few thoughts that have come before us this night, and make them preparatory by His grace to our looking further at the precious acts of mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, for His name's sake.

The Great Servant-Prophet: Addresses on the Gospel of Mark, Mark 1:1-11: "Behold My Servant"

Mark 1:1- 11

I feel, beloved friends, led, I trust of the Lord, to bring before you, even though it be only partially, something of the ministry and service of our Lord Jesus Christ in this world. That subject could never be an unimportant one, not only from the preciousness and blessedness of the ministry itself, as I trust we shall be able to see, but also because God was pleased in His grace to devote one of the four narratives concerning the life of our Lord Jesus Christ in this world, distinctly to that purpose—and so distinctly, as I hope to show you, that it characterizes the whole of Mark's writing from beginning to end. The omissions, the additions, put entirely out of the question that which used to be a very favorite occupation in past times—harmonizing the gospels. It has been well said that they never disagreed; you cannot harmonize that wherein there never was the absence of harmony at any time. But I tell you what happens in connection with it when you do not read by the gracious teaching and leading of the Spirit of God, you lose the distinctness of design of the blessed God Himself in presenting in each gospel history the features and the characteristics of our Lord Jesus Christ, in all the various paths and positions that He was pleased to walk in and fill in this world. I know of no gospel wherein that is more distinctly manifested than in this very Gospel of Mark. The first verse, for instance, carries with it convincingly to the heart at once the theme, the great thesis of the Spirit of God through this gospel, namely, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Nothing could be more simple than that, if our hearts were only simple to take it in, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" That is the whole pith and substance of this wonderful epitome of His service and work down here in this world.

But before we look a little at the way it is introduced in the verses we have read in this first chapter, I want you to take into account two or three facts that we must ponder over and dwell upon for a moment before we can rightly understand it. It is a great thing rightly to apprehend the bearing and meaning of words, and when we speak of our Lord Jesus Christ as the great servant-prophet, and as the great minister and teacher, we must remember this, beloved friends, we cannot speak of Him as our servant it would lower His dignity and His glory to speak of Him as our servant. Granted that He serves us, and He served all here; yet He was the servant of God, He was Jehovah's servant, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth." And you will find that distinctly throughout this gospel, He is the servant-Son; servant is the great characteristic that marks all His path throughout this gospel; and when we come to it presently I will give you a very striking instance of that in the record. But I say again we could not speak of Him as our servant. We can rejoice in His service, we can bless and praise Him for the manner and way in which He served us here in this world, served us all through His life, served us on Calvary's cross, and serves us now from glory, for He is the girded servant. He came down here and became a man that He might be a servant, and He has taken manhood up to the throne of God in the heavens and will never cease to serve in heaven. You have one blessed remarkable instance of this in the Gospel of Luke, when He says to His disciples, in that beautiful ch. 12, that in that day when He will have it all His own way, when all the present order of things is passed and He will have everything according to His own mind in glory, He will come forth even then as the girded servant to serve those whose hearts were so captivated by Himself that they watched for Him, and waited for Him, and served Him in that watching spirit here. It is not here, beloved friends, that He leads us to expect anything from Him except the joy of walking in His path of rejection, and scorn, and shame; but in that day which is coming, in that bright glory to which He has given us through grace a title to be with Himself, in virtue of all His work, when He has everything there according to His own mind, and most of all when He has all His own there around Him in that scene, could anything be more affecting or more touching to our hearts than that even there in that glory He will come forth girded? "Verily, I say unto you, he shall gird himself" are His own words in that precious chapter; there is the servant distinctly, servant attire, servant form, servant manner, servant way—and will come forth, and serve them." I take it that having that combined with the Gospel of Luke, where He is most of all presented to us as the man, it is the man who is the servant; it is He who became a man amongst men, and whose genealogy in that gospel as you remember, is traced up to Adam, so that we have His connection through incarnation with the race of men, albeit it was in that miraculous and peculiar way in which God has guarded the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the man who is the servant. And, beloved friends, that is very wonderful for us to think of, because God has ever had servants; there are the angels that do His pleasure, and we are told of those angels in Heb. 1 That they are all "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" but what ministry of angels can come up to the ministry of the man, the servant, He who having taken part in manhood, having become a man, being truly and really a man here in this world, the One that came from heaven—shall I say it, beloved friends? I will say it with joy—the heavenly Man here in this world, the Man out of heaven, yet truly having become a man—oh what ministry, what service like the service of that heart to us, what ministry of angels what ministry of creatures far in intelligence beyond us, could speak to our hearts, could be so affecting to our hearts, as the ministry of Him who became a man, and who, in all the blessed tenderness, and grace and sympathy of His heart, let out here in this world those perfections of feeling, of sympathy, of tenderness peculiar to a man. It is this combination, I repeat, which is set forth in the Gospel of Luke, where He is the Man—and which we have often had before us here in times past, it is the combination of His manhood with His service, although it was performed in divine power, as I hope to show you,

and although He was when a man just as truly as He ever was, “God over all blessed for evermore,” still, in that character of service and ministry which He rendered here, it is that combination, beloved friends, which is one of the most precious and one of the most comforting things to the heart that I know of; that He draws near to us in all the grace and love which in the first instance brought Him down here; that, as we have often said, He did not love us at a distance, and He does not serve us at a distance. It was not mere power bestowing upon us that which our needs called forth, but there was love. I quite grant you there was omnipotence of power, but there was omnipotence of love in combination with omnipotence of power. Therefore, when we think of Him as servant, we must always think of Him as God’s servant, Jehovah’s servant, “Behold my servant.”

Now, beloved friends, I think that is a very important point for us to keep in mind, so as to guard and protect by God’s grace everything like a true and proper estimate of the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me give you one instance from the history of this gospel just to sustain that thought, that He was not our servant, though He served us; but He was Jehovah’s servant here in the midst of Israel, and also serving man, but always Jehovah’s servant, serving in power. If you compare at your leisure the account of the transfiguration for instance—or rather, not compare, but contrast, because that is really the word—if you will contrast the account of the transfiguration: as it is given us in Matt. 17, with the account given us in Mark 9 you will see a remarkable instance of just what I am about to bring before you now. In the Gospel of Matthew, when he recounts the transfiguration, he does so in connection with the subject which it was the design of the Spirit of God the evangelist should relate. And hence it is the manifestation of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, the kingdom here in this world; it is the manifestation of the kingdom; “kingdom” is the ruling word in Matthew. Whereas when you come to Mark you will find that left out altogether. What you find in Mark is this, There be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power. “Power” is the word in Mark. Why? Because it is connected with His ministry. “Kingdom” is the word in Matthew, because it is the dispensational record.

Now that is exceedingly interesting, and puts its character at once upon both the writings. I have spoken of His love, I delight to dwell upon the fact of His power, but the power is what you find continually all through the Gospel of Mark. And therefore you will find the miracles, those marks and signs of power, you will find, I say, the place they get all through the gospel, you will see how continually miracle after miracle is referred to and brought before us. Why? Because it marked the wonder-working power of the great Servant- prophet in the midst of men. He was the One who was there in wonder-working might, in omnipotence of power, but in all the omnipotence of tender love as well in the midst of men, and hence the prominence that is given to all this, which is characteristic of this gospel throughout.

There is another observation I would like to make in connection with the gospel, which will also help to show how distinctly this is ever the subject. Have you ever thought how striking it is that the very one who was selected by God and by His Spirit to give us this ministry and service of Christ, was the man who in his own first essay at service broke down? For this Mark was the very one who turned aside from the service and from the testimony which he was going to carry forth with the others, and went to Cyprus, his native place. And I think it is very striking that this is the one who writes the history of the service and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. And why? Do you think there is no design in Mark being selected? Do you think there is no distinctly important point in Mark being the one that was fixed upon to give us this account? I believe the reason of it is simply this, that we might be able to see the contrast between Jesus, the Servant-prophet and all else beside. There is a touch in that very fact of great preciousness to my heart—Jesus is supreme wherever you see Him, Jesus is unique wherever you see Him, Jesus is perfect wherever you see Him; not merely in His manhood, not merely in His path, and walk, and testimony here, but in the distinctive features of His service. He is the perfect servant, and (I say it with all holy reverence) He is the ideal Levite, the One who served in all the truth and reality of service in the tabernacle among men, and finally, voluntarily laid down His life as the greatest act of service that He performed either to God or to men in this world. I believe that is one reason, beloved friends, if not the main and principal reason, why the person who was selected to give us this ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ in this world, should be the man who broke down and failed himself, and whose history is beautifully presented to us afterwards, when the apostle says, “Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry.” Thank God for that! Because, I may add in passing, God records in scripture not merely the failures and the breakdowns, and the im- perfections, and the shortcomings of His servants, but He records as well their restoration; for, beloved friends, it is His grace that secures the one, as it is His power that can rescue from the other. That is the reason, I have no doubt, why Mark’s history is brought before us there.

Let us take one other point which comes to one’s heart at once in reading this gospel, and which I would like to dwell on for a little, and then we shall pass on to look at three great points in the verses themselves; and it connects itself properly with what I have already said with regard to Mark. If you take the work and service of men here in this world—it matters not who; take the apostles, or take Paul, who followed the Lord Jesus Christ nearer, not only in path, but in testimony, than any man before or since, and whose path was closest, we might say, in tread upon the path here of our blessed Lord—we find that we cannot too microscopically examine the service of any man, we cannot look down, so to speak, into the minutia of the service of any man; it will not bear it, the blots are too many, the failures are too great. We do not well, beloved friends, when we commit ourselves to that. And I am pressed in spirit to say this to my beloved brethren to-night. If we do so, it is because we have but a poor idea on the one hand of the perfection of the only perfect servant, and on the other hand, of the feebleness of an earthen vessel. And again I say, beloved friends, let us not take the microscope and examine too closely into the particulars of a man’s service; but remember that what you cannot do with regard to mere human service you can do with regard to the service of Christ. Now here is what is so precious. You cannot examine His service too closely; it will bear the closest examination, the strictest scrutiny, because it is perfect. I do not know anything that is more comforting or precious to my heart than that I can look over all His blessed service and see in every part of it the perfection of the One who was perfect. Let the objects of His service be ever so difficult subjects, let it be that the objects of His service are ever so far away in need and want, let the case be ever so trying, let the need be ever so great, let the opposition to His gracious ministry be ever so increased, let all the hindrances be ever so magnified, yet they will only bring out in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ the perfection of His service and the perfection of the servant. Now that brings me back again for a moment to that beautiful verse I have already quoted in part, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon Him; He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.”

Oh what a contrast to every other man in service! What a contrast in His position is the beloved of God! What a contrast as well in His place of lowly retirement amongst men! What a contrast in all the silent power that marked Him, so that as He passed along in this poor world, there was no voice, no cry, no sound, nothing, as such, to call attention to Him; it was all patient, retiring, blessed, unwearied ministry, yet in power. I love to think of that verse, I was thinking of it only a little time past with great delight and comfort, “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth”—the man, as far as this world was concerned, out of the despised region and place—“how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the

Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him." O how blessed to dwell on that, beloved friends! how blessed to be allowed to contemplate this ministry of our own dear Lord and Master here in this world, to see what it was to God, what God received in that—not merely what man got, but how God was served by Him, the true Servant.

Now let us observe one important feature in what I have already spoken of. If there is anything that comes out distinctly in His service, it is this, that just as truly as He ever kept His place as man, having been pleased to become man, so He ever truly kept His place of servant, having taken upon Him the form of a servant. Let us never forget that. Let us cherish, beloved friends, these touches that we find in scripture that set our adorable Lord and Master before us in the truth of His Person as God and Man. Do not let us look at one part of His glory and lose sight of another part of it. And do not let us allow ourselves to be entrapped by the enemy, that because He was "God over all blessed for ever," that He was not equally man, as truly and as really a man in perfection here as He ever was God over all. Let our hearts by grace adoringly embrace both and adore Him as both, as we see that He who was God was pleased to become man, and also equally see that He, having become man, and taking upon Him the form of a servant, as man kept that place of service and subjection to the very close.

Now for one proof of it, and then I pass on. And this, beloved friends, is one of the most striking proofs of it I know of in the gospel, and it is both interesting and arresting as I believe we shall find. You remember now that the blessed Lord, when speaking of the day of His coming, the day when He should be manifested, says in the gospels. "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven"—Mark alone puts in this, and it gives its character to his gospel—neither the Son, but the Father" {Mark 13:32}. Now why is that omitted in the other gospels, and inserted in Mark? Do we read carelessly, my beloved friends? do we read without divine intelligence or thought? That is the way, I am grieved to say, a great many read the word of God, as if there were no design in its additions and omissions in various parts. Do you read it with the eyes of God the Holy Ghost, or do you read it according to the bias of your own mind? There may be a great deal of will in the way we treat scripture—do not let us forget that. You may have the fixed determination in your own mind to find so-and- so there. I remember well, years ago, how when I read the word of God, I never could divest myself of the idea that I saw things in it that I know now are not in it at all; and yet you could not persuade me that they were not in it. Why? Because my will was to have them so; and my will being determined to have things so, I saw them in the light of my will here in scripture, as I vainly thought, instead of really reading according to the instruction and guidance and direction of God the Holy Ghost. Now how striking this instance is, "neither the Son." Why, beloved friends, is that brought into Mark? Because the Son in Mark is the servant- Son. The very essence of the perfection of a servant is simply to be at the absolute control of the Master. The very essence of a good servant is not to have a mind of his own. I should not apply to the blessed Lord the word "will of His own," for He had no will but the will of God as the secret motive and spring of all that was in His heart; but He received everything direct from God in the servant character, and He was distinctly energized by God the Holy Ghost, as we shall see presently in His servant character. Mark those words I have already quoted, "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil"—why? because they needed it? no; but because "God was with him." There is the servant, He is Jehovah's servant, He is upheld by Jehovah, He has got Jehovah's Spirit on Him, and He moves through men, through their needs, their sorrows, their wants, and their woes with a heart that felt for everything, a heart that was touched and that entered into everything.

I have often said here—and I feel it now more than ever—that we all live too far away from human misery to know much of what it is. We do not know what the desolations of this world are. What do we know about the heart-breaks, the sorrows, the griefs, the blighted hopes and blasted prospects found in it? We could not endure it. It is a great mercy of God that we do not know it; it would be enough, perhaps, to send some of us away entirely out of the haunts of men, it would be too overpowering. But oh! what a comfort it is to think that there was one who passed as servant through it all, knew it all, measured it all, entered into it all, understood it all, felt for it all, and knew how, as God's servant, to meet it. That is what you have in the ministry and service of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord by His grace and Spirit grant that these few introductory sentences may help us in connection with our gospel as we turn for a moment to study the way in which His service is introduced here. Now I am about to speak of three points, and I will be as concise and brief as I can.

The first great point that I see in the verses we have read is that the service is introduced without any formal array of any kind. It is what we might call suddenly introduced; there is no preface; it is all very concise; "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God that is all. Now, beloved friends, there is something very blessed in that expression. I think God, in His infinite grace, would give your heart and mine just to recount here a little of the treasure that is in that expression, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." How blessed that is! It is the good news. "O yes," you say, "good news, that is the meaning of the word gospel." But contrast it with what is past. There was no good news in Judaism. Is there any good news in the modern inventions? Judaism had a killing law; that is all it had, a condemning letter, a claim that left man more hopeless than he was before it met him. I do not stop to inquire about what is suggested at the present time, beloved friends, it is too puerile, too contemptible, to waste a thought upon. But mark this for a moment. The greatest comfort to the heart when I read that verse, "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ," is that now here is something that comes from heaven. You say "it is good news," but let me ask where from? From heaven, and that, beloved friends, is what is so blessed and so wonderful about it. This is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, this precious Servant, but this divine Servant, the Messenger who has come from heaven, and has come from heaven with good news. Do not your hearts rejoice in that? It is not a claim, it is not a demand, it is not a fiery law that strikes terror into the soul, but it is the announcement of glad tidings; and that which is so precious, it is the announcement of it in His own person, even Jesus Christ the Son of God, it is the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And therefore, observe the way in which His service is introduced to us here is by making Himself prominent and we are left, as it were, with Him in that way. If I know anything of the glory of His Person, I know what to expect from "the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God." If I know anything of the love and tenderness of His heart, I know exactly how to fill in that expression, "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." I do not know whether I have conveyed to you, beloved friends, the thought that is in it, but it is to me an exceeding precious reality, that whilst it is the gospel and the service, as we have said, it is so connected with the Person who was rendering it that He is made prominent, and you are allowed to form a divine conception by the Spirit of what that good news would be in fulness, and in plenteousness, and in blessedness, when it is so connected with Himself, "Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Now that is the first thing I see here.

Secondly, you have in the verses we have read what I may call, I think correctly, the preparatory messenger. I will not dwell very long upon that, because we have had it before. But there is a preparatory messenger who goes before the face of the One who is coming, according to the prophetic scriptures. There are two scriptures quoted here, Mal. 3 and Isa. 40, and those two scriptures pointed to John the Baptist. who

was to go before the face of the One that was coming, “to prepare his way,” that is the expression, and then when John utters his message himself, he says, make his paths straight.”

Now the first thing that comes before us in that preparatory message is a very important one for all our souls, and I desire earnestly to dwell upon it. God will have, however great His grace in meeting us, and however full and large the manner of His service towards us in His blessed Son, but let us never forget this, beloved brethren, God will have in our state reality. I know very well, and feel it too, that in our ministry and service, if there is anything we overlook it is just that. I believe in my soul that the defi- ciency, the disappointment, the little effect produced by servants of God, should be laid at that door, that they have not considered the state of those they minister to. If we do not take it into account, I believe we shall find that God always takes it into account. Do you think He is purposing to have a great mass of unreality? Do you think that the blessed God will, as it were, send out His message of love and of truth, and communicate His mind, to a great mass of unreality? Do you think it is the hard, dry brains of men He wants? I tell you He would have us think of their souls. Do you think it is the mind of man that God desires? He works on his conscience, He wants his affection, He wants his heart penetrated by means of his conscience. And therefore, when God sends His blessed Son into this world, and the Lord Jesus Christ comes in this ministering servant character that we have spoken of, the very first thing you find in the forerunner is this, John’s whole ministry was to this effect,—You people of Israel call yourselves the people of God, you count up your genealogy and trace yourselves up to Abraham, you are proud of Abraham, exactly as people now live upon the respectability of their ancestors who have no respectability themselves; so you go back to Abraham, and you say. “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man, how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?” Do you remember what the Lord’s answer to them was? “He that committeth sin is sin’s slave.” And that is exactly what their moral condition was, they were the slaves of sin. It is a great thing to give words their true and proper meaning, they were the Roman slaves in one sense, politically; they were sin’s slaves and the devil’s children morally. That was their condition. Now, beloved friends, you see what a solemn order of things that is. Do not let us think for a moment, “Oh! well, of course that was the condition of Israel, and I quite understand how solemn that is, and quite enter into the distinctness of it”: but do not let us think that it has no voice for us. Do you mean to tell me that there is no danger in that very direction for Christians at the present moment? I dare not hold back what I believe to be the truth of God to please any man, and therefore I avow that I believe God has a controversy with us Christians because of our moral state. You know there is one thing we seem to be wonderfully clever and wonderfully skilled in, and that is, to put the cause of feebleness and departure anywhere and everywhere but where it really lies; we like to find it away from us, of course we do, I can quite understand that. “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” It is as old as Adam, the principle of removing the onus, the weight, off ourselves, and to try and find some cause that will liberate us; that is quite natural. And therefore I see here a very solemn voice, that before this blessed ministry is accomplished, before the Lord Jesus Christ Himself exercises it directly in person, this preparatory messenger announces this great fact—God must have, and God will have, reality as to moral condition before Himself. Hence he talks of “straight paths.” Why? Because theirs were crooked paths, deceitful ways; but he goes down to the root of the matter, and touches the hidden things and the people really where they are.

And more than that, observe how the preparatory messenger not merely announces this by word of mouth, but that he himself in His own Person was the expression of it. I think that most interesting and solemn. When John the Baptist occupies this place of breaking up the way and making the path plain, it is not merely by his word and testimony, but in his own person. Nay more, first of all he is in his position here the testimony of it personally; secondly, he is in his apparel the testimony of it; and thirdly, he is in his diet, his manner of life, the testimony of it. You find all those things here. He is in the desert, not in Jerusalem, not in the city but outside. Beloved friends, let us take that to heart, “the voice of one crying in the wilderness.” Why not in the city, why not in Jerusalem, why not amidst the haunts of men? Clearly, that standing outside he might be in his position there the living testimony of how God regarded the state of things in the city that is the reason why. Then it is not insignificant to point to his apparel; the man is dressed suitably to his occupation there is a severity about him; it reminds one when we read it of the asceticism of the Essene. You will say, What an ascetic he is, how severe the man is in his appearance, his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins. And why? Because God would have reality in His people, that is the reason. It is indicative of their moral condition. Even his dress is to bear testimony to the terrible low state of God’s people. And then we find the diet of the man, his meat was “locusts and wild honey,” the plainest fare that could be conceived. And then you have further his, even a call to repentance a breaking up of the fallow ground.

Now it will, I believe, strike you in looking at it, how John’s testimony exactly brought out what the prophet Jeremiah complained of in ch. 8. You remember what the prophet says of this subject. Let us never forget it, for it is amongst the most touching words of the Old Testament scriptures. It is the lamentation of the prophet over the condi- tion in which the people of God were during the time of his ministry. “They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, where there is no peace.” The prophet brings home this great fact to them; there is a wound there, and there were ecclesiastical nostrums and quacks of that day who attempted to heal slightly that wound. And how? By presenting a message that was not in keeping with the state. If God comes and deals with us, beloved friends, He must have reality, He could not add to a festering sore or wound, if it is there, in our moral being. “Peace, peace,” was building up a rotten order of things, and God is too faithful, and too holy, and too gracious not to meet exactly the condition of things as it really is before Him. Hence John’s ministry was in that sense preparatory to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just one other point. We have that ministry closing, as it were, and Jesus Himself directly introduced to us. Hence we have Him coming down and accepting John’s baptism, or rather, inviting John to baptize Him in the river Jordan. I trust most here understand what the meaning of it is, for it is very precious, because it shows out His grace. If there was a listening to the preparatory message of the servant, if there were any hearts touched and wounded with the true sense of their whereabouts, if there was any turning to God in the midst of His own people, if there was any looking at things really as they were—and John’s baptism was the expression of it on the part of all that came—Jesus Himself must be there too. O what grace! He associates Himself with the returning remnant of God’s people, with that which is really of God. He fulfils righteousness where they confessed sins: “thus it becometh us,” we read in another gospel, “to fulfil all righteousness.” That is the meaning of His baptism. He identifies Himself with the first effect of grace in His people, and He goes down and submits, for the fulfilment of righteousness, to baptism at the hands of John in the Jordan.

Now you get that word which is peculiar to Mark, “straightway,” “and straightway coming up out of the water.” It is striking how often the word occurs in Mark, and that under various significations: it is characteristic of the gospel. There is one Greek word all through, but various translations of it: “immediately,” “straightway,” “instantly.” “And straightway coming up out of the water,” now mark the expression that is used, “he saw the heavens rent asunder,” that is the meaning of the word “opened,” they were rent asunder. I could not convey to you, beloved friends, the preciousness of that expression to me. It was as if God hasted to proclaim what His heart had found in His own Son; He

rends the heavens. I have thought of that word many a time, “O that thou wouldest rend the heavens and come down.” But look here, the heavens are rent asunder to let the whole mind of heaven out in its ineffable delight in Jesus Christ. It is one of the most striking and beautiful expressions I know of anywhere in scripture, “the heavens were rent asunder.”

And then you have the seal, the Holy Ghost descends on Him. Mark the words, “the Spirit like a dove descending upon him,” that is the form the descending Spirit took, no doubt expressive of what He was in His own Person. The dove, as you know, was the bird of sorrow and the bird of love, and therefore it was a fitting type of what our Lord Jesus Christ was in His own holy, precious, glorious Person. He is marked off by even the bodily shape that the blessed Spirit was pleased to take. Some one has observed, and I think it is a very precious thought too, that not only was this dove-like form of the Spirit expressive of His Person, but there were in the dove the silver wings, and there was also the sheen of gold there. But I believe most of all and first of all, there was that which our Lord Jesus Christ was personally set forth in the dove-like form the blessed Spirit was pleased to take.

But not only this, but now we have the Father’s voice, and that is one of the most beautiful things connected with His coming up out of the Jordan. “There came a voice from heaven saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom is all my pleasure.” Now, beloved friends, there were two precious realities in that. First of all—and I know nothing more comforting to the heart to dwell upon—there is the intimation which He gives us in that blessed scene, this proclamation that comes from heaven, this utterance of the Father’s voice. Could anything be more blessed than that He should be pleased to let us know how that Jesus is everything to Him? Have you the sense of this in your souls, that you and I are privileged in that beautiful scene to be the intimates of the blessed God, that He allows us into that nearness so that we should have communion with Him in His thoughts about His beloved Son, that Jesus is the Father’s object, that Jesus is God’s delight, that Jesus is all His pleasure, that He finds all in Him. I believe that is the first great thing in that intimation, that God Himself in His grace is pleased to bring us into this place of holy intimacy and holy communion, that we can share the Father’s delight and the Father’s thoughts about the one in whom the Father found all His pleasure. There is only one thing more, and then I finish. There is our place now that redemption has been accomplished according to all the grace and goodness of God. Jesus has that place Himself; the heavens were opened to Him, the Holy Ghost descends in a bodily shape like a dove and abode upon Him, and the Father’s voice proclaimed, “This is my beloved Son.” Oh! beloved friends, is not the veil rent for us, and have not we got the Holy Ghost, and cannot we say, Abba, Father? It is the very figure of our place as Christians, it belonged to Jesus in virtue of what He was and who He was, and He has in infinite grace made that place true for us by His redemption.

Well now, I only pray that the Lord in His grace would be pleased to bring those things before us, and connect our hearts in living power with them. Most of all do I press those two points, that which relates to state I earnestly press upon you. I feel that there is a crying voice of God at this present moment as to our state. Believe me, no amount of religiousness, or quasi-piety that has at the bottom of it a desperate amount of flesh, will do for God. There must be reality; God will have reality, and therefore there is the breaking up, “break up your fallow ground.” The fallow ground of the heart must be broken up, and when it is, then comes, as I trust we shall see another evening, the suited condition for that most precious of all ministries, that He can minister, namely, He has “sent me to heal the broken- hearted.” Ah! but God must break down first, though, “to set at liberty them that are bruised.”

The Lord in His infinite grace grant that what has passed before us may be for profit to us as we dwell upon it, and ponder over it, and meditate upon it. If I am made a means in God’s hand of supplying you with food for meditation, how thankful I shall be. I feel how poorly I have presented it, but if any little thought should be in His grace food for this, so that your heart should get the comfort of it, to Him be all the praise through Jesus Christ.

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