Matthew - Commentaries by T.W.P. Wolston, Editor

The Gospel Messenger: Volume 12, Salt.

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

A FATHER said to his daughter she was “not worth her salt.” The next day the daughter told the cook not to put any salt in anything to send the dinner in without salt, and put no salt on the table. So dinner time came, but all was saltless, and hence tasteless. Its value was found out by its absence. “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” (Matt. 5:13).

The little maid in Naaman’s house was the one that made God and His prophet known, and her master was saved by the word dropped to her mistress. Like salt, it might seem a poor thing, but it had its effect.

“Bring a new cruse and put salt therein,” said Elisha to the men of Jericho, when they spoke of the situation of their city being pleasant, but had to confess the water was naught, and the ground barren. Like this world, the pleasures of sin are for a season, but all ends in death.

There has to be a new beginning. Everyone must be “born again,” or “born anew,” as the blessed Lord said to the great teacher in Israel in John 3. “If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation.” “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” “Henceforth we know no man after the flesh.” The old bottle of Judaism will not do for the new wine of sovereign grace. It was a new cruse the salt was to be put in. Truth apart from the work of God in the soul is like putting salt on bad fish or meat—it will never make it better.

Salt keeps a good article. When the salt out of the new cruse was cast into the springs of water, they were healed. Death and barrenness simply declare man’s condition in nature.

If you will read 1 Peter 1:18-25, you will see how the new cruse is found— “Ye must be born again”—or never enter heaven, for only newborn, and blood-washed ones are there. 2 Peter 1 tells us how the salt out of the new cruse affects the springs of water— “For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I have just been trying to spell salt in connection with salvation—

“S-alvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9).

“A-ccount the long-suffering of our Lord salvation” (2 Peter 3:15).

“L-ook unto me, and be ye saved” (Isa. 45:22)

“T-ake the cup of salvation” (Psa. 116:13).

It is said of Timothy, that from a child he knew the Scriptures, “which are able to make thee wise unto salvation”; but notice how one gets it, where salvation is “through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Jonah had to confess “salvation is of the Lord,” and at once he was on the dry ground, saved. He tells us all he passed through, down at the bottom of the sea, with weeds about his head. But he fainted, and, when his strength was gone He trusted another.

Now is the time to get this salvation. Judgment is near, as we see in 2 Peter 3. Repentance is what God looks for from you. “God is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,” and we are so to account God keeping back the judgment, and meantime He delights in mercy. Hence He says “Look unto me, and be saved,” i.e., take salvation from me. The gospel not only shows what you escape, and are saved from; but “the cup of salvation” tells us of something to take in, something to drink in, even fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore. The believing soul says, “I will take the cup of salvation,” and call on the name of the Lord.

But if through indifference and unbelief you do not take that cup, of another cup, you will yet have to drink. “Upon the wicked he shall rain quick burning coals (margin), fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cap” (Psa. 11:6). “Remember Lot’s wife.” She looked back, and “became a pillar of salt.” “And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt” (Mark 9:47-49).

The Gospel Messenger: Volume 12, Ten Virgins, and the Bridegroom's Return., The

Matthew 25:1-13.

OUR Lord here shows us what took place at the beginning. There was a company who were expecting the Bridegroom. You must not confound the Bridegroom with the Judge; Jesus will be Judge on the great white throne: as the Bridegroom He will come for His bride first, The Lord Jesus, having gone on high, is now seated at God’s right hand until the appointed moment comes, and then He will rise and will come for His own, to welcome them, and to be welcomed By those who know Him and love Him. These the wise virgins represent. They have been His witnesses. The foolish virgins were not witnesses; they had not any light.

The parable is very simple. The kingdom of heaven is likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. You must not suppose that in the ten virgins you have the Church as such, because they do not represent the Church as the body of Christ,

but a history of profession, fend the end thereof. We must not import into Scripture what is not in it. We very often make the great mistake of putting into Scripture what is not in it. The parable shows that some of the very people who went out to meet the bridegroom were the people who went into the marriage; yet every believer has passed away who went out at first. There is not one on the earth today that was here on the day of Pentecost. The point is, that the Lord's return is never the deferred hope of the believer, and reality must mark the professor of Christ. All that are real go in. Not what you profess, but what you possess, is the point. Not the ground you take, but the state of your soul, is the point. "They that were ready went in." Are you ready?

Will the whole world be converted and be ready for His return? The Lord here says, When I come back half of those who go out professing to wait for Me will be unprepared. You must have the indispensable necessity—the oil—if you are to be ready. It is not only the possession of a lamp, but what will feed the light and keep it going. The Holy Ghost alone can feed the light. Mark you, ten virgins went out. Five were wise and five were foolish. It is not the old and the young, the rich and the poor; it is the wise and the foolish. And mark, these are not the heathen; they are professing Christians. You are doubtless a professing Christian. You are probably a church member. You are passing current as a Christian. I am not addressing the heathen, but I am addressing Christless professors of a Saviour of whom they are totally ignorant.

We must try and separate these two classes. Some were wise, and some were foolish. God begins with the fools. I do not call you a fool, but God does. What is a fool? A foolish person. And do you call me a fool? I do not, but the Lord Jesus says, "They that were foolish took their lamps and took NO oil with them." The reader without oil-not having the Holy Ghost-is among this class. "But the wise TOOK oil." Now observe the immense difference between the two. They all took lamps; they were all professors of Christ. It was night, and the night is the moment of the absence of Jesus. The lamp is the profession of the name of Christ, which of course abounds on the earth today, and in no place under the sun more than where the English language is spoken. I am serious. There is no place under the sun more favored, and there is no doubt God has given us great privileges, with correspondingly grave responsibility.

Could anything be more serious than to be, not a heathen, but a baptized professor of a Christ you do not know. Had I met you last Sunday, and asked you, "Where are you going?" "I am going to worship," you would have replied. But, I ask, Are your sins forgiven? Oh, I would not like to say that, you reply. An unconverted sinner going to worship? How can that be? Have you got the oil? What does that mean? What is the oil? You will find all through Scripture that the oil is the figure of the Holy Ghost. Have you received the Holy Ghost? You reply, perhaps, "I hope so." The wise virgins did not hope to have it. They took oil. But look at the foolish virgins, and see your own case. Little cared they about the oil, little dreamed they of the necessity of new birth, and the possession of the Holy Ghost. It was quite enough to look like others who were going out to meet the Bridegroom. It is nice to look like other people, and if they have a lamp, then a lamp let us each have. The devil has got a great many lamp factories today, and a great variety of lamps, too, all without oil. And perhaps, my friend, you have gone and taken a lamp. In one of the numberless sections of Christendom you have professed to follow Christ. I am going to clear myself of your blood. If you have an oil-less lamp you are going to be shut out. Do not misunderstand me. The Lord is coming. I have heard the cry, and I have gone out, through grace, to meet Him. Through infinite grace I have got the oil. Have you it? Have you the Holy Ghost? Listen, "the wise took oil." How did they get it? We are not told that here, but we are told that they were so wise that they would not budge on single step without it. That is the point.

Oh, a lamp will do for me, say you; wiser heads than mine let me into the professing church; I have been in the Sunday-school, in the Bible-Class, and have recently joined the church. I like the thought of carrying a lamp. But you have no oil, Oh, soul, God wake you up, the Lord wake you up ere it be too late. You must be converted, and receive the Holy Ghost, or you will be shut out.

Perhaps you will tell me that you do not believe in the necessity of conversion. You do not believe in the Spirit's work, that lays hold of a man, and makes him feel his danger? If He touch you He will open your eyes, and you will see that you are all wrong. Thank God, if you have passed through the new birth. Do you say that you would like to be converted? Thank God for the desire. If you are yet unblessed, you had better be in a hurry. Christ's coming will close the possibility of getting the oil. Will there be no preaching then? Plenty, and the seats will be-half-filled with people. The wise will be gone. Shall I say, God have mercy on those that half-fill the seats? It will be too late. "I know you not," is the Lord's word to late-comers. If you wish to be saved, if you wish to join the ransomed company, and to go in with the Bridegroom, you must have the oil now. You must be converted. God save you, my friend. God convert you this very hour. If you die as you are this moment, you will spend your eternity in hell.

Ah, friend, you have sin on your conscience, and sin in your heart. You are steeped in Sin. Untouched by the Spirit of God, steeped in sin, and unblessed of God, what a sad case is yours, although a professor of Christ. Drop that unreality. Holding in your hand a lamp that has no oil, unconverted, not born again, and not possessing the Spirit, you are on your way to an eternal hell. Oh be aroused, I implore you. Gaze a moment at the wise. Do not tell me that they had not the knowledge of salvation, for, mark, they took oil. Where did they get it? They had got it. That is certain. I should like to get it. Thank God. Can I buy the oil? Yes. You can buy the oil, but it is without money, and without price (Isa. 55:1). Do you know how a wicked woman once got it? A Stranger came to her and said, "Give me to drink" (John 4:6-42). She did not give Him water, but He gave her the oil. Friend, you come to Jesus, and you will get it. You just turn to the Lord Jesus, that is the way the soul receives it. Turn to Jesus once on the cross for your sins, and now exalted at God's right hand in glory (Acts 10:43).

One great truth of Christianity is this, that when a sinner turns to the Saviour, he gets all his sins forgiven by God, on the ground of righteousness, because all His claims have been met by the death of His Son. There is more than that. The Holy Ghost now on the earth, the Spirit of God, loves to come and seal the faith of the soul that believes in God's dear Son. That is the oil. The believer in Jesus is not only converted, but has received the Holy Ghost. You are not a Christian, if you have not received the Holy Ghost. It is very simple. I do not think there is anybody that has really bowed to Christ, but has the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost comes and dwells in the believer, immediately he has trusted the Saviour.

What leads a man to trust in Jesus. He sees he is lost, and he sees God must judge him; then he hears of Jesus and trusts Him. He hears the word of truth—that Christ is a Saviour; that every man is under the judgment of God; and that "the Son of man is come to seek, and to save that which was lost." He finds out that. Christ has been a substitute, and he says, I wonder whether He died for me? He is not quite sure, and then he realizes that Christ died for sinners, and if for sinners, then for him. He can then say, "The Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

What is the gospel of salvation? That Christ has done a work, whereby God has been perfectly glorified. All the value of His work is put down to your credit, as believing in Him. When you learn that Jesus desires to save you, you will say, By the grace of God I shall trust Him. When a man believes in Jesus the Holy Ghost seals him. In the Old Testament you get the figure of the oil repeatedly. The blood was put upon the leper first, and then came the oil (see Lev. 14). I must be washed in the blood of Jesus before I can be sealed by the Holy Ghost. Redemption is one thing, and the reception of the Holy Ghost is entirely a different thing. What is the mark of God's children? They have the Holy Ghost. It manifests them. They are marked off as being His. They say, "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6).

The wise put the oil first, and the lamp last. They said, We are going to meet the Bridegroom, and therefore we must have the necessary qualification. They "took oil, in their vessels, with their lamps." That is a real Christian (Rom. 5:5). Every person that has the Holy Ghost is ready. I am either ready, or I am not ready. Thank God for the ready ones. The Lord is coming back for us. I believe that the cry, "Behold the Bridegroom I go ye out to meet him," has gone out. After the first fifty or sixty years of the Christian era, the hope of the Bridegroom's return for His people was completely lost sight of by the Church. You never hear a word about the coming of the Lord for His people in all the writings of "the Fathers." But the true hope of the Church, that is the Lord coming into the air, and our rising to meet Him there, is now animating the Church (Thess. 4). For seventeen long centuries this hope was lost, but God's Spirit has revived it, and there, is more testimony now than ever there was, in Scotland, and all over the world. The Lord is coming. I believe we are just at the last moment. Are you ready? Are you prepared?

I quite admit that there is a great deal of infidelity, but all the virgins arose and trimmed their lamps, just before the Bridegroom came. There never was so much activity as now, no matter where you turn. Why? Because the Lord is coming, that is the reason. If the Lord come, and find you unconverted, and unwashed in His blood, you will join in the petition, "Give us of your oil." My friend, it will be too, late then. Others cannot help you. You will have gone on in your sin till it be too late. Contemplate what it will be to be too late. "While they went to buy, the Bridegroom came." Unconverted professor, you that have long confessed His name, you will find He has come and you are left behind for judgment.

Do you really think anybody ever mistook you for a Christian, unconverted lamp-holder? You have lived for the world, and indulged in its lusts and pleasures; and though you may have donned its religion, you will be left for its judgment too. You will find out what a terrible reality is the judgment of God when it comes upon you. Oh, be wise! Come to the Lord now, turn to Him now, and get your guilty soul saved. Turn to Jesus now. He has not come yet, but He is coming. May God give you grace to turn now, and get among the "ready" ones. I am ready, and what made me ready? The Saviour's grace, and the Saviour's blood. The Saviour that saved me, can save you. Trust His heart, and be among the ready ones.

"They that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut." That closed door seals the doom of the unsaved, and then what a bitter cry will rise from many lips, for "afterward came also the other virgins," saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us." Ah! your lips have never been parted before in real prayer. They will be that day. Then your prayer must be denied, why not be ready now? The door is wide open now, why not obtain your title to pass in while it is so? A closed door is an awful thing for a too-late sinner. From within hear the Lord's voice "But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not." Awful response, but it is the answer of righteousness, although uttered in the voice of sorrow. Another scripture says, "Depart from me, ye workers of, iniquity." Friend, the most awful thing that could happen to you, is to be denied by Jesus in that day. Precious soul, as He now knocks at your heart, and says to you, Let me in, are you not going to let Him in, Jesus the Saviour? Turn, and say to Him, "Lord I have been hard, and unbelieving, but today I hear Thy gospel of salvation, and, Jesus, I will trust Thee." He would love to hear you say this. Let not 1897 close, and find you unready for the coming of the Lord.

Fellow-Christians, it is all peace, and joy, and gladness for us; we are going, to be with Jesus forever. Soon He will come. We are ready, through infinite grace. We have joined the company of the redeemed, the glory bound band. Happy people! Ours is the glory forever, and the Bridegroom's company.

Dear reader, I should like to know, are you among the wise or the foolish? Which? May God give you to be wise in time, for His name's sake. Amen.

W. T. P. W.

The Gospel Messenger: Volume 12, Marriage of the King's Son., The

(Matt. 22:1-14.)

THE parable which closes Matthew 21 shows that there was a time when God drew near to man to claim from him that which was his duty to give to God. That was the responsibility of the creature to the Creator. But, when God sent His Son, man slew Him, and cast Him out. Terrible picture of what man is as man. In that parable we have undoubtedly the bygone history of Israel.

The parable which opens chapter 22 is a divine sequence of the story of the husbandmen. It unfolds a totally different truth. God comes out to let us know that, spite of man's sin, He has got something in His heart for man. He has a thought, a purpose, connected with His Son. He has a Son, and His Son is to be married: there is to be a feast worthy of His Son, and He seeks guests.

What God wanted was hearts that would delight in honoring His Son. "He sent forth servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding feast; and they would not come." Again He sent messengers, but "they made light of it," and slew the servants who bade them come. What sin! what audacity!

Now mark, God has authority, for God is God, but He also has long patience. Bless the Lord for His long-suffering. But God has authority, and if He make a feast for His Son He is going to have Him honored. Better honor Him now, in the day of grace, than have to acknowledge Him in the day of judgment, when His exercised power will dismiss you from the presence of His glory. You are going to honor Him yet, careless sinner. The day is coming when you must honor Him. God will have it. His mills grind slowly, but surely. His purpose never fails.

God gave the Jew the first chance when Christ was on earth, but they would not own Him. Then—in the second call—you come a stage further. “Again He sent forth servants,” to tell them that the Lord was risen from the dead, that the work of redemption was done. This you get historically in Peter’s preaching in Acts 2, 3. His preaching was based really on the work of atonement, a work by which God had been glorified about sin. The death of Christ was indeed a wonderful moment, marked off by its own peculiarity from every other moment before or since. Then the holy spotless Son of God took up the question of the guilt of the whole world, doing a work which alone could meet the mind and thoughts of God, meet all the claims of His throne, break the power of Satan, and save vile sinners, like you and me, righteously.

Note well the patience of God with the Jew— “Again, he sent forth other servants”... (vs. 4). That took place in the early part of the Acts, undoubtedly in the ministry of Peter and his fellow-apostles. You will remember that when the fig-tree (see Luke 13:6-9) had no fruit for the owner, though he had sought it three years—the duration of the Lord’s ministry among the Jews—he said, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” The dresser pleaded: “Let it alone this year also.” Give it another year of grace. This second mission by the lips of the servants of the Lord in Acts 2:5, was the year of grace to the guilty nation of Israel. They had murdered His Son, but God was not, and never is in a hurry to judge. He lingered in love over a nation that had murdered His Son, and He lingers over you, man, just now.

Everything was ready, but alas! they would not come. Not only was there a feast, but a garment that fitted the guest for the feast. Remember that. You have not to think, How can I be suitable? The point is this, Would you like to be there? Do you respond to the call that God gives? “They made light of it.” Oh, you say, that was the guilty Jew. But, my dear friend, are you sure that sentence does not fit you? God’s message of invitation came, and “they made light of it.” Mark, unbelieving, unconverted sinner, you are the man. What an awful thing! When ages have rolled by, and you are outside God’s feast forever, my friend, I tell you what you will recollect, that the gospel would have saved you from the eternal judgment of the lake of fire, but that you “made light of it.” It is not the question of your having done some great sin. No, no. This is the point, you have made light of God’s gospel, God’s Christ, God’s invitation. Ah, friend, if you have been of that company till this hour, may God arrest you. You are opposing God, you are slighting His grace; He is bidding you to turn to His Son, and you are making light of Him. Anything and everything, but God’s wedding feast for you. They “went their ways.” That describes you exactly. One man was buried in his farm; another man was engrossed in his merchandise. Where was the harm of that? These things engrossed their hearts, controlled their lives. The Holy Ghost describes their actions by the solemn words, “they made light of it.” Oh, you say, they must have been awful sinners. So saying, thou condemnest thyself. God’s chief thought is Christ, whereas your chief thought is your pleasure, your farm, your earthly occupation, which leads you simply to make light of what God thinks everything of, Now do not shut your eyes to the solemn fact that the man who makes light of Christ must taste the wrath of God. Although they made light of Christ, God had patience with Israel for some forty years after the death of His Son. Then the determined opposition of that people brought condign judgment upon them. Morally their end was come in the death of Christ, and as a nation they were dead before God. God keeps a sexton to bury His dead, and He let the Roman army play the sexton’s part. The nation was swept off the face of the earth, and Jerusalem in ruins is the standing witness of God’s judgment upon the opposers of His grace. The point then is this, Are you among those who make light of God’s offers of mercy and grace now?

Nothing that man can do can chill the warmth of the love of, God. He says, so to speak, If the Jew will not have my grace, I shall turn round to the poor Gentile. “Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find bid to the wedding feast. So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good; and the wedding was furnished with guests” (verses 5, 6). That is sweet news for you and me. Paul was selected by the Lord as the chosen vessel, to carry out the news to the Gentiles, and he brought the gospel over to Europe (see Acts 16). He got up from Asia in three days. When God is bringing the gospel to Europe, He gives His servant a quick passage. The first man to be converted in Europe was a downright “bad” one. Paul met a “good” one when he met Lydia, and when he met the jailer he met a pretty “bad” one. There is an outward difference in the lives of people. Thank God, His grace meets everybody, no matter what the sinner has been.

The gospel is the most gracious service that mortal man can be employed in. Do you know what I have got for you? Thank God, I have the privilege of telling there is a feast for you, and God bids you come to it. Listen, you are invited. See that you do not “make light” of the invitation.

Christians, I wonder; sometimes, that you do not preach the gospel more. Oh, you say, I have no gift. Had you not better say, I have got no heart for it? Be assured it is not merely a question of gift. It is not a question of preaching to companies.

“Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage,” is our Lord’s command to us all. To every sinner that crosses your path we should say, “I have an invitation for you. Yet there is room.” While there is room we have not done our work yet. “Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled,” is the Lord’s injunction, and the servant’s warrant for earnestness. His heart is so full and tender. He bids you come, He has spread a feast, and it is you He wants. Friend, thou art invited. Oh, hoary-headed reader, it may be the last time that God will give you an invitation.

There is no question of what you have been, or what you are. “As many as ye shall find, bid to the wedding feast,” is the command. Thank God for that word. My beloved friend, God offers you a heavenly home, and heavenly association with His Son, with all the dignity and glory that is connected with His beloved Son. “All things are ready, come.” Have you had a little difficulty as to whether the gospel suits you? Can I find a sinner? I know it means that one, for I am instructed to invite as many as I can find. Have you any difficulty about the good ones? You and I are not of them. The “bad” ones just describes and suits me. Have you ever found out that you are among the bad ones? You had far better get the truth about yourself. Oh, you say, I am intelligent. But then, you are only an intelligent sinner, and “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Do you know why it was that Jesus died? Not for His own sins, but for the sins of sinners. He died for sinners. Do not be afraid to come to the Lord on account of your sins, because Jesus “bare the sins of many” when He died. Redemption is accomplished, the veil is rent, and the way into the holiest of all is made manifest.

I have met a lot of people too good for Jesus. There are some souls far too good for Him. They would not like to take the place of being lost sinners. Would you like to come to the feast? Oh, of course I would, say you. Well, somebody got into the feast, and then got turned out. And you say to me, What does that mean, was he so bad? I am perfectly certain he was not a bad one that was put out, because the bad one said, If I come in, I must have a garment to suit the feast. If you find a man full of himself, and full of self-righteousness, he is too good for Jesus, and slights the garment, though he would go to the feast. Such will not take the ground of being lost and undone. They will not have it that they are lost.

Oh, you say, God is very good, and He is very gracious. True, and therefore you hope to be in heaven, because you think you are not so very bad after all. I hope God will help me to smash your hopes. My friend, you will be detected as a person who has been a mere false professor if you have not on God's wedding garment.

Let me repeat. There are none too bad for Jesus. There may be many too good for Jesus. Take the thief on the cross, a person who had lived a scandalous life, he was the first trophy of grace. The Lord brought that redeemed soul back to glory with Him. He was such a bad man the earth could not keep him. That was the first soul saved after Christ's death. He was being cast out from earth when the blessed Saviour put His arms beneath him, and said, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." And see the first man that goes into glory after the Saviour died. A man who was too bad to live on earth. Oh, you say, I am such a sinner. Thank God if you know it. It is the bad that are called. Come and confide in His name, and honor Him. There will not be an empty seat in heaven, remember that. If you decline to answer to the gracious call of the Lord, He will find someone who will respond, for God will have no empty seats in His house. A guest of God thou hast not been. A guest of God thou wilt not be, and yet for eternity, thou wilt be the guest of somebody. Whose? The world's! and "her guests are in the depths of hell" (Prov. 9:18.) I am going to be the guest of God on the ground that, though I am a poor hell-deserving sinner, I have been invited.

What about this man without the garment? There is another day of judgment coming. It is a day by-and-by, when all profession will pass beneath the eye of God. It does not say what he had on, it might have been a beautiful suit. It is well known that it is the custom of the East for the provider of the wedding feast to also provide garments suited for the feast. When God invites you thus, and in your heart there is found by grace a desire to belong to Christ, the Lord will provide you with everything. The servants brought out the best robe in the fifteenth chapter of Luke. The father kissed the son, and he learned that he was loved. What is the best robe? Christ. And what is the wedding garment here? Christ. You and I cannot stand before God save in Christ. When this man came to the door, I have no doubt that some servant was standing ready to put on him a garment. I think I see him. He says, "Thank you, I will do as I am, I do not think I need it." He had neither part nor lot in the matter.

He had no sense what suited the honor and glory of the King's Son. You have very likely got on a robe of religiousness, that is not Christ. I was struck only last night in thinking of Rebekah (Gen. 24). She hears from the servant the rapturous story of Abraham's son, and presently she says, "I will go." But she would think, I have no raiment fit for a house like Isaac's, and while she thus thought, 'the servant brought out jewels of silver (redemption), jewels of gold (righteousness), and raiment, and Rebecca took them. Do likewise now.

Yes, my friend, the gospel comes down, and saves you where you are, and remember, the garment that fits you for His feast God also presents to you. You trust in Christ, and you will find you have the wedding garment. "Friend, how earnest thou in thither, not having a wedding garment?" was an awful question. The man was speechless. Unconverted professor, there is a day of the most speechless torture before your soul, with all your so-called Christian profession, just because it was Christless. "Then said the king to his servants, Bind him, hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Oh, is this going to be your ease? With all affection let me ask you to possess Christ now. You are a stranger to Christ, you are a stranger in heart to God, and you must be a stranger to the wedding feast. Profession will not do; you must possess Christ. You can read your own history in this solemn parable. May God in His grace lead you to Christ. He wants you to be in His presence, clothed with Christ. Christ for your life, Christ for your all. If you believe in Him now, by-and-by you will have the everlasting company of that blessed Lord. Will you come in now, and have the garment put on? God calls you to, and fits you for, the scene where His Son is to be eternally honored. Do not "make light" of such grace.

W. T. P. W.

The Gospel Messenger: Volume 12, Vineyard and the Husbandmen., The

Matthew 21:33-46.

BEFORE examining this remarkable parable, which the Lord Jesus propounds to His hearers that day, I will ask you, my reader, to glance briefly over the early part of this chapter. You will there notice that the context flings into the most wonderful relief the striking and solemn truths the parable contains. This was the last day of our Lord's ministry. We have reached the last week of His life, and in this chapter I believe we have reached the Wednesday of the week in which He died on the Friday.

That day the whole nation of Israel were gathered together before Him, as they supposed to judge Him, but really that they might receive from His lips their own judgment.

He had come into Jerusalem seated on an ass, and thus had presented Himself as Israel's Messiah, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah (ch. 11:9). When He came in, "all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?" There was an immense stir. God put His hand on the people of that guilty city, because He could not allow His Son to enter, and pass out of it, without receiving at least some testimony as to who He was. From end to end that big city was moved, so that they have to say, "Who is this?" It was a wonderful moment as they spread their garments before Him, and cut down branches. His entry thus meant the fulfillment of Scripture, and as the true Son of David entered the city that day, and the multitudes, mightily moved, said, "This is Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee," it looked for a moment as if Israel knew her King. Alas! she did not.

May I ask you, my reader, has your heart ever yet been moved in the presence of Jesus, the Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God? If not, do not forget that you are on trial now in that respect, and that if you miss the present moment of getting blessing from Him, as a Saviour, you will pass before Him when He sits upon a bench for judgment. That day will soon arrive of which Scripture says, "God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

In the scene before us, the Lord judges morally as He cleanses the temple, while withal He shows Himself to be the Son of David as He healed "the blind and the lame." When David, the son of Jesse, wanted to get hold of Jerusalem, the lame and the blind were hated of David's soul (see 2 Sam. 5:6-8). Here is the true David, however, and what does He do? He heals the lame and the blind. What a Saviour Jesus is, full of tender grace, and love, and goodness!

The next thing here is that as He returns to Jerusalem in the morning, he sees a fig tree. He looks for fruit, but finds “nothing thereon, but leaves only”. He curses that tree, and, as the disciples look at it, it withers away. Oh, what a picture of a Christless professor. “Nothing but leaves.” Is that your case? God knows. If you are born of God there will be fruit. The fig tree was always the symbol of Israel as a nation, and it is very striking that the Lord blights that tree as a sign of what was coming. He had shaken the city, opened the eyes of the blind, and had judged the fig tree; and then these self-constituted judges come and say to Him, “Who gave thee this authority?” By way of reply the Lord puts a question to them— “The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?” (vs. 25.) Now you see they are being judged. They were afraid to say from heaven lest He should ask why they had not believed John; and they were afraid to-say from men because of the people. Aye, you will find that even the leaders of religious thought may have people like slaves under them, but they themselves are afraid of them. Hence they cannot tell. That was indeed a confession of their state, they did not know from whence John’s ministry was—a wonderful ministry that shook the land from end to end.

Then the Lord unfolds the parable of the two sons. “A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went” (verses 28, 29). When the Lord first speaks to us, we generally say, “I will not.” Of this son we read he “afterward repented, and went.” It is a happy thing if you have repented; but if you have never been brought to bow to Jesus, I pray God you will be led to repentance now. May Jesus’ voice reach you. That voice of the Son of God has reached to the ends of the earth. And do you know what he says from heaven? — “Repent!” God has commanded all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day for judgment. When will that day be? I do not know, but it is nearer than you expect. If the Lord came for His people tonight, Tomorrow the judgment would begin. It is a wonderful thing when a man repents towards God; it is always the moment of blessing.

But we read on— “And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.” You have here easy-going profession, lip confession. “I go, sir,” is easily said, but what did he do? He went not. Have you ever been born of God? If not, you are of this class, Who were they who said, “I go,” and went not? They were before the Lord at that moment. Who were they who said, “I will not”? The publicans and the harlots. They knew they were sinners, for they said, “I will not.” But grace changed their attitude, for God can meet sinners of the deepest dye, and the publicans got into the kingdom of God. Many of them were converted, and blessed of God. Why? Because they repented. Not so was it with the leaders of religious thought the Lord was addressing, hence He says, “John came unto you, in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not” (vs. 32). They were a very religious people He was talking to. John’s clarion voice, pressing repentance, had rung through the land. It went to the conscience of many a publican and harlot, and they got into God’s kingdom. But what about those who had merely said, “I go, sir, and went not”? They believed not John’s testimony, and this, you see, the Lord charges on the leaders of the nation—the scribes and Pharisees. He shows where they were.

Religion never saved a man yet, nor ever can. Christ, and only Christ, can save sinners like you and me. Ritual is all external. The work of God’s Spirit is all internal. The first is man’s doing, the latter God’s. When you have the conscious sense that you are a lost sinner, then it is you repent, so I ask you again, Have you ever repented? Profession without possession is valueless, nay, even positively dangerous. There might be at first open rebellion, but, if grace leads to repentance, God blesses that soul. My friend, it is a wonderful thing to get out of the devil’s grip. May God save you now; but mark you this, it is not often that a religious man gets hold of God’s salvation. I have very little hope of a downright religious man. He does not know, and refuses to know that he is, what he is, a lost sinner. The devil will whisper to him; You are not the man that needs salvation, that preacher does not mean you; he means publicans and harlots. Ah, he blinds your eye. And by-and-by you will learn this, that your religious history has been a religious sham.

It is this solemn exposure of man’s heart that introduces the striking parable of the Householder. You may say to me, What is the meaning of that parable? Turn to the fifth chapter of Isaiah, for Scripture always explains itself. “The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant” (vs. 2). This is the explanation of the parable before us. The thing is perfectly plain. You have the first man upon trial. Man is seen in responsibility, and he absolutely and utterly fails before God. He is an utterly lost sinner. In our parable you have the whole of the history of Israel in responsibility. Put man under law and what does he do? He breaks it. Is there fruit for God? No. The Lord here, before the whole nation, brings out this solemn truth, that what God justly may look for from man, He does not get. When the Owner of the vineyard looked for grapes, He found wild grapes.

Then you may say, How can I be saved? Not by law. You may be saved by grace, but not by law-keeping. Grace only can save you. It takes a man perhaps a good long time ere he reaches what the apostle Paul unfolds in the Epistle to the Galatians: “We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God; for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (chs. 2:15-21).

What does the Gospel bring out? That man cannot do anything but sin. There comes in the need of the Saviour. What we have exposed here is the total ruin of man. They had the Word of God; they had the testimony, but it produced no fruit. “When the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.” That is the way the world treated the Son of God. The Son of God was here, love incarnate, and the husbandman said, Let us kill Him. They effected their purpose, for “they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.” That is perhaps what you call bygone history. I ask you, Do you think that God has taken no account of this? Will not God take account of the murder of His Son? Yes, He will. Of this the Lord’s hearers were assured, for when He propounded the query, “When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men.” They had a perfectly right judgment of what the lord of the vineyard should do.

Is it not a wonderful thing that God has put up with the murder of His Son for eighteen centuries, and that He is waiting yet to win souls? Thank God that the Lord did not come back at once to execute judgment.

If you are wise you will see that there is a terrible breach between God and the world, and you will take your side with the One who has thus been cast out by the world, your heart will turn round to that rejected Saviour, and you will own Him as your Lord ere the day of God’s

retribution arrive. It will come, for “Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner” (vs. 42). God has exalted the despised Jesus. This is a quotation from the 118th Psalm. What is the stone? Have you any idea who the stone is that the builders rejected? Read Acts 4:10, 11, if you have a doubt. The prophecy of the Psalmist is now explained by the Holy Ghost. These Jewish builders had no room for Christ. What about you, in your life’s history? What is your relation to Christ? Is He the foundation stone? Is He the corner stone? Ah I you say, I have not had much thought about that yet. Then, in your case too, Christ is the stone set at naught. Yours is a very serious case, for the charge of the Holy Ghost against you is that you prefer anything and everything to Christ. Friend, that is a very serious charge to have lying at your door.

Oh, look up, and see that exalted Man at God’s right hand. It is only due to Him that He should be there, and as seated there, He can save and bless you, for the Lord informs the Jews, “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof”—i.e., God gave up the Jews, and sent out the Gospel to the Gentiles. Alas! among them, too, as a whole, Christ is not believed. Here and there hearts have been won, but apart from the working of grace, the Gentiles have in no sense behaved differently from the Jews.

But we read further: “And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” All must bow to Jesus. I tell you what bowed my heart—it was the love of Christ that broke me down. Who fell over the stone? The Jews fell over it. They looked for a grand and glorious Messiah. When they saw Jesus come in lowly grace, Jerusalem knew not the day of her visitation. “What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called Christ?” said Pilate. “They all say unto him, Let him be crucified,” was the awful answer (Matt. 27:22). They stumbled over Him, and the nation was broken. The murder of the Messiah was followed soon after by the destruction of Jerusalem. That is the fulfillment of the first half of verse 44; but what means “on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder”? That is you, my friend, if you are unconverted. Terrible as was the judgment that fell upon the Jews for rejecting their Messiah when seen here on earth, far more terrible will be the judgment of the Gentiles, who have refused a glorified Saviour.

There is a terrible judgment before the man who has heard about Jesus and has not believed on Him. Are you that man? God forbid. No, my friend, if you are wise you will hear what Peter says: “This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:11, 12).

You may be saved just now, where you are. Oh, hear the voice of Jesus. Seek His face. You are welcome; you may get God’s salvation, without money and without price. Salvation like a shining river is flowing through this dark scene of sin. Jesus is a Saviour who eternally saves His people from their sins and all their consequences, and you have just simply to believe in Him who died and rose again. Do you know what will then happen? Jesus will take you in and save you on the spot.

When you come to the Lord, you see what the world has done to Him; it has refused Him, and you cannot be on the world’s side and Christ’s side too. You will be like the Ethiopian eunuch we read of in the eighth of Acts. Philip preached Jesus unto him, and he believed, and then said, “What doth hinder me to be baptized.” He had heard the news that the life of Jesus was taken from the earth (Isa. 53), and he wished to be identified with Him. The whole truth of the Gospel was opened up to that seeking soul, and he saw the blessed truth that Jesus had gone into glory, and his heart followed him there. Friend, if you are simple, you will say, I should like to take my place seriously and really with the One whom the world has cast out. Shall it be so? God help you from this moment to say, “Lord, I believe.”

W. T. P. W.

The Gospel Messenger: Volume 12, "Every Man a Penny."

“For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way; I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.”—Matthew 20:1-16.

WE have here something that is very instructive. The Lord has been saying in the previous chapter how difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. In fact, He says, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (vs. 26), i.e., you cannot save yourself, but God can save you. Peter, struck by this, says, “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” Then Jesus said: “Verily I say unto you... Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first” (verses 27-29). If you follow Jesus, you will have your reward. It is not only the twelve apostles to whom this applies. He will reward every one that has followed Him.

Now, alas! our hearts are very self-righteous, and He has to correct every bit of self-righteousnesses that springs up in our hearts. Peter was rather well pleased with his devotedness, so the Lord says, as it were, You have done very well by it, Peter. Do you, my reader, think of what you have given up for Christ? The rather think on what you have got from Christ, for all we have is but the result of sovereign grace, and no thanks to us. That is the point of the parable which follows.

“The kingdom of heaven is like,” &c. The point of this parable is this, there is no limit to God’s sovereignty in grace. God is sovereign. If you get eternal life, you get it by sovereign grace, and confidence in the grace of the Master of the vineyard is the point. “Whatsoever is right I will give you.” He wants men in His vineyard, but their, call and their reward depend entirely on His grace. All is on the principle of grace, and of God’s sovereignty.

Have you ever begun to work in the Lord’s vineyard yet? He is a wonderful master, so full of grace, and goodness, and encouragement. There is nothing to compare with the love of Christ, and the service of Christ. Look at the ceaseless activity of Christ which leads Him out to seek servants in this parable. The penny is what His grace will give you by-and-by. He goes out “early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard”; then “about the third hour”; again “about the sixth and ninth hour”; and once more “about the eleventh hour.” Only think of the earnestness and activity on His side. If His grace call, and save you, my reader, happy for you, for by-and-by He will reward you. Do not despise His call. Better far to serve Christ than Satan!

But the day closed; and when even was come, the Lord said, “Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.” It will be a grand day when this roll-call is heard! and each receives his reward. Are you a laborer? “I do not think I am a preacher,” say you. It is not a question about being a preacher. It is this, Are you for Him, and are you in His service? All His servants got a penny, and who gave them the penny? Christ. The first thought they should have received more than the last. That was a huge mistake. We are going to heaven, thank God, but we can only go in by sovereign grace) and the call of God. Oh! the blessedness of the sovereignty of God. He might have let you and me alone. Many are called, but few chosen. Are You chosen? Well, you say, I do not know. Thank God, I know. I could not rest if I did not know. Sovereign grace called me, and in that I rest. Grace takes us all in. The heart that knows what grace is, is delighted that you should taste it too.

Observe here what the Master says with regard to giving each a penny—even those who came in last: “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?” (vs. 15.) Certainly! If in His grace He put the one called at the eleventh hour on the same footing as those called “early in the morning,” the latter should have rejoiced. The first got what was justice, the last enjoyed grace. It is sovereign grace that carries us on, and sovereign grace will carry us in; and it is the effect of grace, that what you enjoy yourself, you are very anxious that others should enjoy too. If delighting in Christ yourself, you have such enjoyment in your soul that you desire that others should enjoy what you enjoy. You have lost nothing, although somebody else shares what fills your heart. And that is the way the gospel spreads. A wonderful thing indeed is grace, for it takes in the vilest and most guilty; and when you come to know the Lord, you want others to share what you are enjoying. May the Lord give you, my friend, to taste His rich and infinite goodness just now, and then fill your heart with deep longings for the blessing of others.

W. T. P. W.

The Gospel Messenger: Volume 12, Treasure; the Pearl; and the net., The

(Read Matt. 13:44-53.)

I SHOULD like to press upon you, my reader, that these words fell from the lips of the blessed Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, become a man, and found in this scene, that He might reveal the love of God to man, and bring man to the knowledge and enjoyment of God. The truth which He brings out here in parabolic form is most precious and wonderful.

In the first two parables—the treasure hid in the field, and the pearl of great price—He brings out the action on His own side, in order to unfold God’s eternal thoughts, purposes, and counsels. God had counsels and purposes of blessing for poor sinful men upon this earth, and these have come out in the Person, and above all in the death of His beloved Son. What the Lord unfolds here is something absolutely new, the like of which never was before. We are permitted to find ourselves the objects of perfect and eternal love. What a wonderful thing it is when a man finds himself to be the object of love deeper and stronger than death! I know many a person will say, “But I do not love God, although I try to.” My friend, do not try it. The activity of His love, really discovered, will soon make you return it. Believers praise and love Him simply because they cannot help it, when the love of His heart fills theirs. Oh, let us give all thanks and praise to Him!

Turn now to this scripture and see what God is doing. What a refreshing thing it is to turn aside from the responsibility of man, and look at what God is doing. Here was Jesus Himself at this moment the full revelation of God. The disciples got near Him in the house, and He says, I will let you see some of the secrets of my Father’s heart. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth the field.” You may say to me, “Well, I suppose that is a sinner seeking the gospel.” Impossible! I am quite sure that is not its meaning. The interpreter of this parable had not got the mind of the Lord when he told you that.

You talk of a sinner selling all that he hath. What can a sinner sell? What have you got to sell? All that a sinner has is his sins, and they can only bring him into judgment, not blessing. Salvation, moreover, cannot be purchased. Money cannot buy it. The scripture says, “Ye know ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold,... but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18). It is the Saviour—the heavenly merchant man—who sells “all that he hath,” not the sinner. The field is the world, and what has Christ found in the world? A treasure.

Well may you say, Then who are the treasure? What all amazing thing when a man finds out that he is part of the treasure. Here in the field, owned and governed by Satan, and full of sinners in their sins, walking under hid power, we now discover a heavenly Stranger, intent on His Father’s business, and this is the One, whose eye, in the midst of all the world’s confusion, detects a treasure in that world. His own are His treasure, and you will never make Christ your treasure until you find out that you are His treasure. Are you His? It is He who bought you; it is He who died for you. I am His treasure, that I know. He had the deep conviction that the treasure was in the field somewhere. It filled His heart with joy, and He gave up all to possess it.

Oh, there will be a glow in your heart that will never die out, when you learn that you are His treasure.

But the Lord bought the field for the sake of the treasure. Do you know that this world belongs to Him? There is a Man at the right hand of God, at this moment, in Glory, and the world belongs to Him, and He is yet going to possess the world, because He bought it.

His wonderful death in obedience, and grace, has given Him title over everything, hence He could say, “Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him” (John 17:2). That “many” is the treasure hid in the field, and for that He gave up all. There are two sides to that which He had to give up, in order to get the treasure—His Church. Then the point is this, What did He give up? That treasure had got such a claim upon Him—such a hold on His heart—that He gave up everything for it. If you get saved, your Saviour will be far more joyful than you. Do you not know that it is written of Him, “Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame”? (Heb. 12:2.) Do you ever think of the joy that the Lord Jesus has in the salvation of the lost? Who but He could or would have acted as He has?

He was the eternal Son of the Father, and ever dwelt in the bosom of the Father, but He wanted our hearts to enjoy what He enjoyed, and to share His Glory, so He stooped to death, to lift us into life, as it is written, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). His leaving of His first estate—Godhead glory—and stooping to manhood and death was His perfection. Adam left his first estate in an endeavor to “be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). What was apostasy in the first man, was the perfection of the second man, the last Adam He was God, but He became a man. He laid aside His Godhead glory, and He, who was the Word, was made flesh (John 1:14). He had also earthly rights as a man, and as King of the Jews, but He laid them all aside, gave all up, and went down into death to take you and me out of it. Praise His name forever! Hallelujah! what a Saviour!

Christ’s treasure consists of a great many poor, wretched, lost, undone, and hell-deserving sinners, all saved because He Himself has come down and done a work in virtue whereof they can be blessed. Selling all—includes the sufferings of the cross, and all that the blessed Lord Jesus went through as a voluntary victim. God cannot save at the expense of His character. If He save, He must save righteously. The revelation of the light shows me that I am a guilty sinner; but God, in the love of His heart, sent His Son into this world, and He drank the cup of judgment, due to us, so that now God can come out and save righteously, and, if you let Him have His way with you, He will bring you into association with His own Son. He went back to heaven as man—as the man who had glorified God. He had borne sins, not for Himself, but for others. Do you know how many sins He had on Him? No tongue can tell. He says, “Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me.... They are more than the hairs of my head” (Psa. 40:12). Again, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Peter 2:24). By His sufferings and death He bought the treasure. Tell me, are you part of the treasure? My friend, have you never got that question settled yet? Have you never learned, and said, “Jesus has died for sinners, therefore He died for me.” If so, my fellow-believer, you are of the treasure.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly (or beautiful) pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (vs. 45). This merchant man is indeed a man in very serious earnest. He did not want pearls merely, he must have beautiful ones. He had discrimination; he knew exactly what he wanted. The Father did not want His Son to be alone, and therefore, just as Abraham sent to seek a bride for Isaac in the far country, so this blessed Son of God comes to seek His bride. The pearl of great price manifestly is not Christ, but His bride, His Church, looked at in her united state. The “treasure” presents the individual side, the “pearl” the unity and beauty, to His eye, of the Church. To win it He will endure anything and everything, and for her “sold all that He had.”

Oh, think of His agony in the garden, and what came from His lips: “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will; but as thou wilt.” If this parable is to be wrought out to fruition, He must drink that cup; and He must know what it is to be forsaken of God. Oh, think of all the billows and waves that passed over His holy and gracious soul (see Isa. 53.). He could have moved away, escaped all, and saved Himself; but how then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, and His people be saved? To save them He surrenders all that was dearest to His heart. He will even give up communion with His God and Father, and He it was who did ever those things which pleased God. He would even bear that God should turn from Him, turn His face away, so that His people might be saved and redeemed. Such was the penalty of sin-bearing; and if He bear not their sins, and all the judgment due to them, they could not be saved. But He will bear all. Such is His love—“the love of Christ which passeth knowledge” (Eph. 3:10).

Great, indeed, is the price the Saviour has paid. Did you ever think of it? Think of Jesus: think of all He passed through, and your heart will be melted. May God, by the Holy Ghost, lead your soul to ponder these wondrous realities.

But perhaps you ask—Does He love me? Ah, have you never learned that He loves you? How do I know that He loves me? Scripture simply assures me, and I believe it. It must be personal. It is no use in the world for you to know that He loves me, if you do not know that He loves you. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). He was more than man, He was God here in human form, and “God commends his love toward us, in that while we were yet, sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). I know He loves me, because He died for me. Would He have died for you if He did not love you? When it says, “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” I say that includes me then, for I am a sinner, and I can say with Paul, “He loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). He and me. And what is between? Love. Thank God for it. That will do, I want no more. The soul rests in this, He has loved me, and given Himself for me.

Again, “Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor” (Eph. 5:2). Again, “Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27). Here we have three aspects of Christ’s love. Past—He gave Himself. Present—sanctifying and cleansing. Future—presenting to Himself the Church spotless. He has died to save us. That is love. How often now He gives the very word that helps and brings blessing to the soul? That is love. It is the Lord, in His love, from the glory, who ministers the very word you need, and by it He washes you. In the future He will present you to Himself without a spot.

He is going to present us to His Father, by-and-by, in His own likeness. Do you know, beloved fellow-Christian, that you and I are going to be exactly like Jesus in glory by-and-by? Oh, you say, that will be glorious. You are right. Love suggested and carried all this out.

It was the late Dr Hawker, I think, who quaintly said, that the Father showed the Church to Jesus in the looking-glass of eternity, and she was so beautiful that He said, I will give up everything and die for her, to make her My own forever. He did not mean man’s church—mere

profession—but that which really belongs to Jesus, and He will have her home by-and-by.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord” (Matt. 13:47-51). The net is the gospel going out to the many—its aspect is towards multitudes of people. Every kind are in the net. When it was full the fishermen drew it, and separated its contents. They did, their work in a very deliberate manner. They sat down, and “gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.” We have no business to put the bad into vessels. And what do you mean by the good? The good are those who belong to Christ. Put them together. What about the unconverted? Leave them alone: do not put them with the good in vessels. They should be made to feel what, and whose they are. Today God is doing this: the Spirit of God is getting the good fish out of the meshes, and putting them together. Happy is it for all believers who have enough energy to come out boldly for Christ. The saints are to walk with each other as such. Whether worship or work be in question, the unconverted have no part in either.

When the Lord comes the action is reversed; then the angels will separate “the wicked from among the just.” When I talk about the wicked I mean the unsaved. Today we are to put the saved together—excluding the godless, that they may feel their condition. If they do not, their day is coming—a day of judgment. Your day is coming, sinner, mark that, when the angels shall come forth, and, touching only the wicked, “shall cast them into the furnace of fire.” Unsaved reader, get hold of this clearly. You are nothing but a wicked sinner on your road to hell. May God save you ere it be too late. Oh, may God in His grace so use His Word that the sense may be awakened in many souls as to what is due to Christ! I fervently invite you to come to that Saviour now, and taste His love. Slight that love, and you will surely taste His judgment. Which then shall it be—love or judgment?

“CHOOSE YE THIS DAY.”

W. T. P. W.

The Gospel Messenger: Volume 12, Wheat and the Tares., The

(Matt. 13:24-43.)

ANY careful reader of the thirteenth of Matthew will notice that there is a remarkable difference between the parable of the sower who went out to sow, and the six parables which follow. These latter are said to be similitudes of the kingdom of heaven.

In the parable of the sower we see that God is not seeking anything from man, but is bringing something to man. The word which He will put into the heart will produce fruit of its own kind, and it is the individual soul—responsible for what it hears—that is before us. The six parables which follow, present what is collective, or seen in the aggregate; and you will easily see that the first three differ very largely from the second three. The first three were spoken by the Lord from the boat. Thereafter He leaves the boat, comes into the house, describes what He means by the wheat and tares, and then goes on to unfold the last three parables.

Some of His hearers were greatly struck, and they could not rest till they knew what the parables meant. I wonder, my friend, if you have been so struck? If not, I hope God’s Spirit will so strike you, that you will really go to Christ, to get the meaning of His words. All who had “ears to hear” could not rest till they understood the meaning of the parable of the wheat and the tares. There is no necessity for anybody to be in difficulty as to its meaning. The most feeble intelligence can understand it, because the Lord expounds it.

The first three parables—the wheat and tares, the mustard seed, and the leaven hid in the meal— present the kingdom of heaven under three figures, which give the external aspect of that kingdom as a scene of profession, and responsibility. The other three give us the internal aspect of affairs, viewed as God’s work, and the carrying out of His purposes in grace, albeit we still have a view of the kingdom of heaven. Anyone who listens to God will see what these figures mean, although an unconverted man would not understand the last three, since they bring out the secret purposes and thoughts of God, and are only apprehended by faith.

But you may say, “What do you mean by the similitude of the kingdom of heaven?” In Matthew’s Gospel—where the expression “kingdom of heaven” alone is found, and never said to be nearer than “at hand”—Jesus is the King, but His people would not have Him, they refused Him, and He retired to heaven. The world cast Him out, and today He is the rejected Christ, and the rejected King. Hence you do not see much sign of the kingdom of Christ. You see the kingdom of the devil, and the kingdom of the flesh. But in this scripture the Lord, so to speak, says, “I will show you what this world will be during the time of My absence, till I come back again.” The kingdom exists now. It commenced, in that sense, when He went back to heaven.

Instead of God bringing retributive judgment upon the world that has cast His Son out, He is doing a wonderful work: He is saving men and women, and calling out a company to share Christ’s glory, and kingdom. While man is showing what he is, and what is in him, God has His own purposes of grace, and He is carrying them out. The field, spoken of in this parable, is the world. It is not the Church; if it were the Church you would have a great mixture of believers and unbelievers together, which should not be. God’s work was that of sowing “good seed”—really His own children, but “while men slept, his enemy came, and sowed tares among the wheat.” How easily we can go to sleep! The easiest thing for you and me to do, is to go to sleep, my fellow-Christian. All sinners are dead, and many Christians are sleeping, and need rousing up. Sleep is the thing with which the devil paralyzes the Church. Hence we read, “Therefore let us not sleep as do others” (1 Thess. 5:6).

What is the sphere of God’s work today? It is the whole world. There the name of Christ is proclaimed, but, while God’s work was going on men slept, for everything committed to man in responsibility fails, and the devil sowed his tares among the wheat, and went his way. A first-class worker is the devil. He does his work, goes his way, and tells no one about it. We might learn a lesson from this. Many a good work of God has been spoiled bf talking about it. In the eighth of Acts we see Satan introducing tares Simon the sorcerer was baptized with the rest, and put on the name of Christ, though evidently unconverted, for Peter said unto him, “Thy money perish with thee;... thou hast neither part

nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8:20, 21). He got into the kingdom of heaven by profession of Christ, and baptism, but all the while he was an unreal man.

Now you must understand that "the kingdom of heaven" is not heaven. The Lord gave Peter "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19), but I hope you do not think Pater had the keys of heaven? No, no, he never had. Why? Because the keys of heaven are in the hands of Christ. As a servant on earth, Peter had the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" committed to his care. He used them first when, in the second of Acts, he opened the door to the Jews, and three thousand were converted on the day of Pentecost, and, being baptized, entered that kingdom. In the tenth of Acts he went down to Caesarea, and there opened, the door to the Gentiles. Painters depict Peter with keys at his girdle, and sheep all round him, and some are deluded thereby, and think Peter can let them into heaven or keep them out.

Profound mistake! Keys are for opening a door, not feeding sheep. You do not feed sheep with keys, but with turnips and the like.

The Lord here shows what would be during His absence. There would be a mass of mixed profession in the world. The wheat sprung up, then likewise the tares. The Lord expounds this parable to His disciples inside the house. We are told that He that sows the seed is "the Son of Man." The blessed Lord Jesus is doing God's work. "The good seed are the children of the kingdom." Do you think that you are good seed? "The tares are the children of the wicked one." Do you know that wheat is valuable? Wherever there is a work of grace in the souls of men and women they are like wheat. Thus every child of God is as wheat. Oh, how dear to the heart of Christ is every one born of God.

The Lord Jesus said to Peter once, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). Now Simon was a saint, a believer: he was wheat, with a good deal of chaff existing also, and God let Satan sift him to get rid of the chaff. Do you know, my unconverted reader, why Satan does not sift you? He leaves you alone, because you are all chaff He never troubles his own. "His goods are in peace" (Luke 11:21). The peace is false, and Satan is too wise to disturb it. Unsaved sinners he regards as his own, his goods. He does not worry sinners, but he worries saints. He is often permitted of God to put them through the sieve. If you were not wheat he would not sift you, dear fellow-believer, so do not be discouraged if you are tempted, tried and sifted. He whispers to his own: "You are very decent, you can keep your mind easy; you are as good as most, better than many; God is good, and merciful, and a nice, respectable, well-behaved person like you is sure to be all right in the end. Do not let the preachers of 'judgment to come' trouble you. You believe in Christ, go to church regularly, and make a proper profession—not too loud—what more can you do?"

Thus does the wicked one beguile mere professors. They never get any trouble from him because they are tares. The devil, I repeat, never torments his own. It is the children of God he torments. He will torment them to the end. He tempts from first to last. He had the audacity to tempt the blessed Lord Himself. Christian, remember that with every temptation God makes a way of escape for you. You look to the Lord, and He will carry you, through.

What an awful thing it is to be a tare! The tares are not heathens, but the baptized professors of Christ that people Christendom today. They are professors of Christ outwardly, but not members of Christ's real Church. The Church is composed of wheat. Where is wheat found? It always grows around the stem. Christ is the stem. He was the one solitary sinless man, the true corn of wheat, and all His people spring from, and derive from Him, as risen from the dead. He has borne the sins of His people, and every one that believes in Him is united to Him. If you are connected with Christ, He is your life, and your righteousness. Every corn of wheat will get to the garner, not one will be lost. If you have never yet been born of God, and washed in the blood of Jesus, do not dream that you are of the wheat, for "the good seed are the children of the kingdom," i.e., those that are born of God.

Are you a child of the kingdom yet? You say "I do not know." Why do you not know? I know, and I am acquainted with a great many who can tell me that they know. If you have not been converted, yet it is high time you were. A new-born soul always likes the company of the Lord's people. So you can easily find out if you are the Lord's.

Have you found out that you are but a tare in the wheat-field, and do you want to be real? "God be merciful to me a sinner," should be your cry. How is it that you have a pew among God's people? I will tell you. The devil would have you there; he puts you there, just to ensure your eternal damnation by the crowning sin of a false, hollow profession.

But stop, my friend, and look ahead a bit; the harvest day is nearing apace. "The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels." This mixture of the living among the dead, the real and the unreal side by side, will go on in the world till the end. Then the wheat will be gathered into the garner, the saints all transferred to, and shining as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father, while the tares will be "cast into a furnace of fire." The servants wanted to destroy them, to "gather them up" now, but the householder said, "Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them." Rome, forgetful of this command of the Lord, and desirous of getting rid of what she counted tares—in reality God's wheat—has rooted them up by thousands.

Hear what the Lord Christ says: "Let them both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn." Men are being bound in bundles now. Confederation is the cry of this day, and paves the way for Christendom's final judgment. The Lord is coming for His saints, and then will the Church be taken to glory. "Gather the wheat into my barn," means, take them home. The present day of God's long-suffering grace will soon close, the last gospel message have gone out, and the end of the age come the Son of Man will send forth His angels to deal with all those who do iniquity. There is the final judgment of the unblest. People do not like the solemn story of judgment to come. Just you listen to the Lord here. "They shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity." And what becomes of such? The angels "shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." If, my reader, you who have heard the gospel, are of that sad company, you will then say, Fool, fool that I was not to believe.

Believe the truth, and come to Christ now. He will receive, and save you. You shall be His, and He shall be yours forever. Do not look for things to get better down here; the world is not getting better, nor can do so. It is getting worse daily, and ripening for judgment. We, beloved fellow-Christians, have just to wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus. Then we shall go home to our Father's house, see our blessed Saviour face to face, and be with Him, and like Him forever. What a prospect! I trust no one will lay aside this paper, and put his head on his pillow tonight, until he can say, "Thank God, I know that I am wheat; and I am waiting just to go on high." Surely it is better to spend eternity in the Father's kingdom than in a furnace of fire. Friend, which word describes you— "wheat" or "tares"?

W. T. P. W.

The Gospel Messenger: Volume 12, God Sowing, Not Seeking.

(Read Matthew 13:1-23.)

THE Gospel of Matthew, written for the Jews, presents the Lord Jesus as their King—alas for them—refused. Let us glance briefly over the first twelve chapters. We see in the first chapter the genealogy of the King. His right to the throne by birth is incontestably proved. In the second the circumstances connected with the birth of the King are recorded, and Gentiles come to see Him who is King of the Jews but whom the Jewish nation know nothing of—not even that He is born. The third chapter relates the proclamation of His kingdom by John the Baptist. The fourth chapter gives the temptation in the wilderness, and the moral overthrow of the usurper—Satan. In chapters 5-7, the so-called Sermon on the Mount, we find enunciated the laws, the rules, and the moral principles of the kingdom of which this Blessed One is the King. In chapters 8 and 9 the powers of the kingdom are described. Every possible miracle that Messiah could perform is there found, a complete testimony to the glory of the King. In the tenth He sends His disciples out to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom largely, and also to show its powers-miraculous healing. In the eleventh, we find that even John the Baptist began to doubt if Jesus were the Messiah, and the cities, in which most of His mighty works were done, refuse to believe Him. In chapter 12 not only do the rulers of the nation refuse to believe Him, but they attribute to Satanic power that which was the activity of grace in the power of the Holy Ghost. What He was doing in the grace and power of God, and thereby fulfilling Scripture, they said, was the work of a man filled with the devil. As a nation the Jews definitively, when tested, reject their King. That nation's history is over.

As a result of this, Christ breaks the links that exist between Him and Israel, He refuses to own them, as connected with Him in the flesh. But some He does own, for "he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (12:49, 50). The only way in which we can manifest that we are in touch with Christ is by doing His will. You and I did our own will, just because it is the nature of the unregenerate heart so to act, irrespective of God's will. Sin is the will of the creature in activity.

Let us now ponder the scene presented in Matthew 13. The Lord's action is significant as He pushed off in the boat. (Compare Luke 5:3.) God was going to bring in a totally new kind of ministry. Till now God had been seeking something from man. He was responsible to give God his duty, his love, his service, but he had totally failed to do so. The owner was looking for fruit in the vineyard, but he found none: nothing but leaves. Until now man was under law, and the law was the declaration of what the creature ought to be. That law he had not kept. He had broken it in every point, was therefore guilty and lost, but when the Lord Jesus comes, in grace, to save him, He is not wanted. This shows that man was absolutely under Satan's power. Nothing was to be got out of man, so God begins a new kind of ministry with him, and that work is, that He wants to put something into him. The Lord sows the seed to produce fruit. He is not looking for something from us. God is not now a claimer, nor a receiver, but He is a giving God. He gave His Son, He has given us His Spirit, what better could He give? The fruit will come in due time if only we receive and retain the seed. Grace works now by sowing the seed—the Word of God—in the heart, and the Lord is the sower. If you have not received the Word of God, there is no link between your soul and God. The effect of its reception is to produce new life. How is a man born again? It is all the work of God, though His Word and His Spirit. When the Word of God gets down into a man's conscience, he bows before God, and owns everything; and I do not think anyone is ever really blessed in any other way.

Now note well that the sower is the Son of Man (vs. 37), "the seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11), and the soil is the heart of man. This soil is presented to us in four different ways.

1. "Some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up" (vs. 4). "Those by the wayside are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). To hear and believe is God's way of salvation. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). The jailer at Philippi was saved this way. Christ is the only way. Jesus saith, "I am the way, the truth, and the light" (John 14:6).

Man is a poor, undone, helpless sinner, but salvation is offered to him by God. Salvation, freer than the air you breathe, is offered to you in the name of the Lord Jesus. "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). I should like you to know who is the most out-and-out believer in sudden conversions. Well, it is the devil. Mark that. The devil has a great deal more confidence in the gospel than most men that preach it. He knows the gospel converts a man where he sits, therefore, he says, "I must take away the word immediately, lest he believe, and be saved." Hearing, believing, and being saved, is God's order.

The gospel, my friend, can save you just where you read this. If the arrow of conviction got into your soul there would be a wonderful change in you. But if you are only a "wayside" hearer, Satan takes away the seed—the word—which in sinful carelessness and hardness of heart you do not believe, and you are left, untouched and unsaved.

2. But we read that "some fell upon stony places." These are they "which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away." When tribulation or persecution comes, they give it up. There is no root. Oh! if only God's Word got really down into you, it would take root downward, and bear fruit upward. The "stony-place" hearer receives the Word for the joy of it, and gives it up for the trouble. I believe that this class is mostly found among the young. It is both a blessed thing to be a Christian, and a joyful thing. But the gospel does not make a man cheery all at once. It makes him serious at first, because he sees his sins, and has to face God about them. When believing and pardoned then comes the joy. To cleave to Jesus, and Jesus only, is joy unspeakable.

3. But, thirdly, "some fell among thorns." Who does this represent? Our Lord explains. "He also that received seed among the thorns, is he that beareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful" (vs. 22). True indeed is the word, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:23). Judas loved money, and sold Christ for it. Balaam "loved the wages of unrighteousness." Do not imitate these men. They both loved money, and thought little of Christ. This thorny-ground class is perhaps the largest of all. If you are still of it, may the Lord, in His mercy, arouse you ere it be too late. You will find this

class of hearers of the Word everywhere. They are as thick as the leaves of the forest. Time is too short, and eternity is too long for you to trifle with God's Christ, and His salvation any longer. Let not "cares," "riches," or "the lust of other things" rob you of God's salvation. The devil will use anything to effect this, anything under the sun just to keep Christ out of your heart. You have eternity before you; would to God that you realized it. Where will you spend eternity? Face this reality, I pray you.

4. But the fourth class is cheering to look at. "He that received seed into the good ground, is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit and bringeth forth some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." Everything turns on understanding the Word. I can understand no word in Scripture without divine apprehension. The object of the book of Proverbs is "to perceive the words of understanding" (1:2) as well as "to know wisdom and instruction." Again, "A man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels" (1:5). Again, "With all thy getting get understanding" (vs. 7). Are you resting on anything but Christ? If so, you have no understanding. Of the real Christian it is written, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 5:20). I wonder whether you have got this yet, my friend.

In Luke 8 we read that the seed which fell "on the good ground are they which, in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." Do you know what God says about the heart? "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). An honest heart is a heart that knows the truth about itself, viz., that it is utterly dishonest. A good heart is a heart that knows it is bad to the core. My dear friend, you need not be afraid to know what you are. When you have learned the truth as to yourself, you will find that God comes out and shows what He is, a living, loving, blessed Saviour. The Word tells you of your own ruin and guilt, on the one hand, and the love of God, and of Christ on the other hand. The gospel—the seed, the Word of life-shows how God has come out to meet the state and condition of the soul through the death of His own beloved Son. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of, all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,"— "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). When this is really believed the Word is kept, and the believer brings forth fruit with patience.

W. T. P. W.

The Gospel Messenger: Volume 12, Hundred Pence; or, do I Forgive?, The

"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have bad compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses." —Matthew 18:21-35.

IT is a great thing to see that the dealings of God with man today are in absolute grace, upon the ground of righteousness—grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life. There is no limit to God's forgiveness of a guilty sinner. Peter, having heard what the Lord has preached, says, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against a me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" I have no doubt that Peter thought he had done uncommonly well when he forgave seven times. The Lord replies, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." You ought to show in your ways with others how absolutely boundless is My grace. Forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven.

It is a very important principle which the Lord brings out here, viz.: —You will have to do with others as I have done with you, if you are to enjoy My grace. What has the gospel done? It tells you, if believing in Jesus, that God has forgiven you. You are a forgiven man. The man that knows the gospel has the happy sense in his soul that the Son of God has come, and that the work of redemption is accomplished, and hence he knows that he is saved. Yes, "The Son of Man is come to seek, and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). All are lost, but the Son of Man has come to save.

Now Peter was a converted man, and so are all who believe, they are on the same footing as Peter—eternally forgiven. We have received God's pardon on the ground of His Son's death, for the gospel comes out now upon the basis of the work of the Lord Jesus, by which God has been glorified, and all His claims fully met. Thus God is able to reveal His heart, and to come out to a world full of sinners, like you and me, and He can do it righteously. To lay this righteous basis, the Son of Man was judged by God. It cost the Lord Jesus His life; He had to give up everything. God comes out on that ground, and proclaims to the whole world the sweet news of the forgiveness of sins. I quite admit that an erring or backsliding Christian cannot get his sins forgiven till he confesses them; but grace anticipates this action in the case of a sinner, and proclaims pardon to him just where he is. Until touched by God's Spirit a sinner does not confess, because he does not know what grace is. What changes the whole moral being is the discovery that God is able righteously to forgive all your sins. He comes and whispers, "Thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. 9:2). The Lord Jesus commanded, "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem," the worst spot of all (Luke 24:46, 47).

The heart of the Lord yearns over you, my unsaved reader, and I am free to tell you that "through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things" (Acts 13:38, 39). We have all sinned against God, sinned deeply against Him; but before the day in which He has to judge that sin, He comes out in the activity of His grace, His Son dies for the sinner and his sins, atonement is made, and thus God is able by the Holy Ghost to proclaim the sweet news of pardon. The man that finds out this is arrested, and his heart is charmed to learn that God can forgive him. He finds then that all Christians are his brethren, and he has to walk in relationship to them, in the same spirit of grace which God has shown to him, otherwise he cannot enjoy that grace. It is this point which the

parable before us illustrates.

“Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.” One owed him ten thousand talents. He could not pay his lord, so his wife and children and all that he had were to be sold. It was an immense sum, and how could he pay it? It was something like two million pounds in our money. The parable has a meaning. I do not doubt that the servant, who owed the ten thousand talents, was the Jewish nation. They had broken the law, persecuted God’s prophets, slain the Messiah’s forerunner—John the Baptist, —and they were plotting to murder the Messiah, Himself. Oh, the fearfulness of their guilt! Could God forgive a nation as guilty as the Jew was? Yes, He could. You know what the prayer of the Lord Jesus was, when on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” That prayer converted the thief, I doubt not. But what was the answer of God to it? I believe the second and third chapters of Acts give us the answer. In chapter two, Peter says, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (vs. 38), and, again, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (3:19). He calls on them as a nation to repent. To the Jew first, and then to the Gentile, is God’s order, but the Jew would have neither. There was a provisional pardon presented to the nation through the preaching of Peter. It was a national pardon. It was really the forgiving of the servant that owed the ten thousand talents. When Peter preached the nation had consummated their guilt by slaying Jesus, their Messiah and King, whom God raised up, but they would not have Him. The apostles are put into prison in the fourth of Acts for preaching Christ, and the Jews sum up all their sins by slaying Stephen, and in his person resisting the Holy Ghost. All was over with Israel, and their future history is an interpretation of the parable.

No sooner has the forgiven debtor got outside than he meets one of his fellow-servants who owed him “a hundred pence.” “Pay me that thou owest,” is his urgent demand. His cry for patience is unheeded, and the luckless debtor is cast into prison till he should pay the debt. On hearing this his lord was wroth, and delivered the unfeeling servant to the tormentors, “till he should pay all that was due unto him.” What is the meaning of that? You know the Gentiles had treated the Jews very badly, but what was the treatment that the Jews had got at the hand of the Gentiles compared with the treatment that the blessed Son of God had received at the hand of the Jew. God had sent His own blessed Son, and they slew Him. The Gentile had opposed the Jew, but the Jew opposed God. “Pay me that thou owest” is what the Jews practically said to the Gentiles after God had provisionally forgiven them. The Jews would not have grace themselves, and would not let the Gentiles have it.

When Paul was converted it was specially to the Gentiles that he was sent (Acts 22:21). When he was telling the Jews about his conversion, and his commission to the Gentiles, they cried; “Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live” (vs. 22). The Jews would neither have the gospel themselves, nor would they let Paul carry it out to the Gentiles. This is really the wicked servant taking his fellow by the throat. Paul describes their actions fully in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16: “For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.”

The lord accosts the hard-hearted and unfeeling debtor as “Thou wicked servant,” and pronounces his sentence. Where is the Jew today? Cast off by God; cast out of Palestine. They have murdered their Messiah, and refused grace in every shape. As a consequence they have been cast off by God “till they pay all.” Will all be paid? Read Isaiah 40:1-2, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” That is a very striking scripture. By and by the Jews will wake up to find who has paid their debt, the blessed Lord Jesus Christ Himself. They have received double from God’s hand in chastisement, and then Christ becomes their Saviour, because He has borne the sins of His people. He bore their iniquity. The Scripture is exceedingly plain. God has been wroth with Israel and delivered them to the tormentors, till they should pay all that was due.

It is important to see that our Lord then passes on to say, “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses.” Now, beloved friend, I believe this to be a principle of immense importance. I frequently find souls that have not peace, and people that say they are anxious to be saved, yet they never seem to get on. What is the reason of it? I believe there is some hidden root that has never been laid bare before God. Some secret sin, or personal feeling. If this is the case, that soul never really knows the Lord’s forgiveness. I find many Christians who are not happy. They do not enjoy the Father’s love. Why? Somebody hurt them, and they have a grudge against that one. Such souls will never enjoy the Lord’s forgiveness. To enjoy His forgiveness I must act similarly towards others. “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mark 11:25). It is a vital principle. If I have a grudge against another, I cannot get on. I am perfectly certain that the want of real peace and Holy Ghost joy among the people of the Lord often depends on this matter. The application to you and me is, I believe, more important than we have thought. How often must I forgive my brother? Till seventy times seven. How has the Lord forgiven us? Absolutely. We must act on the same lines to others if we would enjoy His grace.

But probably you say, How can I get forgiveness? Well, the gospel comes out to you and proclaims forgiveness through faith in Jesus’ name. You receive that forgiveness, as a sinner in your sins, and start on your way to glory. But, you say, What about my sins day by day? There must be confession to the Father (see 1 John 1:9). There is where you start. If you through grace are led to believe in God’s dear Son, you will come under the benefit of all the work that He has done, and He cleanses you from every sin. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). A perfectionist says that, and only shows that he is deceived. But, you say, I thought a Christian was a person who did not sin. Well, he ought not to sin, but he has the flesh in him. It is folly, in fact it is a delusion of the devil, to say we have no sin in us. The flesh is still in us, and it is nothing but sin. If we let the flesh act and thus sin, we have to confess to the Father. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (vs. 9). That is an erring Christian’s resource. If as a child I find I have sinned, what must I do? Go to the Father, and simply confess my sin, and get forgiveness, not as a lost sinner, but as a child. He is faithful and just to the One who has died. All my sins were in the future when Christ died on the cross. If you are in a backsliding state owing to unjudged flesh, and consequent sins, you will never get right until you have confessed them. You will never get clear of the cloud your sin has brought in till you go to God and make a clean breast of all.

The Lord Jesus Christ made propitiation when He bore our sins, and now He is an advocate on high. Christ died to make me clean, and He lives to keep me clean. If I have sinned the Spirit will touch my conscience. When I have confessed, God forgives, communion is restored, and I again get the joy of the Father’s love. To live in its enjoyment, however, I must forgive others, as I have been forgiven-yea, even “till seventy

times seven.”

W. T. P. W.

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