Matthew - Commentaries by William John Hocking

The Institution of the Lord's Supper, Lord's Supper: 2. As Recorded in the Gospels, The Institution of the

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He had come into the world to inhabit the body prepared for Him and to taste the vicissitudes of life among men, and now He had come near to the accomplishment of the work given Him to do. He could bless God that it was so. Presently He would wrestle in agony in the garden of Gethsemane with the power of darkness in full view. Wrath was before Him in vision, and then He would struggle, as it were, at the prospect which was so abhorrent to His holiness. Here at the table, He was about to say, “This is my body.” The joy that was before Him of having accomplished the Father's will, and of having rescued from terrible destruction myriads of the souls of men, filled Him with delight, and He looked up and blessed, and He broke the bread and passed it to them.

Not that He partook of it Himself. He desired to eat the Passover with them before He suffered, but this Supper was something new and different. This was something for them to do for His sake. This was to be a memorial for them. Did He Himself require a memorial? Does He need some tangible token to keep us before His heart? some memorial to bring us to His remembrance? Never; our names are engraved upon the palms of His hands, but do we not forget? Do we not often need reminding? He knew our weakness, and He took the bread, and said, “Take eat, this is my body.” And by these simple words He joined us up, so to speak, with Himself in His great work at Calvary, and in its results. It is as if He said, ‘Make this your own, let this truth be yours, let it be within you, let it be assimilated in your very being; take, eat.'

Hence it is, beloved friends, that we come so close to the blessed person of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Supper. “This is my body,” are the Lord's words. There is no need, however, for fanciful notions with regard to the bread. Let us be clear that the material is bread, and that it remains bread. He said, “This is my body,” using, of course, a figure of speech, such as was often upon His lips. He spake in the manner of that nation to whom He came. When He said “This is my body,” He thereby attached a special significance to the loaf. This, and nothing else, was to be the emblem which should set forth His body, and should for this reason recall to their minds His body.

THE BREAD A MEMORIAL

Let us be clear with regard to another point. When the Lord said, “This is my body,” He held the bread in His hands, and handed it to them. He handed it to them to eat. But He was still there before their eyes. He administered, if we may use that technical term, the bread before them. But He was distinct from it Himself. The bread was a memorial for them, and given to them by the Lord, He being separate from the bread which was and is emblematical of the body in which He suffered and completed the work of atonement. This feature of the Supper is ever true, and is an important one for faith to realize. He Himself, the living glorious Lord, the One into whose hands all things are now given, is present to preside at the feast, to superintend, if He will be allowed to do so, on the occasion. But He is separate from that which is His memorial. The living Lord conducts us in our remembrance of the Christ who died.

There is a reason I have for referring to this distinction now. I have found that some persons regard the Lord's Supper as if it were a means of causing them to remember someone they have in some measure forgotten during the previous week. For six days, or some part of the six days, they have been so busy with other things that the Lord has been out of their thoughts. The memorial is valued because it brings Him back to mind. This is a false view of the Lord's Supper. The Supper is to remember the Lord as He was, in His sufferings and in His death. It is a shame that any Christian should require something to cause him to remember the Lord as He is, in the glory. Can it be that we are so far removed from the sense of the living joy of knowing Christ Himself that He passes out of our hearts, and we need something visible, like the breaking of bread, to bring Him to our minds? We do not assemble to remember Christ the glorified Christ, we come to remember the One who died. There is but One adorable Person, of course. Jesus Christ, who is on high is the same Jesus who was crucified, but we meet to go back to the past. And the Spirit uses that marvelous faculty of memory which we possess, the power we have of making yesterday live again, so that the events of long ago become as fresh as ever in our hearts. We know we all have that power in some degree, and this power of remembrance is turned to account by the Spirit of God in connection with the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is something further stated about the bread, which is His body—which, as Luke says, “is given for you.” If you compare the accounts carefully in the three Gospels (which it is always profitable to do), you will find that there are some words in Luke which are not in Matthew or Mark. Luke adds just those words which lay hold of our hearts, and draw us into dose communion with the Master Himself. “This is my body, which is given for you,” and as He said this He could apply the words personally to any one of them that sat at the table. “It is given for you.” ‘For me,' says Peter, ‘For me,' says James. They could each and all respond thus and say, ‘It is given for me.'

The Lord meant to quicken the pulsation of their hearts towards Himself. He wanted to draw to Him the devotion of their souls, as they should realize that the sufferings through which His holy body would pass would be on their account. The great work would be for their benefit and blessing. I know therein was the accomplishment of the will of God; I know the death of Christ has very wide-reaching results. We shall never measure it 'properly,' nor understand it fully. But at the Lord's table, while there may be loftier thoughts, is there anything which can touch our hearts more deeply than the remembrance that He suffered for me? He died for me. “My body is given for you,” He says. The whole man was given. The blessed Person who surrendered Himself as an offering, a sacrifice, held nothing back. Such is the sacrifice the Lord loves—the whole burnt-offering, everything completely rendered to God. “This is my body, which is given for you.”

THE CUP AFTER SUPPER

But the Supper was not confined to the loaf only. Subsequently the cup was given also. He took the cup and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, “Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the new testament.” In these words the Lord shows us unmistakably that the particular event in His history to be remembered on these occasions is His death, because there were the two elements. There was the bread, and there was the wine. The bread was the body, and the wine the blood. Separate as they were in that emblematical form, they truly set forth thereby the

death of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the body, as we know, the blood is the life. So it is expressed throughout the Old Testament. But when blood is seen distinct, it is the witness of death. So it came about with our Lord historically, for we read, the soldier came with a spear, and pierced His side, after He had delivered up His spirit. Forthwith there came out blood and water. This token of death was registered upon earth as evidence that the great work of life-giving had been accomplished. The supper reminds us that there was veritable death in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we think that Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord: did indeed taste death, bowing to the king of terrors, who brings paleness to the cheeks and tremors to the hearts of multitudes of men, we are filled again and again with amazement. The Lord tasted death, and yet He had displayed such power over death, making the grave yield up its victims, young and old. He could speak, and the dead lived again. Yet now He says to the apostles, “This is my body; this is my blood.”

How full of wonder must have been the hearts of those men as they pondered over these words. What did the Master mean? It was not the first time He had spoken of giving them His flesh to eat. He had often spoken of His death. It was now come very near at hand. “This is my body which is given for you.” There is no other way of life for you; it must be this way of death for me. In my life, in my incarnation, I am altogether separate from you. It is only through my death that you can participate. Only thus can you be blessed; hence I give my body and shed my blood for you. The Incarnate Son was here in this world, but His death was necessary for man's salvation. God had said, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Here then was pictured the sinless One giving His life and going down into death for the blessing of those who were around Him, and. of those who should believe on Him through them. He took the cup, and gave thanks, and they might all drink of it. Judas was not there. Jesus had washed Judas' feet with water, but his heart was left unclean. What would be the use of his eating and drinking with an unclean heart? It is worse than useless to drink the cup if the heart is estranged from the Lord. The hearts of the eleven were true to Him, and He invited them to take and drink. ‘You can share, you can participate. Drink ye all of it.' Moreover, the Lord added, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood,” speaking of that new covenant of which the prophets had foretold, of the covenant which would be yet made with the house of Israel and Judah and which will be seen in all its glory in days yet to come. But the blood, as the basis of that covenant, was about to be shed, and the cup is the memorial of it.

SINS FORGIVEN. CHRIST REMEMBERED

“This is my blood which is shed for you for the remission of sins.” You observe the Lord's Supper is not a place where the children of God come together to remember their sins. Their sins are remitted. The institutions of the law differed in this respect. When the sacrifices were offered of old, there was a remembrance made of sins every year on the day of atonement. But believers are not invited to the Lord's Supper to remember their sins. They come to remember Him who died, having borne their sins in His own body. It is not that we are not conscious of having sinned—for such a person there could be no supper in its true sense. The supper is for those for whom Christ shed His blood that their sins might be forgiven. Jesus, looking upon the company in the upper room, saw the indelible marks of disfigurement that sin had wrought in their moral characters. They were clean by His word, but He came not by water only, but by water and blood, and He was about to shed His blood for the remission of their sins. So when we drink the cup, we are reminded of His blood shed, and we are then indeed on holy ground. We are together in close fellowship with our Lord and Savior. Hence we cannot but think what it is that has brought us there so near to Him.

The disciples did not enter into the true character of the cup. They could not anticipate the value of the blood of Christ to them. But we know it. Why is it we come together? To remember the Lord in His death. Being there, the cup brings before us that precious blood which has cleansed us from all sin, and made us suitable to sit in the presence of the Lord. Judas had gone out, but Peter and James and John and others remained, and they were made the recipients of this communication from the Lord, in spite of the activities of Satan, and the weakness of the flesh. And why is it they were there? Why is it they were maintained in such hallowed society at such a time? Because of the precious blood of Christ about to be shed that their sins might be removed.

Oh, beloved friends, how wonderful this theme is for our meditation when we are together to remember the Lord Jesus Christ! Can it be possible that we appear on such occasions to lack subjects for thought and worship? Can it be that the trivial happenings of the past week occupy our hearts, and obliterate every holy memory of Christ and His passion and death? Is there not enough in the death of Christ to engage our hearts for one brief hour? Do we chafe because there is a long protracted silence? Is there not sufficient love and interest in our individual hearts to cause us to be absorbed with the Lord Jesus and what He suffered for us? Do we find it irksome because there is no audible voice? It is a happy thing when a man breaks the silence by the Spirit of God, expressing what is on the hearts of all, but it is happy also, when there is no voice, to recognize the supremacy and sufficiency of the Lord Himself.

Beloved friends, let us think again of the night of the institution. Here is the Lord of glory, here in this world, where for three years He! labored in active ministry. He is about to die. He gathers around Him just before He leaves the world eleven men out of the millions of the world's inhabitants—eleven men who, because of previous training, might at least have been expected to enter into what was before Him. But there was not one who rose to the real facts of what was before the Lord. They were all very far away in spirit from the burden of His heart at that time. Is there not still an astonishing lack of interest, in the death of Christ? Out of all the millions upon the face of the globe at the present time how many are there who meet together habitually for the sole purpose of fulfilling the Lord's word: “This do in remembrance of me"? They are very few, comparatively, who show any regard for His will in this respect.

Do we not care for His death? Did He anywhere prove His love for us as He did upon the cross? Shall we tire of this holy theme? Is once a week too often to remember Him? Oh, beloved friends, what must the indifference of His own have been to the Lord on the night when He was betrayed? What, then, is it now that so many can be indifferent, careless, regardless of the memorial of that infinite work which cost Him so much to accomplish?

We can, of course, think of the Lord at any time, and in any place, but we ought to have the Lord's words written upon our hearts, “This do in remembrance of me.” The remembrance is a question of doing. It is not a sacrifice to be offered, but it is an act to be performed. He has definitely said this, and it is not for us to take away from what He has said. “This do in remembrance of me.” ‘I shall leave this world that does not want Me. I shall return to the place I had with the Father before the worlds were. I want you to raise a memorial to My death here in this world, not in marble, not in costly architecture, not in anything which can be measured by the riches of this world, but by a simple act, of no external value in itself, by nothing impressive in the nature of its ceremony. Do this in remembrance of Me. I call for this act of obedience on your part.'

Beloved friends, unless we eat the bread and drink the cup, we cannot “do this” in remembrance of Him. You may make excuses, you may raise objections and difficulties, but you cannot carry out the word unless you eat the Supper. His words are simple and easy of understanding, as we have reiterated this evening, and because they are simple, their claim is irresistible. The Lord does not ask us to make a great sacrifice, but He does ask us to eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of Him. Let your whole heart and. soul ever be in the observance of His will. Let all that is true and spiritual and begotten of God within you be concentrated upon the performance of this act. If we honor Him, He will honor us. If we are true to Him, He will be—I was about to say, true to us, but He is always true to us whatever we may be. If we deny Him, He is still faithful which is all the greater reason why we should so far as in us lies, carry out this word of our Lord, laid by Him upon the loyal hearts of those who love Him, and who follow His footsteps through this world.

W. J. H.

(Continued from page 196)

The Institution of the Lord's Supper, Lord's Supper: 1. As Recorded in the Gospels, The Institution of the

Notes of an Address on Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19, 20

It is a striking circumstance that in the New Testament we have very few ordinances of any sort prescribed for the believer. We have baptism, and we have the Lord's Supper, but nothing besides. This absence of ritual is in great contrast with the religion of the Jews. Under the Mosaic Law, there were many sacrifices to be offered daily, and throughout each day, and these sacrifices were of many kinds. There was a gorgeous and ornate building in which men were to worship. There were priests specially delegated for the purpose of ministering in the holy things and in the holy place and in the various holy services. There were also the Levites with definite duties in the Temple precincts; there was in short a great host of rites and ceremonies to be performed. But when we come to the New Testament, we find that this order of things disappears, and that worship in spirit and in truth takes the place of worship by rote. The Lord's Supper is mentioned definitely in a few places only, but always in the simplest language, while the service itself is distinguished by its simplicity. There is nothing difficult in its observance. There is nothing costly in the bread and the wine which constitute the Supper. They are just inexpensive articles within the reach of all. There is no priesthood, as distinct from assembly, authorized for its administration; and the prescribed ritual, if we may call it so, is very simple indeed.

CHRIST HIMSELF—NOT SHADOWS OF HIM

Why is there this striking contrast? There may be many reasons, but I would like this evening to mention only one, which I think may be sufficient for the occasion. Under the law, the sacrifices and 'the services of the priesthood all pointed down the Old Testament ages to One who was coming, and who was to do the great and sufficient work of making an end of sins and of introducing righteousness. But in the New Testament, we find that Person has made His advent into the world, and has accomplished the work of redemption. Moreover, He makes His presence known and felt in connection with this simple service. And when you have the substance, will you care for the shadow? When you have the antitype, where is the need for the type? The Lord's Supper brings the hearts of the children of God into close and living association with the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and having Him, all legal symbolism is superseded, as the Epistle to the Hebrews shows in great detail. It is the Lord, then, who gives the Supper its essential character, and therefore He is able to make His own people recognize His presence under the most adverse and difficult circumstances. They may be scattered and separated, they may be persecuted, but wheresoever they may be in the wide world, let them only be gathered to His name, let them but be desirous to “do this in remembrance” of Him, and He is there in the midst; and His presence amply compensates for every other disability. The presence of Christ Himself enables the believer to rise superior over all outward circumstances, whatever they may be.

I know that eating the Supper is not individual communion, and we will, perhaps, touch upon that part of the subject later. But it should be clearly understood by all that no person can properly enter into the meaning of the Lord's Supper, and that no Christian can experience the blessed fullness and joy of its observance apart from the recognition of the presence of Christ Himself, verily in the midst according to His word, not cognizant to the senses, it is true, but cognizant in spite of the senses. Oftentimes there are matters arising in connection with the observance of the Lord's Supper which may tend to distract or turn away the heart and the thought from the subject of the moment, but when Christ's presence is realized all these things lose their influence, and dwarf into their proper insignificance.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE INSTITUTION

It is interesting to look at the institution of this Supper with particular reference to the circumstances under which it was inaugurated. This will help us, I think to gain a view, a right view, of this memorial and of its spiritual import. It was upon the eve of the great climax (shall I say?) in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ that this Supper was instituted. He had been in this world, the Son incarnate, passing through its varied scenes, the wonder of the angels, and the scorn of men. What that passage through this world meant to Him we shall never know. But there was always before Him during His ministry that crisis to which He alludes as His “hour.” There was an hour, a fixed moment, to which He was advancing. Everything concerning Him had been pre-arranged; all the events were determined beforehand, and He knew the future. He was never taken by surprise, as we are, but consciously facing the difficulties, the sorrows, the agonies of Calvary, He went forward, unchanged in heart and purpose and action by what He knew was coming. His love never diminished in the slightest; His works of mercy were never left undone because of the greater work of atonement before Him, but with imperturbable grace He proceeded continuously day after day, night after night, in pursuance of His lowly service. His days were filled with beautiful expressions of heavenly love in this dark and evil world, set forth for man's faith and knowledge.

But when He drew near to Calvary, He was in the very shadows of that oppressive darkness which enveloped Him on the cross. And it was on the eve of His departure from this world that He instituted this Supper. On the passover night itself, on that night so full, too, of events of universal importance, He instituted this Supper. You will remember that He was together with His disciples in the upper room expressly to keep the passover supper. The company was Jesus and the twelve. They were twelve distinguished men, but distinguished in a special manner. They had been called out to be His apostles, His beloved followers and His witnesses. They were selected to see more of His face than any in the world besides, to hear more of His words than others, and to be admitted by Him into scenes of closest intimacy.

DISCIPLES CONTENDING FOR PRECEDENCE

The disciples were around the table, and Jesus at the head, looking upon them, as, indeed, He is looking now upon us, He saw all that was within them, and Scripture records that during that memorable night they showed that they were men of like passions with ourselves—changeable, unreliable, sometimes impulsive in love and earnest zeal, and at other times carried away by foolish and wicked thoughts. The disciples should have known what was before their Master. Only a few days previous Jesus had said to the twelve, “We go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him unto the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify” (Matthew 20:17-19). That the Jews and Gentiles would unite in His crucifixion and death, He told them on three occasions. You would have thought that their interest and expectation of these events: would have been quickened on that night—the passover night. What did the blood of the lamb signify? Did it not recall the hour of judgment and death passed long ago in Egypt? Had they considered the Lord's words seriously, would they not have entered that room with solemn hearts and chastened spirits? Would they not have been filled with a foreboding sense of sorrow and pain before their beloved Master? We find, however, that they were engaged in petty quarrels, struggling among themselves as to who should be greatest amongst them. Observing, I suppose, the disciple whom Jesus loved taking the place nearest to Him, their jealousy was aroused. Why should he be there? Why not they?

What was this painful altercation to our Lord? He was contemplating the morrow when He would bear their sins in His own body on the tree—just such sins as these. They could not understand His loving purpose. They were unable to enter into the grief before Him. Such lack of spiritual feeling was the sorrowful result after three years' service with them. There was for Him no comforter, no sympathizer, none that cared. Do not let us judge them too harshly; let us rather judge ourselves. Are we never guilty of the indulgence of unworthy thoughts at the table of the Lord? In the most solemn moments, when the Spirit of God is making to live again before us the hour of suffering at Calvary, thoughts may even then arise in our hearts, altogether out of harmony with the subject of the Spirit of God. We must know that we ought to bow our heads in shame when our Lord looks round upon us as we are eating His Supper, because things are sometimes in our hearts which ought never to be there at such a holy season.

THE SERVICE OF JESUS AT THE SUPPER

Jesus rose from the table, He laid aside His garments, He girded Himself with a towel, knowing, as the beloved apostle said, that the Father had given all things into His hands, that He had come from God, and was going to God. He then went round as the servant of them all to wash their feet. Was not this a sight to move their hearts? The Lord of glory, whom angels delighted to serve, was there meekly serving twelve men of humble birth—Peter, James, John, and Judas too. The Son of God had come down to serve them all! “I am among you as He that serveth.” The word, the act, form a rebuke for us all. Let us remember that on no occasion in our spiritual experience do we see the glory of humility exhibited more than at the Lord's Supper. That loaf, that wine—what do they tell us? Of the One who came down from above to serve, of the One who did serve in life and death; of the One who went under the cloud of wrath to serve, and to the death of the cross and into the grave to serve. Let us, then, never be ashamed to serve this Christ, for has He not served us, even to the death of shame?

JESUS AND JUDAS

All these circumstances are associated with the institution of the Supper, which forms a contrast in its calm beauty with what was around Him in Jerusalem, and what was before Him on the morrow. In the little company itself there was willfulness as well as weakness. One was altogether divided in interests from the Lord. For Judas was there. “Ye are clean,” says the Lord, “but not all.” In the little circle, there was this spectacle of direct apostasy before the eyes of our Lord. This man had been able to withstand the benign rays of heavenly glory shed directly upon him for three years. His heart was not softened by the ministry of grace, but hardened. The love of Jesus had never penetrated his soul. It had, on the contrary, become a stronghold of sin, of shameful deeds, of Satan himself. The betrayal was an exhibition of the power of Satan, overcoming one in that small apostolic band. The Lord appealed to the traitor. He gave him the sop, and Judas took it, but withstood the overture. All the love of Christ was thrown away upon him; his soul was completely devastated and ruined. “That thou doest,” the Lord said, “do quickly.” Then he arose from the table and went out, and Scripture adds, “it was night.” He went out into the blackness of night's darkness to do a deed of blacker darkness. Judas was at the table, but went out from the presence of the Lord, to go to his own place. He was not “clean,” as the Lord had said.

But he having gone, the Lord, as they were eating, took bread and the wine, and instituted the Supper. This done, He went on to speak those valedictory words we have, and which we love so much, in the Gospel of John. These discourses speak, not of the forgetfulness on the part of the disciples, not of the evil within them, but to their hearts which were full of love for Him, and of sorrow, because He was about to leave them. He knew that they truly loved Him; He knew that in spirit they were prepared to renounce everything for Him. He knew that they were exposed to danger, and that they were feeble in action but fearless in spirit. He said 'I am going away. You are filled with sorrow. I know that you love Me. I know that you will lament when I am gone from you, but I will come to you again.' So He brightened the future for them by the promise of His return, and thus buoyed them up with the glorious hope of His returning, having first taught them the remembrance of Himself in the Supper.

All these circumstances tend to give a special character to the Supper of the Lord. They all combine in an appeal to our affections that we should value its observance. There is no engagement more solemn or serious, and nothing more blessed as a spiritual occupation. I do not know what we can do or say that calls for more earnest examination of our own hearts than the participation in this feast. Yet the service is simple and accessible, and, while we are assured of the Lord's presence, there are no terrors set before us as there were at Sinai—no clouds of darkness, no thunderings or lightnings. On the contrary, we have the sweet and loving invitation of the Lord Himself, “This do in remembrance of me.”

THE LORD TOOK BREAD AND BLESSED

Now let us notice for a little the actual institution of the Supper by our Lord. The details are all familiar to us who are present, no doubt. While the disciples were eating, the Lord took bread. This act was not associated with the ritual of the passover supper; it was an act quite separate, of course, and quite distinct from it. The passover supper was kept, the ceremony was maintained in the prescribed form, and then the Lord instituted a new Supper, and one that would supersede it, because the passover was about to be fulfilled by the sacrifice of our Lord Himself, and having been fulfilled, it disappears, as it were, from the round of appointed feasts.

The Lord took of the bread that was before Him, and He blessed. We do not read that He blessed it. You will observe that the word “it” is in italics in our version, and therefore the significance is not that He took a piece of bread, and made it something else. He did not transform it. He blessed. He blessed God. He recognized the Giver. His heart went up, as He loved it should, in thanksgiving to Him that was above. No occasion too great, none too small, for each and all things He would bless, and would give thanks. If you compare the account in Luke with those in Mark and Matthew, You will find that in Luke the parallel words are, “When He had given thanks.” Blessing, therefore, is equivalent to giving thanks. There is no support at all in Scripture for the notion that the bread mysteriously and wonderfully became something different from what it was before.

The Lord blessed, as we find He did on other occasions. It was a relief to Him to look upwards. He could find nothing of joy in what was around Him, but He could turn to God, and to the joy set before Him. His link with the Father was close, His fellowship was intimate and precious. It was His habit to look up and give thanks.

There is no doubt that there is more involved in the act than the mere giving of thanks for the reception of the bread. There was about to be sacrifice and bloodshedding, and both were before the holy soul of our Lord. This bread was to be His body. It had long been before Him to do this deed of redeeming love.

(To be continued)

Bible Treasury: Volume N10, Denying Self and Taking the Cross

Notes of an Address on Matthew 16:24

I should like to call your attention this evening to one of the verses we have now read (Matt. 16:13-24): “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

In considering this verse, containing., as it does, the direct words of our Lord Jesus Christ, I think it would be well for us to be clear that, so far as the Scriptures record, we never find that the Lord Jesus Christ invited men to come after Him unless they first of all had come to Him. This may seem a very small and unimportant distinction, but, in point of fact it involves a very great principle.

To come after Jesus is in itself an arduous task from which any man might well shrink who knows not the Master. It is the knowledge of the gracious and glorious person of the Lord Jesus Christ which awakens the sincere and whole-hearted response that men ought to make to His call to discipleship. But there are degrees and measures in the knowledge of Christ. There are many persons who know something of our Lord Jesus, who have answered His invitation and come to Him in their distress and weariness and penitence, and have found rest in Him and peace for their conscience; but yet they have never followed Him. They have been content, as it were, to know Him from afar. Such Christians, sad to say, count absolutely nothing in the world in the matter of witness, of effective testimony for the One whom they profess to love.

I heard during this past week from a Christian man what illustrates this. He is at the present moment in training in the Army. He, I know, is bold and forward to testify, when occasion offers, for his Master, but among all the recruits with whom he is associated he and one other are the only ones that take a pronounced and definite stand, firm and true for Christ. The majority are those who will listen attentively to the words of the gospel, who make a general profession of following Him, and who, if pressed to a confession, will vow that they do really believe in Him; but when it comes to standing up for Christ in the midst of a company of ungodly men, when it comes to putting on a firm front and confessing the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, their faith cannot carry them to such a pitch. Their courage fails to rise and face the jeers and persecution of the world. To such the Lord calls in the words of our text, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.”

Why is it that men and women who have rested their souls for all eternity upon Jesus Christ, and upon His work at Calvary's cross, and who do, in the inner recesses of their hearts, love Him—why is it that they cannot speak out for Him when His name is abused, when evil things are said against Him, in Whom they are trusting for salvation? Why is it that at such times they seem dumb? Is there nothing within their hearts that prompts them to say something, and do something for Him, that will show that they are following after Him, and are not, like the rest of men, carried along by the world and in the ways of the world? The answer must surely be that they have not yet learned the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord.

But let me repeat, it is necessary first of all to come to Him. The Lord said, “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest". Now we know that deep down in the hearts of men and women there is a sense of something wrong there, and that wrong cannot be set right except by Him. They come to Him in their several ways—in their feebleness, in their sorrow and in their penitence; and they find Him true to His word, ready to receive them and to speak peace to their guilt-stricken hearts. Oh, it is a great day when a man goes in his sins to the feet of the Savior!

Was it not a great day in the life of the woman of Capernaum when Jesus was sitting at the table of Simon the Pharisee and she came to Him in all her need? She came because she was sinful, and she came to the feet of Jesus seeking rest for her accusing conscience. She could find a refuge nowhere else, and she dared the power of the world, as represented by the surly Pharisee, to come to Him whom she believed to be the Savior of sinners. She wept over His feet, feeling afresh the sin of her soul, and she waited at His feet until she had His word: “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.” And she went away freed and forgiven. It was a great day for her soul. It was a day that could never be matched in her history. She had come to Jesus. The poor woman, in all her grief and in her inability to cleanse the fountain of evil within her heart, came to Him, the fountain of light, in order to be cleansed. And she was cleansed.

This was a wonderful episode in her life, as it is in the life of every one who comes as she did; but, beloved friends, let us face another fact. We must understand that conversion does not comprise the whole of a man's Christian life. I admit it is the most important point in a man's history when he turns from the broad way that leads to destruction into the narrow way that leads to life, but we must remember that the career of a follower of Christ is not a gate, but away. When you enter that narrow way, having passed through the Door, which is Christ, what do you find throughout that narrow way? You find Christ who is Your Master and Lord. Recollect His words to the disciples of old and to you: “I

am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me."'

Beloved friends, the Lord Jesus Christ, in this verse I am pressing upon you, calls to those who have already come to Him, who know already something of the sweetness of His love and His grace, and He calls such to come after Him. And who is it calling for volunteers? It is the blessed Savior and Lord come down from heaven, walking through this world. Only a few heeded His call. Multitudes of men in the world of that day scorned. and despised the Nazarene. He had some followers it is true; a few women also here and there believed on Him. Crowds came to be healed, but how many were with Him as He traversed Galilee and Judea? Oh, such a little company. Why was this? Because the mass did not discern the beauty that was in Him. They saw not the glory of His Person, and yet, if they would, they might have seen it. If they had only considered His wonderful deeds and utterances, they might have learned sufficient of the glories of His Person to have renounced self and the world for His sake.

Now, by way of illustration, let us think of the man spoken of in the immediate context—Simon Peter. Why was it that he was commissioned to hold the keys of the kingdom of heaven? You will remember, perhaps, the first interview Peter had with our Lord Jesus Christ, as it is given us in the first chapter of John's Gospel. There we are told how he came to Jesus at the invitation of his brother Andrew. And he came, why? His brother said, Come to Jesus. We have found Him! He is the Messiah! He is the Christ! He is the One of whom all the prophets have spoken. He is the One whom all the types foreshadowed and foretold.

So Peter came to Jesus. Jesus knew him and welcomed him. Simon had learned something concerning the Person whom he found. The One to whom he had come was not merely Jesus of Nazareth; He was the Messiah of Israel; He was Jehovah's Anointed who should come into the world and be a king on David's throne.

Now it is clear the lessons Simon Peter learned that day prepared him to answer the subsequent call of Jesus. Some little time after, when Peter was on the shore of the lake of Galilee, a voice fell upon his ears, “Follow Me.” He followed Him. Why? Because he knew it was not just an earthly voice that called to him. It was the voice of the Messiah. It was the voice of the Christ, the Son of the living God. It was the voice of One who had come down from heaven to seek and to save the lost. Heaven was in that voice. Boats and nets were not worth considering. Jesus was worth more than them all. Beloved friends, do you know what it is to have left all and to be following Jesus?

In contrast with Simon Peter, there was another man whom you know from the Gospels. I mean a young ruler who came to Jesus and said: “What must I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered, “Go, sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” That was a bargain. But the Lord added, “Come, follow me.” Here was the test. The man looked at Him, the Prophet, whom all Galilee and Judaea despised. Leave my wealth and possessions! Leave my rites and ceremonies! Leave my religion and my friends, and follow this Nazarene! There was no beauty in Him that he should desire Him. He could inquire of Jesus as a Teacher, but he would not follow Him as Master. The call of the Lord Jesus to him was in vain: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

It is the great secret of power in Christian life, beloved friends, to love and adore the glorious Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. You may make the mistake most easily of slighting Him if you listen to the promptings of your own heart, if you are carried away by the formalities of religion. You may think of Jesus as only a name, just as much and no more to you than an historical name, with no living person behind it. The great secret of strength is to find out the power behind the name of Jesus.

There was a man in Jerusalem who thought that Jesus was one of those deceivers who had gone about seeking to draw away true men after him; and he did all he could to stamp out that name, to eradicate the desire from men's hearts to follow Jesus. That man's whole life was suddenly revolutionized. How was this? How was Saul of Tarsus converted? How was he turned from being a hot-brained persecutor, to be a meek follower of the Nazarene? It was because he saw the heavenly glory of Jesus.

On his way to Damascus, suddenly from heaven at noonday, shining brighter than the Syrian sun, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ shone down upon this man. He was stricken to the dust, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Me, by Whom all things consist, whether thrones, dominions, principalities or powers! Me, before Whom all angels bow! Saul found that he, a puny man upon the earth, was persecuting the One who was in the Shekinah of glory.

Beloved friends, are there not tens of thousands of men who are turning their faces away from God? They go about their business day by day as if there was no God, and perhaps they attack the book that tells of Him, fighting in this way against Him that sits in the heavens. Perhaps there may be none such in this audience to-night. But I ask you, one and all, what is Jesus in your life?

To the proud man there prone in the dust, confused and desolate, came the word; “I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest.” He who was despised on the earth was magnified in the heavens. The same appeal is made to you, my hearer. Are you on the side of earth, or on the side of heaven? Are you on the side of those that nailed Jesus of Nazareth to the cross, or are you on the side of God who has exalted Him? Will you not come after Him? He does not force you to be His disciple.

Some people say thoughtlessly, “I should like to follow Him,” just as that man who said, “Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.” But Jesus spoke to this man. It was as if He said, Do you know what you are saying? Do you know why it is you are so ready to come? “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” Will you follow the Homeless Stranger?

God in His word sets before your view the glorious Person of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, once crucified on Calvary, now enthroned in glory, and He seeks the devotion of your life. He wants a complete and devoted response from your heart to the claims of His Son. If He has forgiven your sins, if He has made your future bright with the hope of His coming, is it not right that you should be for Him here in this world? The world is against Christ, and the man who comes to the Lord Jesus Christ should not stoop to serve the world.

But see what the Lord asks the man to do who comes after Him. “Let him deny himself.” When you have come to Christ, and have perhaps passed the first flush of the joy and rapture of knowing that all your sins are forgiven, that you have been accepted, and that, vile and sinful as you were, the Lord received you, and showered upon you the blessings of His love and His grace: I say, when the joy of this experience has for a moment subsided, then it is that many a person finds out, to his surprise, that he has a traitor within his own heart, that he has a foe within himself, and that he has within him what rises up day by day to impede his walk and service for the Lord Jesus Christ. The position then is that there is a voice within him that calls him to serve and follow Jesus Christ, and there is another voice which says, ‘Take your ease. All is

right with you for the heaven to come. You have eternal life. Rest on your oars. Do not struggle. What need to make such efforts? All will come right in the end. Take your ease.' Need I say what result invariably follows unwatchfulness? The man who does not watch and pray is the man who falls into temptation. He succumbs, and what a spectacle such a failure is? That is a man who has rested upon Christ, and there he is, back in the mire, so to speak.

Beloved friends, I am referring to-night to facts which come to view in the professing life of men and women on our right hand and on our left, and why is it so? Why is it? Because they do not in self-denial follow the One that is the Lord Jesus Christ. He saw the great need for a continuous habit of self-denial Some people have one week a year for this purpose, and let the other weeks of the year go. If you look at the parallel passage in the Gospel of Luke, you will see that the Lord has fixed the time: “daily.”

Let us then, who follow Christ, deny ourselves. The word means to say “No,” to refuse. We read that when Moses came of age he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. The term used is precisely the one we have here. Moses denied himself and resisted the alluring prospect. He would not sit on the throne of that despot who was crushing the people of God in horrible slavery. He would be on the side of God, and he denied himself the throne of the world's empire. He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and set aside the pleasures of sin, which were for a season.

We naturally like to be on the side of popular opinion. There is many a person to-day who is meddling with the things of this world just because he will not deny himself. A tempting offer comes from a worldly quarter: the desire for rest and ease from Christian endeavour arises. He is unable to say ‘No.' Lethargy and indifference have come over him, and Satan takes him at a disadvantage.

Remember, that when the Lord Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane Himself to pray, He told His disciples that they ought to pray, lest they entered into temptation. Separated from the apostles, you see the Blessed Lord there left alone to visions of Calvary, of the power of Satan, and of all the power of the world rising up against Him. What does He say, “Father, if Thou be willing let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done.” He rises strengthened. Again the supplication is repeated. But what of His disciples? No power received, for there was no intercession on their part, no denying themselves on that last night. And when those who apprehended their blessed Master came, those who had slept fled with the others. The Lord said, “Let a man deny himself,” and this example illustrates the need for it.

Sometimes the Lord will put you into a place, so to speak, where you are face to face with the hostile armies of the world, and then a sense of your own utter weakness to resist such force is borne in upon you. Then it is you learn you must never take your eyes from Him.

Take up your cross daily. This direction does not imply that we are to take up the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It rather says, 'Let a man take up his cross.' What does the expression mean? We must not confound taking up the cross with being upon the cross. You find the Lord Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross of Calvary, but you also find that it was the custom of that day that the one who was sentenced to crucifixion should carry his cross to the place of execution. The man who was seen carrying his cross was therefore the man who was thereby known to be adjudged for death, and the death of the cross; and the multitude were not slow to display their feelings against such a person. There is a man, they would say, who is worthy of death: he has outraged the laws of his country, and they would mock him and show how glad they were to be rid of him. Carrying the cross was therefore the sign of an outcast.

And the cross is the chosen badge of our service to Christ. It is the distinguishing mark which shows a person to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. The cross as a symbol in these days of ours has lost something of its original significance, because it has now been made an object of pride. When our officers distinguish themselves exceptionally in the present campaign they will be rewarded, probably, with the newly instituted military cross as a decoration. It is an official diploma, so to speak, of their bravery, of their special courage and devotion to their country. But there is its form. It is that of a cross.

There is, however, a feature of this new cross which connects it with the spiritual one. The military cross bears a crown upon each of its four ends; and so it is, beloved friends, with the cross you are asked to take up. The cross of a believer supports a crown. ‘No cross, no crown.' Each suffering one shall wear the crown.

When you look at a certain man, you know by his demeanor that he is a follower of Christ. He has something about his deportment that marks him out as a follower of the meek and lowly Nazarene. He is one who does not answer back. He is one who does not mind being made the off-scouring of all things. He has taken up the cross, and upon that cross he wears, you may see it if you will, the future crown. Those that suffer with Christ shall reign with Him.

Beloved friends, I ask you whether it is not a fact that when you go into general company you find you can speak of ordinary things, politics, pleasures, nature, and even God, and men will listen to you, join in the conversation, and attend to what you say. But when you introduce the name of Jesus the Nazarene, of Him who suffered and died, you get less response than before. Many will speak of God in an abstract way, while they have no real regard for Jesus in their hearts. Have you any place for Him? I feel sure you believe that there is a Creator of this world and that you are confident that there must be an Omnipotence somewhere that controls the world with all its intricate operations; but have your sins been forgiven? If you have had your sins forgiven, have you such little love in your heart for the Savior that you will not allow it to show itself by following Him?

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” That is the way. The way of the cross is the way of salvation. And the blessed Lord points the finger at you! No, He does not point the finger and tell you to go; He says, Come after Me, and points to the narrow way which He trod in such patience and obedience to His God, the end of it being involved in the blackness of darkness. But He who went to the cross is now enthroned in brightest glory. That is your way, it is my way, if we follow Him.

“If any man... follow me.” It will be a great attainment, beloved friends, when we are there in the place He has gone to prepare for us, when this world will be a thing of the past, when all the suffering for His name's sake will be over. Is it not a fact that the sufferings of this little while are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us?

Depend upon it, there is a great future before you and me, if we do but answer to these words of the Lord Jesus Christ, and deny ourselves and follow Him. He looks down, as it were, from heaven, and calls to you. He wants you to enlist for the duration of the war. There must be no turning aside, no resting; we are in a hostile country, and the campaign must go on until the Lord comes. It is a time of peril; and who is there

upon the earth prepared to follow the Lord Jesus Christ in loyalty and devotion? You cannot follow Him with your sins. You must come and be cleansed from your sins. You must have that black past forgiven and obliterated, and nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, can cleanse you from your sins. Having been cleansed from your former sins, let your future be to take your cross, to deny yourself, and to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

W.J.H.

The Hidden Treasure and the Costly Pearl, Hidden Treasure and the Costly Pearl, The: 4

IN considering these two parables, one can scarcely fail to be struck by their general resemblance. In both, the finder esteems his prize so highly that he is thereby constrained to part with all for the purpose of acquiring the same. This points to the conclusion that the main subjects of the parables are intimately connected, if not identical. So that as the treasure has already been shown to indicate that nucleus of truth and faithfulness existing in the midst of a heterogeneous mass of profession, so does the pearl of great price figure that same nucleus, though of course in a different aspect. For the two parables before us give a double view of the “good” in the kingdom of heaven, just as the third and fourth of the series give the two characters of “evil,” viz., the mustard tree, showing the outward conformation to the world and its ways, and the leaven, marking the corruption that permeates to the very core.

The difference between the parables of the treasure and the pearl seems to be that the first views the saints of God in their individual capacity as precious in the sight of the Lord, while the second discloses that remarkable unity which is a distinct characteristic of the children of God during the present interval. The term “treasure” might include gold, silver or any articles of value, and thus be of a very composite nature; but the beauty and value of the pearl depends entirely upon its homogeneity. So we find that in the latter parable the merchant is especially declared to have found “one pearl of great price.”

It is of no small importance that the distinction thus laid down by these two parables at the very inception, so to speak, of the present order of divine things should he borne in mind. Dilating upon the privileges and responsibilities of the church to the obliteration of those of the individual is as far from the truth as exalting the individual at the expense of the church. To ignore, or even weaken either, must result in confusion of mind and failure of testimony.

And it was undoubtedly seen needful to unfold this dual relationship of the saints of God, at this juncture, lest it might be supposed that, in their remarkable unification, their recognition as individuals was thereby destroyed. We have therefore the parable of the treasure preceding that of the pearl. The interest of Christ in His own is shown to be towards them personally before it is collectively. They are said to be His, first severally, and then jointly.

We have this order in the presentation of these truths in the Epistle to the Ephesians even as here. The apostle there writes to the saints and faithful, and unfolds God's eternal purpose concerning them. He first enumerates the blessings they possess as individuals rather than as a corporate body. They were blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ (chap. 1: 3). They were elected in Him before the foundation of the world (ver. 4). They were predestinated to the adoption of sons (ver. 5). They had redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (ver. 7). In Him they had obtained an inheritance (ver. 11). In Him also, after they had believed, they were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise (ver. 13). These all are the sure portion of every soul saved in this day of grace, both at Ephesus and everywhere else, Gentile or Jew. The blessings are common, as is the mighty power of God which quickens and raises them though previously dead in trespasses and sins.

But more than this. It is then particularly dwelt upon that Jew and Gentile, so long and so widely separated, are now seen alike children of wrath, once alike dead in sins; yea, also quickened together, raised together, and even seated together in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2) To faith it is now displayed in the very heavenlies that the ancient distinction between Jew and Gentile is abolished. Indeed it could not be expected that any mere earthly privilege should hold good in the heavenlies, much less when all are viewed in Christ Jesus. Nothing could be a stronger affirmation of the establishment of an entirely new order of things than is here given. Far-off ones are made nigh in Christ Jesus. Both are made one by Him. He has made in Himself of twain one new1 man. Both are reconciled to God in one body by the cross. He preached peace to the distant and to the nigh. Through Him both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Titus the Gentiles who were strangers and foreigners share, not only the personal blessings (“fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God”), but also the corporate (“are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit”), Eph. 2.

Clearly this was a revelation not heard of nor even hinted at before. Neither Old Testament history nor prophecy; spoke of Jew and Gentile on one common platform. The mystery of Christ “in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph. 3:5, 6). Here again it is declared that the Gentiles, beside being “fellow-heirs” which might not exclude class distinctions, were of the “same body.” So that the “unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:4) is of an altogether unique character, and neither known nor prophesied of before.

In the millennium, Israel most certainly will not be merged in the other nations, nor on the other hand will the Gentiles be advanced to the same level as the Jew. In that day God's ancient people shall be the “head” and not the “tail.” The seed of Israel “shall inherit the Gentiles and make the desolate cities to be inhabited” (Isa. 54:3). The supremacy of the people shall be owned; for “many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek Jehovah of hosts in Jerusalem and to pray before Jehovah. Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, in those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold, out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech. 8:22, 23). Again, “Many nations shall come and say, Come and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many peoples and rebuke strong nations afar off” (Mic. 4:2, 3). These scriptures are surely sufficiently explicit to decide that the pearl would be no suitable figure for the kingdom set up in power, when the Gentiles will be subordinate to the Jews, in no way brought into such an intimate unity with them as is described in the Epistle to the Ephesians as existing at the present moment.

In the Epistles the figure to which this unity is referred is that of the human body. “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:12, 13). Compare also Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:12; Col. 1:18. This figure is beautifully adapted to illustrate the unity resulting from the co-ordination of the various component parts. The members however diverse in themselves are harmonized by the Spirit of God and brought into a state of mutually interdependent relationship, so that each member is essential to the perfect unity of the body and also to the due performance of its functions.2 And herein lies the difference between the two figures—the “pearl” sets forth unity joined with beauty and value, while the “body” indicates unity along with activity and mutual co-operation. In the parable the church is viewed as in the Divine mind and purpose, but in the Epistles as in actual life and practice upon the earth; hence the variation in the emblem.

The beauty and consequent value of the pearl in question transcended that of all other pearls. Here we are brought in presence of the inconceivable fact that the Lord Jesus saw that in the assembly which called out the ineffable delight of His heart. It is not ours to question here whether that quality be inherent or derived, though we may well be certain we shall never discover in ourselves any adequate cause. It befits us rather to ponder, wonderingly and adoringly, the words of Holy Scripture, “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 to himself the church glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:24-27). He then is the Lover of the assembly in its entirety; He gives nothing short of Himself for it. His object is to present to Himself the church perfected and unblemished in glory. And He lays claim to it because of His sacrifice. When He came to Israel, He came to “His own.” But He “gave Himself for us” (Titus 2:14). So that the Lord takes the church on the ground of His work on the cross, and not on that of promise or prophecy. In the expressive words of this parable, He “went and sold all that He had and bought it.”

We have seen therefore that, in this comprehensive survey of the kingdom of heaven in its corrupted form, two parables are given to assure the hearts of the Lord's people, that however extended may be the influence of evil principles and persons upon that which professes His name, they themselves are too much upon His heart, to allow His purpose regarding them to be thwarted. The Lord knows, loves, and rejoices over them that are His.

W. J. H.

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The Hidden Treasure and the Costly Pearl, Hidden Treasure and the Costly Pearl, The: 3

THE second striking feature in the similitude of the hidden treasure is that the field was purchased for the purpose of acquiring the treasure: “the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field.”

In this particular, also, the analogy is in strict accordance with the doctrinal truth conveyed by inspiration to the apostolic churches, and through them to us and to all saints. For the Lord by means of His mighty work of redemption, purchased not believers only, but the world out of which they were taken. This is no matter of speculation but of revelation. Indeed the fact that in consequence of His death, the Lord bears a relation to all mankind and further to all creation, is repeated in scripture in various connections. He is Lord of all (Acts 10:36). He has received power over all flesh as well as to give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him (John 17:2). He gave Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time (1 Tim. 2:6), as well as giving His life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28). He tasted death for everything as well as for the many sons He is bringing to glory (Heb. 2:9, 10). He reconciles not only those who were sometime alienated in their minds by wicked works, but all things whether in heaven or in earth (Col. 1:20, 21). The saints of to-day are His purchase or peculium (Eph. 1:14; 1 Peter 2:9); but also of false teachers it is said, “who privily bring in damnable heresies, and deny the Lord who bought them” (2 Peter 2:1).

There is therefore abundant witness that the Lord Jesus has obtained a right over the whole world including those who become heirs of salvation. So in the days of old it was under the title of the “Lord of all the earth” (Josh. 3:13), that Jehovah drove out the Canaanites and established His chosen people in the promised land. And in a coming day the Lord Jesus shall be manifested in the fullness of His acquired glory. Then shall He receive the heathen for His inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession (Psa. 2:8). But this is not in the present day. For in John 17:9, the Son said to His Father, “I ask () for them (the treasure); I ask not for the world (the field) but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine.”

Along with this parabolic assertion of the universal Lordship of Christ, two attendant circumstances are given which call for remark—(1) the joy of finding the treasure and anticipating its possession, and (2) the renunciation of all in order to acquire the treasure.

The prophets had borne witness to the joy of Jehovah over His people Israel when they shall be restored. “Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate; but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married...and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee” (Isa. 62:45). Compare also Isa. 65:19; Zeph. 3:17. This however is during that blessed epoch, when “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9). But the truth in the parable is that, even during the period when tares, and leaven and unclean birds defile the kingdom of heaven, the saints constitute such a treasure in the Lord's own estimation as to afford Him abundant joy.

It is indeed marvelous and incomprehensible that grace should be delighted with objects such as we; nevertheless the fact remains. For Luke 15 shows that even one repentant sinner causes joy in the presence of the angels of God. Who then shall conceive with what exceeding joy the whole company of redeemed saints shall be presented faultless before the presence of His glory (Jude 24)?

Doubtless the supposition that it is impossible that Christ should find joy in the acquisition of His own, or that they should be of value to Him, has led to the popular interpretation of the actor of the parable being not Christ but the sinner. A well-known writer declares that to see Christ in the passage “strangely reverses the whole matter” and he characterizes the view at its best to be no more than “ingenious.”

But to any who are bound by the scripture the phrase, “for joy thereof,” should offer an insurmountable difficulty to making the interpretation of the parable descriptive of man's entrance into the kingdom. For it is to be observed that the word nowhere teaches that the sinner receives the gospel with joyfulness, whatever joy may and does follow in due course (Rom. 5:2, 3, 11). In fact the same may be gathered from the parable of the sower in this very chapter. There we find that the one who received the word “with joy,” was he who had no root in himself, and who, as soon as tribulation and persecution arose because of the word, was immediately stumbled. And not a word is mentioned as to joy in connection with the “good ground” hearers. And no support can be obtained from Acts 2:41. “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized “; for scholars are agreed that the word “gladly” is an unwarranted interpolation, It is true the truth heals, but it does so because it first wounds. It leads to the Savior which is joy indeed, but it previously convicts of sin which is never a pleasant process. The view in question therefore does not correspond with the plain statements of scripture. But passages have already been pointed out which show that the Lord finds joy in the redemption of His saints. In Heb. 12:2, it says of Jesus, “Who for the joy set before him, endured the cross despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God.”

We may therefore conclude that it is Christ who “for joy thereof” sold all He had and bought the field. For the sinner is never told to sell all that he has to purchase the gospel which is without money and without price. And the reference to the word to the ruler— “Go and sell that thou hast” (Matt. 19:21), is of no avail whatever. For this was a test whether so rigid an observer of the law was able to take the path and position of a disciple of the rejected Messiah. He failed as all must, and thus really condemns the theory of those who rob the parable of its force. The allusion to Paul's renunciation of all things for Christ's sake, detailed in Phil. 3:4-9, is also without point; for this was the experience of one who knew Christ. It is quite a different thing, having found Christ to yield up all for His sake, from surrendering all things as the condition of finding Him. The latter exists in the imaginations of men but not in the gospel.

But this leads to the second point: that the finder sells all that he has and buys the field. In what way was this fulfilled in Christ?

Surely in this that, though He came to the house of Israel as the promised seed of Abraham and of David to reign over the house of Jacob forever, He renounced that earthly glory, which was and is His by oath and promise, in order that He might have the saints of the heavenly calling which manifestly could not be, had the kingdom then been set up in power. Thus in Matt. 16:20, directly He speaks of the assembly which will be composed of those who confess His name in the hour of His rejection, He charges His disciples to tell no man He is Christ. He puts aside His Jewish title, comes before them as the Son of the living God He is however rejected and crucified (Matt. 16:16; John 19:7). But in resurrection He is offered to all, not to Jews alone; for the gospel delivers those who believe from all earthly distinctions and associates them with Christ on high. And this goes on even now, when the Lord waives His Jewish rights that He may gather His treasure out of the field.

The Hidden Treasure and the Costly Pearl, Hidden Treasure and the Costly Pearl, The: 2

IT has already been intimated that, in the two parables or similitudes given in Matt. 13.4-46, the intrinsic worth and spiritual beauty to be found in the kingdom of heaven are shown as existing, in spite of the intermixture of evil which is apparent to the cursory glance. The wheat mingled with darnel, the wide-spreading, umbrageous tree, the meal permeated with leaven were discernible to all, and must plainly set forth the general outward appearance. But the hidden treasure and the rare and costly pearl imply qualities that could only be appreciated by the finder. And so in the great mass of Christian profession, the eyes of the world are able to very readily detect the iniquity that shelters itself under the guise of religion; but only the Eye of omniscient grace is able to mark the internal worth and the indestructible unity existing beneath such an unpromising exterior.

The former of the two parables likens the kingdom of heaven to “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 that field” (Matt. 13:44).

The two prominent features in this parable are, first, the treasure hidden in the field; and second, the purchase of the field for the sake of the treasure. In the first place then, what is signified by the figure of the bidden treasure? Some have hastily assumed from Prov. 2:4 (“it thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God”) that the treasure is Christ; and that the parable has a figurative reference to the manner in which the blessings of the gospel are acquired. Without doubt, in Proverbs, the point is to inculcate a spirit of earnestness in pursuit of wisdom. As in seeking for silver and treasure, the energies are by that very fact stimulated, so it should be in the spiritual analogue. But in Matt. 13 we have a similar figure used for a different purpose. Here it is not the diligence of the searcher, so much as the value of the treasure sought that is most prominent. Besides it is not the king but the kingdom that is likened to treasure hidden in a field.

If the general trend of the series of parables be borne in mind, the meaning of the figure before us appears on the surface. In the enunciation to the crowds of the similitudes of the outward form of the kingdom in mystery, the Lord used figures that spoke of good being largely alloyed with evil. Subsequently, to his own disciples, He gave the interpretation of the wheat and the tares which in general intention resembled the leavened meal and the wide-branched mustard tree. The Lord then likens the kingdom to hidden treasure, using a similitude that suggested a pure, unmixed character and not an amalgam as before. In point of fact, the terms in which this parable is expressed forbid us to think of anything but a view of the kingdom of heaven contrasted with those that precede. In the latter, elements (such as the tares, the leaven, the birds) are introduced which tend to diminish the value it possessed in its incipient stage: but here there is nothing of the kind, its value is given without a single mark of qualification.

The first consideration of this truth leads to the reflection that God's ways of sovereign grace must be marvelous indeed when He finds, in spite of man's irreparable sinfulness and his invariable abuse of everything entrusted to him, that which from His own point of view He represents by treasure. For whatever may be the slowness of man's heart to believe all that is written, the truth abides, here and in not a few other scriptures, that God in and by means of Christ has found His good pleasure in men.

But though undoubtedly the New Testament gives us this blessed revelation in its fullest application, a similar expression is used in the Old Testament concerning God's chosen nation. From Mount Sinai, the word of Jehovah came unto the children of Israel— “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings and brought you unto myself. Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all peoples” (Ex. 19:4, 5). On account however of the transgressions of

the people under the first covenant, this purpose of God was never realized. Not that it was thereby abrogated, for it still holds good that Jehovah “hath chosen Jacob unto Himself, and Israel for His peculiar treasure” (Psa. 135:4). And in the millennial day this shall be owned by every nation, from the rising to the setting of the sun. For then Jehovah will save Israel, He will rejoice over her with joy, He will rest in His love, He will joy over her with singing (Zeph. 3:17).

But in the present interval, while Israel is in strange lands, the Lord finds in the midst of His nominal kingdom where evil lifts its head in unrebuked defiance of good, that which His own heart esteems a special treasure. This treasure is not the favored nation of Palestine, which, as has been shown does not come within the scope of this series of parables, but it is the N.T. saints in that ideal character which they possess in the mind and eternal purpose of God.

Now in the epistles of Paul, especially in that to the Ephesians, we have this character presented in the form of doctrine. In Matthew the time had not come to give more than a figurative reference to what the great apostle of the Gentiles was subsequently commissioned to communicate in detail. In his writings therefore, we learn that the church is destined and designed to be the vehicle for the display of divine grace and wisdom.

Thus in Ephesians, we are not only introduced to the inexpressible fullness of our blessing in Christ, but also to the inconceivable fact that by means of us His holy name will be magnified and exalted. “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace” (Eph. 1:5, 6), and again, “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated, according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:11, 12). Here then (it is submitted with all due deference to the judgment of others) we see that character of the church in which it corresponds with the figure of “treasure” in Matt. 13:44. Treasure is such because of the use that may be made of it. And the saints are of value simply because God has deigned to utilize them as the media whereby to display His manifold wisdom. So the scriptures declare the purpose of God to be that “now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:10).

But this treasure is said to be “hidden in a field;” and the church, described in the Pauline epistles as a “mystery” (that is a secret, hitherto hidden but now made known), remarkably tallies with the figure. Compare Rom. 16:25, 26, Eph. 3:4, 5, 9; Col. 1:26; 2:2, 3. In this respect the church affords a contrast to the nation of Israel. For when the Israelites were called out of Egypt to be Jehovah's treasure (Ex. 19:4-6), it was not said to be hid in a field. Because their deliverance from the oppressor and their introduction to Canaan was but the due accomplishment of promises made centuries previous to Abraham their forefather. But the calling and privileges of the church were never the subject of promise. From Genesis to Malachi no revelation from on high was given concerning the church of the heavenly calling. The mystery was hidden from the sons of men, hidden in God. The divine seeker alone was aware of its existence; He alone knew and appreciated its worth. Truly there is a day coming when the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matt. 13:43). But Christ discerns beforehand and divests Himself of all to obtain the treasure—a treasure whose value is the product of His own grace and which apart from Him is worthless and worse.

(To be continued, D.V.).

The Hidden Treasure and the Costly Pearl, Hidden Treasure and the Costly Pearl, The: 1

Matt. 13

THE fact that the series of parables in Matt. 13. consists of seven in number is sufficiently obvious to arrest the attention of a very ordinary reader of the chapter. But it is further to be noted that Mark is commissioned to record an additional parable (that of the secret growth of the seed, Mark 4:26-29), spoken, (it should seem) on the same occasion but omitted by Matthew, while on the other hand, Mark does not give more than two out of the seven in the first evangelist, but adds that “with many such parables spake he the word unto them as they were able to hear it” (Mark 5:33). This consideration justifies the thought, if indeed justification of such a thought be in any wise necessary, that the seven parables before us were selected by the Holy Ghost, and so arranged for some specific purpose.

Without illustrating by examples the remarkable prevalence of the number “seven” throughout the Holy Scriptures, it may be helpful to refer to a well-known series in the Old Testament and another in the New.

Under the law, the Israelites were commanded to observe seven feasts in the first seven months of the sacred year (Lev. 23.). Each of these was typical of succeeding events in the national history. The feast of the passover has a reference to the sacrifice of Christ as 1 Cor. 5. conclusively proves. This was immediately followed by that of unleavened bread, typifying the holy state which is the sure result of the shed blood of God's Lamb, true to faith now and universally in a future day. The sheaf of firstfruits undoubtedly points to the resurrection of Christ on the third day; even as the feast of wave loaves, baken with leaven, shadowed forth the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was outpoured from on high and the church was formed. This feast was in Sivan or the third month, and the fifth feast was not arranged till the seventh month. After this considerable interval the feast of trumpets came at the new moon, with its prophetic reference to that still future and effective summons God shall make to His ancient people. This was quickly succeeded by the day of atonement, in which they were to afflict their souls. It will be duly fulfilled when Israel is restored and shares the results of Christ's death for them. Then shall ensue the millennial joy of which the final feast, that of tabernacles, was the appointed type.

This rapid sketch will suffice to show that the series of feasts of Jehovah was meant to outline a complete cycle of events in the history of God's people, part of which even now awaits fulfillment.

Somewhat analogous are the addresses to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 2; 3). They present successive phases in the history of the professing church from the decline of heart at Ephesus, through stages of indifference to and abandonment of the truth, on to the lifeless profession at Laodicea. These epistles therefore span the period from the apostolic days until the removal of the true and the destruction of the false church.

By these instances the way is prepared to see in the seven parables of Matt. 13. a representation of the rise, progress, and end of the kingdom. But while this is true, it must be remembered that the Lord delineates the kingdom in that peculiar form which it assumes in consequence of the rejection of Himself the King and during the time of His absence. And this fact is very clearly and definitely conveyed in the former chapters of the Gospel. There it is very carefully shown that Jesus of Nazareth was undoubtedly Israel's Messiah, perfectly fulfilling what God had spoken beforehand by the mouth of His holy prophets. It is likewise shown with equal distinctness that, though He was undoubtedly the Savior Who was to come, and though He wrought many mighty works in proof of the same, the nation refused to own their King; so that the kingdom could not then be manifested in the glory of which the prophets had spoken. The implacable spirit of rejection was displayed by the Pharisees in a most unmistakable way when they ascribed the miraculous power He exhibited to a Satanic origin (Matt. 9:34; 12:24). No manner of sin or blasphemy could exceed this. It struck not only at the Son of man but against the Holy Ghost by Whom He was ever energized. It could not be passed over (Matt. 12:31). Accordingly in the succeeding chapter we find that the Lord commenced to teach by means of parables the new form that the kingdom would assume in consequence of this irreconcilable opposition of the Jews.

The parables of Matt. 13 are divisible into two groups, into one of which the first four fall, as having been spoken to the multitudes, in contradistinction to the last three which were spoken privately to the disciples in the house. In the former group the man-ward aspects of the kingdom are portrayed: and in the latter those divine characteristics discernible alone to faith.

In the introductory parable of the sower and the soils, the Lord shows that all depended on the manner of the reception of the word of the kingdom. The sons of the kingdom would be not the natural seed of Abraham, but those who heard the word and understood it (ver. 23). In the other three parables of this group (the wheat and the tares, the mustard tree becoming a great tree, and the leavened meal) the Master unfolds the strange fact that, so far from evil being rooted out of the kingdom by the exercise of inflexible righteousness, it will spring up side by side with good, and eventually so permeate the kingdom as to impart its character to the whole.

The fulfillment of this prophecy, after the Lord went away, may be gathered from the inspired history of apostolic times, and may be observed in the condition of things surrounding us at the present moment. An absolutely pure Christian association is unknown. Evil men and evil principles creep in unawares, so that the Lord's servants are unable to distinguish between the wheat and the tares, and both are growing together until harvest. The poor and despised assembly of God left its first estate and became a prominent worldly power in the earth, thus affording a shelter for the very emissaries of evil that in its early stage were its sworn foes. And not only does this debased state of Christendom arise from an unholy alliance with worldly power, but evil originates from within, going on to leaven the whole lump. So the apostle warned the Ephesian elders, both of the grievous wolves that should enter in, not sparing the flock and also of men that should arise from themselves, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them (Acts 20:29, 30). Deterioration would originate from interior as well as exterior causes.

This then would be the outward aspect of the kingdom as existing upon the earth, subsequent to the Lord's departure and prior to His return when His angels will gather out of His kingdom “all things that do offend and them which do iniquity” (Matt. 13:41). Herein it afforded a direct contrast to the prophetic descriptions of the Old Testament. They describe a state of righteousness and peace when the Lord Jesus sits upon the throne of David. Then evil will be subdued; and “truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven” (Psa. 85:11). But until then, as these parables show, evil is seen in closest association with good, even in that which bears the Lord's name.

However, in the succeeding parables spoken to the disciples only, that aspect of the kingdom is given which can be apprehended by faith alone. The natural eye would never discern the truth foreshadowed in the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price. What appears among men as an indiscriminate and heterogeneous mass is here shown to contain what is valuable and beautiful. At these two parables it is proposed to look more closely (D. V.), on a future occasion. In the last picture the final separation is presented as it affects the good rather than the evil.

THE “body” and the “house” differ manifestly. The church is the house of God, and the body of Christ glorified. God's body it never is nor could be called. “My dead bodies” in Isa. 26:19 simply expresses Jehovah's affection for the Jews when restored after so long a death.

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