Matthew - Commentaries by Walter Thomas Prideaux Wolston

Handfuls of Purpose, Beatitudes, The

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(Matthew 5:1-16)

The particular aspect in which the Lord is presented in Matthew's gospel is, as the Messiah, the King. Matthew writes specially for Jews, to testify that Jesus was really the Messiah, though rejected. In the first chapter we get His genealogy on Joseph's side of the house; of course really He was not Joseph's Son. Had he been Joseph's Son really, He could not have been our Savior; but in order that He should by right succeed to the throne, He must be proved to be legally Joseph's Son.

Really, He was Son of Mary, and Son of God, but God devised a way by which His legal right to the throne of David should be indisputable. By Jewish law, from the moment Joseph was espoused to Mary, she was looked upon as legally his wife, and any fruit of the womb was regarded as his. Thus, therefore, Jesus belonged by legal right to Joseph, and was regarded as his Son. Luke gives the Lord's genealogy through Mary, because Luke's object is to present Him as Son of Man.

Matthew 2 shows us the wise men of the East coming up to worship Him, and Satan stirring up the world's hatred and enmity.

Matthew 3 gives John the Baptist's testimony, and the Father's opening heaven to own Him as His beloved Son, and to testify to His perfect delight in Him.

Then Matthew 4 shows that, though Messiah, though God's King, He is a real man, and a man in dependence on God. Satan comes on the scene, and Jesus confronts the enemy. Satan is utterly defeated, by that which is the most difficult thing for you and for me, actual dependence upon the Word of God even for every word He speaks. "It is written" is His unvarying answer, and Satan is foiled. Then He fulfills Scripture, for He Himself is the light (vss. 14-16). Then He goes forth preaching, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." You will never find the kingdom of heaven preached as nearer than "at hand," — about to come. The kingdom of God could be said to be come unto them (Matt. 12:28), or among them, because the King was there, but the kingdom of heaven was as yet only at hand. It was connected with His rejection and ascension.

In verses 23-25 we have the manifestation of the power of the kingdom, though it was not yet set up. The power of the Lord was wonderfully manifested on every hand, and the fame of Him went everywhere. He presents Himself in the character of the Messiah-King, and His power was blessedly manifest.

Thus it is interesting to notice the connection between the fourth chapter and the fifth. In the fourth chapter you have the Person of the King, and His power manifested in vanquishing Satan on the one hand, and spoiling his goods on the other; and in Matthew 5, 6 and 7 you have the moral principles of the kingdom which He was about to set up, and what kind of behavior He looked for from those that were in the kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is heaven's rule over earth, in mystery now, because the King is rejected, but by-and-by to be displayed in power and glory.

What then is the kind of behavior that becomes His kingdom? The Sermon on the Mount gives the answer, and the first beatitude is characteristically descriptive: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (vs. 3). This is not a question of persons going to heaven, by-and-by, but of heaven ruling them now; it is how to go on before you get to heaven.

We are impatient, sometimes, and say, I should like to go to heaven. "Stop," says God, "I will teach you how to live on earth, before you get there, how to live all along the road."

He who is the King has now gone into heaven. He is out of sight, but He is the Head of a system, and the Lord unfolds here what belongs to that heavenly system, and how those who belong to it should carry themselves.

"And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him" (vs. 1). Moses had said, "The Lord Thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto Me; unto Him ye shall hearken (Deut. 18:15). As the Prophet-King He here gathers His disciples about Him, to teach them. He goes up into the mountain too, thereby, I believe, signifying His removal from earth, His going back to heaven, His being hid in heaven, for the time.

Do not suppose, because we have these three chapters consecutively, that the Lord uttered all the words we get here at one time. They are parts of different discourses, as we shall find from other gospels. Mark's Gospel will help you largely in discovering this. It is quite clear that in the other gospels, for a special purpose, the Spirit of God relates all sorts of incidents, dislocating them from the time in which they actually took place, in order to present a certain picture. Here in Matthew we get repeated dispensational pictures, according to the scope, and design of the gospel, which reveals Jesus as the Great King. In Luke Christ's sayings are put together with the object of presenting moral pictures, for Luke's design is to present Him as a Man among men.

Here, then, Matthew puts all these words together to form a perfect whole, and to give a perfect picture of what the principle, of the kingdom are. On the other hand, a striking selection of sayings and incidents is evident in Luke 14, 15 and 16. These chapters give us a moral picture. In Matthew 14, we have earth, with its hindrances; in Matthew 15, heaven with its joy and blessedness; and in Matthew 16, in the case of the rich man, hell with all its terrible misery.

And now we read that, “When He was set, His disciples came unto Him; and He opened his mouth and taught them” (vss. 1-2). Oh, how He does love to have His own near Himself. You will notice that there are nine “Blessednesses,” and you will also see, they divide themselves into first, seven, and then two.

It is a common thing in the gospels to find seven, for seven is the symbol of spiritual completeness. We find seven parables in Matthew 13, seven loaves to feed the multitude in Mark 8, and the Lord is seen seven times in prayer in Luke’s Gospel. Here it is a complete spiritual picture of what should be the conduct of those who are His, while He is out of His kingdom.

These seven beatitudes are again subdivided. The first four I might call internal, the last three, external. The first four partake, broadly speaking, of the character of righteousness, and are summarized in verse to, while the last three have the character of grace for Christ’s sake, and are summarized in verse

1. BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (vs. 3). What is it then to be poor in spirit? Exactly the reverse of what you find in the world. In the world people stick up for themselves, stand for their rights. A person who does that is not in the kingdom of heaven at all, that is, is not in it in spirit. One who is poor in spirit, is self-emptied, self is out of sight. You will find a lovely connection with this in Psalm 41:1: “Blessed is he that considereth the poor” — that is, the poor Man; and who is the poor Man? Christ! That is, considering the poor Man does not mean giving alms, but considering Him. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” It is a blessed thing thus to be self-emptied: poor-spirited the world would call you; that is it, but the Lord reckons such “blessed.” The Lord give us to know in our hearts the meaning of it.

2. BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN. “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (vs. 4). Why is it blessed to mourn? This is not merely the sorrows and trials that compass our paths oftentimes, though God does come in, and comfort our hearts in these. But do we not find ourselves in a scene where everything is opposed to God? Surely! Can we then love the Lord Jesus Christ, and pass through this scene, and not be mourners? Was not He a mourner when He passed through it?

“Love that made Thee a mourner,

It is not man’s to tell!”

The Lord is speaking here to those who are in relationship to God, and know the Father. To know the Father, to know God as Father, is the distinguishing feature of Christianity. Do you know God then as Father, and are you passing through a scene where His Son is despised, and set at naught, and are you not a mourner?

In John 11 at the grave of Lazarus Jesus was a mourner, not merely He entered into the sorrow of the sisters in truest sympathy, but before God He felt what a ruin this earth is, how completely sin had marred the whole thing, and He is a mourner, and God comforts Him. In fellowship with Him, must we not be mourners too?

3. BLESSED ARE THE MEEK. “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (vs. 5). I believe that has its full application to the godly remnant of Israel by-and-by, but the principle is of deep value to us. What is it to be meek? It is to be like Him who said down here, “I am meek and lowly in heart.” That was said by Jesus in Matthew 11, in a very dark day. You could not imagine a darker day. John was doubting Him, and Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, where His mightiest works had been done, were rejecting Him. What is His resource? He turns round to His Father, and takes everything from Him. He falls back upon His Father’s love, and perfect wisdom in all His circumstances. What is it then to be meek and lowly? It is to take everything, as He took it, from the hand of God.

Supposing I give you a cross word, if you take it from me, Satan instantly gets an advantage, and you are angry. If you take it directly from God, you say, “That was not very nice, was not very Christ-like, but the Lord must have had some good reason for letting that cross word come.” What meekness that engenders in the soul, when I take everything thus directly from the hand of God. What is it to be meek? It is a person who is willing to be trampled on, a person who takes everything so from God, that the bitter thing is sweet.

People often ask what “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) is, and they pass over the first two verses. I will quote them. “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love” (Eph. 4:1-2). You cannot get to verse 3 without passing through, and practically learning verse 2. We need all lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, and forbearance in love, in order to keep the unity of the Spirit. “I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:1) are wondrous words.

4. BLESSED TO HUNGER AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS. “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled” (vs. 6). Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, God will fill. It is a hungering, and thirsting, after practically meeting the mind of God. Do we know that? I suppose the reason why we know so little of what it is to be filled, is because we so little hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Now the subject changes. Hitherto we have had righteousness. It is a right thing to be poor in spirit, it is a right thing to mourn, it is a right thing to be meek, it is a right thing to hunger and thirst after practically meeting the mind of God. Now we come to the other side of the subject. Grace. Christ!

5. BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL. “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (vs. 7). What met us at first? Mercy! What keeps us all along the road? Mercy! What does the Holy Spirit bid us look for? Mercy! We have received mercy to begin with, but the biggest mercy of the lot is to be delivered from this place and scene of corruption, is it not. To be taken up out of it all to be with Himself will be an immense mercy. We are exhorted to be “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life” (Jude 21).

All through Scripture this word mercy abounds: it is a beautiful word, mercy. “Blessed are the merciful.” Ah, beloved, I believe we are a hard lot. God delights in mercy. If a person has this thought in-wrought in his soul, he will be quit of his hardness.

Not that mercy makes light of sin. Not at all! Those who are nearest to God have this too, they are “ pure in heart” likewise, for they are the most like Christ. We need all these things, but all these were manifest in Him. Was He not poor in spirit? Was he not a mourner? Was He not meek? Was it not His meat and His drink to do the will of Him that sent Him? Was He not merciful? Pure in heart? A peacemaker? He was all

these, and more, in perfection.

6. BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART.

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (vs. 8). There is no making light of sin, but the most exquisite tenderness to the poor sinner. The man nearest to God has the most intense hatred of sin, but the most intense love and tenderness to the poor sinner. The man nearest to God is always the hardest on himself, and the most tender to others, specially if they have failed! The further I am away from God the harder I shall be on others, while I let myself off tenderly — far too tenderly.

7. BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS. “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (vs. 9). How easy to do the reverse, to make a little discord, and be a peace-breaker. The peacemaker shall be called, by the name you and I love best, a child of God. “Ye are all the children of God, by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26), is but one side of the truth. Prove that you are a child of God by your ways, is the thought. God is the God of peace. Show your relationship, and your likeness to your father, by being a peacemaker, is our Lord’s injunction here.

These last three blessednesses partake largely of the character of grace, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers. They are the reproduction of Christ in us.

8. BLESSED IF PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Then there are two additional beatitudes which really summarize the other seven. First, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (vs. 10). That is, if you are poor in spirit, if you do not stand up for your rights, what do you get in this world? You get persecution, you are laughed at as a madman, because the difference between this world, as it now is, and in the millennial time, is, that now righteousness suffers, then righteousness will reign. Now you must do good, suffer for it, and take it patiently, for the kingdom is in mystery, and the King is hidden. By-and-by, when “a king shall reign in righteousness” (Isa. 32:1), when the kingdom is no longer in mystery, but displayed, then righteousness will reign. Now, in this world, if you do right, you may suffer for it, for now righteousness suffers. In the millennium evil will be put down, and righteousness will reign. Now, if you are poor in spirit, the world will say you are mad, why not stick up for your rights, why allow yourself to be trampled upon? This suffering may come in many shapes — in your business, your family, or from your neighbor.

9. BLESSED IF PERSECUTED FOR CHRIST’S SAKE. But there is more than suffering for righteousness’ sake. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake” (vss. 10-11). The blessedness of the tenth verse is very different from that spoken of in the eleventh. In the tenth you suffer for righteousness’ sake. In the eleventh you suffer for Christ’s sake, and that is a higher thing. If you turn to Peter’s epistles, you get the two brought out. “For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully” (1 Peter 2:19). That is suffering for conscience sake, which has the character of righteousness.

Again, “And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? “The world will try to harm you, and the devil will try to harm you. “But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye, and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled” (1 Peter 3:13-14). That is suffering for righteousness’ sake.

Now look at the fourteenth verse of chapter 4: “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified.” That is suffering for Christ’s sake. That is a higher thing: just as grace is higher, in a sense, than righteousness, so suffering for Christ’s sake is a higher thing than suffering for righteousness’ sake.

Well, if you suffer for Christ’s sake, what is to be your recompense? When you learn what is pleasing

to the Lord, and, in order to please Him, you have to do what would displease every one else, what does He say? “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.” It is heaven, now, not the kingdom of heaven; and here is a lovely little word of gracious encouragement to the soul, “For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” That is, you have got into good company, do not mind. Do they say dreadful things about you? Well, let them, He knows all about it, let them, I say.

Of course, if the world can come and lay anything really true against you, you can only be humbled. If they speak lies, just rejoice. There is nothing that so spreads too as rejoicing. Just as in an army there is nothing so injurious as to have a few cowards among it. What did the apostles do in the Acts? “They departed from the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:41-42). They were so happy that they blew the gospel trumpet louder, longer, and more sweetly than ever before.

“Oh,” you say, “I do not see the reward.” No. I will tell you why, because reward day does not come till the end of the term. And we are not at the end of the term yet, but term day is coming, so go on.

You will notice another difference too, in verses 10 and 11. In verse 10 it is, “Blessed are they.” In verse 11, “Blessed are ye,” because when it comes to positive suffering for Himself, He drops the abstract term as too cold, and applies it, “Blessed are ye.” Why? Because you are linked with Him now.

The Lord now uses two striking figures to show what His own should be in His 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. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (vss. 13-16). “Ye are the salt of the earth.” Now salt is preservative, it preserves from corruption. When the saints are taken out of the earth there will be nothing left but the dead carcass of a Christless Christendom, nothing but corruption. Salt answers to righteousness. But “Ye are the light of the world,” gives another thought. Light answers to grace. Salt merely preserves things pure from corruption, but light is aggressive, it drives out the darkness. So grace goes forth outside and seeks. “It giveth light.”

A Christian should be a candle, and what for? That his light may be seen, and the Father get the glory. The Lord is very careful not to say, Let your good works be seen, but, Let your light so shine, and why? What is your light? It is the life of Christ reproduced in you, and that being

seen, it is Christ in you that is seen. That is the point. The world is to see Christ in you. It is not merely giving a testimony, but being a testimony. Not being a light-bearer, but being light; and so your Father gets the glory, for that is all Christ. The reflection of Christ in the life of a saint has this for its effect, men will glorify your Father which is in heaven.

On the other hand, how careful we should be in our walk lest we fail to give light. The world is quick enough to pick up our faults. The world is a close observer of the life of a Christian, and knows full well what is inconsistent with the name of Christ.

The Lord give us, beloved friends, to taste thoroughly in our hearts what He gives us here, that we may so walk, and so witness for Him, that the name of our Father may be glorified in us.

What grace, O Lord, and beauty shone

Around Thy steps below!

What patient love was seen in all

Thy life and death of woe!

Forever on Thy burden'd heart

A weight of sorrow hung;

Yet no ungentle murmuring word

Escaped Thy silent tongue.

Thy foes might hate, despise, revile;

Thy friends unfaithful prove;

Unwearied in forgiveness still,

Thy heart could only love.

Oh give us hearts to love like Thee-

Like Thee, O Lord, to grieve

Far more for others' sins, than all

The wrongs that we receive.

One with Thyself, may every eye

In us, Thy brethren, see

That gentleness and grace that spring

From union, Lord, with Thee.

Simon Peter: His Life and Letters, Model Prayer, A

Matthew 15:1-20

"Declare unto us this parable!" This petition falls from Peter's lips, as he hears the Lord discourse in this chapter on that which surpassed his comprehension. It is truly a model prayer, the style of which we might all well imitate. Montgomery has well said —

Peter sincerely desired to understand the parable, and in the simplest language sought it. For brevity and directness this prayer, for such it is, cannot be surpassed, though it reminds one of the prophet's prayer, "Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see" (2 Kings 6:17). Both Elisha and Peter remember to whom they are speaking, and waste no words. They know exactly what they want, and they each say just that to the Lord, and stop. This is real prayer. Any more would be mere verbiage, to be deplored and deprecated, no matter from whose lips.

It would be a widespread blessing if this were borne in mind by those whose voices are heard in prayer, whether in the household, the assembly, the prayer-meeting, or the preaching-room. Long prayers are a mistake, and an evidence of weakness, in all these scenes. In the closet, where no eye sees, and no ear hears but God's, there would appear to be no restriction in Scripture. But in public long prayers are only referred to, to be condemned.

There is a remarkable word from the pen of Solomon which bears on this subject, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.... Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Eccl. 5:1-2).

Peter was heeding this counsel as he simply says to the Lord, "Declare unto us this parable." How refreshing is the brevity and directness of his prayer. Observe, too, that he gets his request straightway.

What led to Peter's prayer is instructive. The Pharisees had challenged the Lord's disciples for eating with unwashen hands. Jesus replies that God is looking at the heart, not the hands — at the inside, not the outside. The Jew, full of externals and tradition — as men are, alas! today, too — were using God's name, and, under pretense of piety, actually sinking lower in its use than the laws of natural conscience.

Hear the Lord’s charge. God commanded, saying, “Honor thy father and mother: and, he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition” (vss. 4-6). For a child to neglect his parents under appearance of devoting to Clod — in temple sacrifice, I presume, the priest bettering thereby — what was due to them, was held to be all right. They had only to cry, “Corban,” that is, “It is a gift,” and the parent might be forgotten. The Lord calls them “hypocrites,” and quotes Isaiah’s solemn verdict, “This people draweth nigh to me with their month, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.”

Thereon the Lord calls the multitude, saying, “Hear, and understand, Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the month, this defileth a man.” He has done with Judaism, and the truth comes out that man is lost.

With this the Pharisees are highly offended, and on the disciples informing the Lord thereof, He adds, “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.” There must be a new life from God, not an attempt to improve the old; that day had gone by. “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” Such was the state of Israel’s leaders at the moment. Utterly blind, they knew not Jesus, nor their own need, and their state and their end is thus tersely described. Fancy “the blind leading the blind.” Can anything more sad be conceived? Yet has it its counterpart today, when Romanism and Ritualism, with their blind leaders, are leading a blindfold host to the ditch, the means by which blind leaders guide their blinded followers being nothing but the exhumed and refurbished paraphernalia of a defunct Judaism, which had its death-knell sounded by the Lord in this chapter, its death-blow dealt by God at the cross, and its funeral executed when the Romans swept temple, altar, sacrifices, and earthly priesthood all away at the destruction of Jerusalem.

Christianity is a system of another order. Its spring is in the last Adam, not the first. Its center and circumference is Christ Himself personally. His love, His work, His blood, His sacrifice, yea, Himself — all that He has, and is, are its Alpha and Omega. Now it is no longer the blind leading the blind, nor even the seeing leading the blind, but the seeing leading the seeing.

But this light had not then fully shone, so one can understand Peter saying, “Declare unto us this parable.” That he should call plain truth a “parable,” that is, “a dark saying,” is strange, but to him, as yet full of hopes in the first man, the doctrine of the Lord doubtless sounded strange, and was evidently unpalatable. The Lord’s answer only revealed to him his own moral blindness, as He says, “Are ye also yet without understanding,” &c. He shows that all is a question of what man is in himself. The spring — the heart — is hopelessly corrupt, hence the streams can only be of the same sort. “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.” Man must be born again of water and the Spirit. Until a new life is brought in, all is useless.

What scandalized the self-righteous Pharisee, and appeared unintelligible to the disciples, was the truth, the simple truth, as to the heart of man, as God knows and reads that heart.

If Christ’s witness be true — and it is true — it is all over with you, my respectable, religious, moral, and possibly self-righteous, reader. Your life may be splendidly clean outwardly, but your heart is corrupt in the essence of its being. You may possibly deny the most of the charge that verse 19 brings — and one is thankful to hear it — but will you venture to say that from your heart — your heart, mind — an evil thought never sprung? You tremble to assert that. You well may. God’s verdict has rung out, “All have sinned.” But, thank God, He also tells us His remedy. The ruin of my heart is met by the love of His heart. For my sin He gave His Son, and Scripture sweetly affirms, “The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.”

I am very thankful, therefore, for Peter’s prayer and its answer. It is an immense thing to know the truth, the worst about oneself. There is nothing so simple or satisfactory as the truth, when it is known. It puts one in right relation with God, and all else. Jesus is the truth, and He brings it out here most solemnly, but does not stop there. He is full of grace, too, so His death conies in later to meet the ruin that He has unfolded here. Still, I repeat, it is a great thing to know the whole truth about one’s state, and Peter’s prayer is what leads up to it here. The day of outward forms is past; man is utterly lost, and needs a new life. How he gets it is revealed elsewhere.

Forty Days of Scripture, Satan's Forty Days: Temptation and Defeat; or, the Strong Man Bound and His Palace Spoiled

(Mark 1:12, 13; Matthew 3:16-17; Matthew 4:1-11,23-25; Luke 4:1-15)

I have read the threefold account, which God has been pleased to give us, of the temptation of the Lord Jesus, because, beloved friends, we get in each Gospel some point that is very noticeable, but which the other Evangelists do not record. Matthew gives you the historical sequence of the temptation, while Luke gives you the moral order of events.

When we think who it was who was tempted, it well becomes us, with unshod feet, to tread this ground, and with circumcised ear to listen to what God says to us. We have the history here of a Man, a true real Man, vigorously assaulted by the foe of God, as it says: “Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, He afterward hungered” (Luke 4:2). He was forty days and forty nights without food, and then, as you might expect, He was hungry. Then the tempter came, man’s tempter, your tempter, my tempter, in that day the tempter of the Lord Jesus. I do not doubt Satan came thinking that he would do with this Man as he had done with the first man he tempted, that is, upset him to his ruin.

We all know that the first man was absolutely conquered, and it is a great thing for you and me to see that we belong to a conquered stock, a conquered race, a stock that has been overcome by the power of the tempter. The first man, I repeat, was absolutely conquered and ruined by the tempter. Here is another Man, the second Man, the last Adam. Why the last? There is no other to come. There are only the first and the last. The first was the parent of the family to which you and I by nature belong. The second Man, the Lord out of heaven, the last Adam here comes before us in all the blessed moral perfection that was His as a dependent and obedient Man; and God permits us to see the victory of Christ, and the downright and complete rout of the devil in the wilderness.

This is grand hearing for sinners, grand hearing for saints, yea, grand tidings for men and women like you and me, who belong to the first man, children of that Adam who was unable to cope with a foe like Satan. We are permitted to see Jesus, before He comes out into this world to begin His lovely ministry, defeat the enemy absolutely. This is indeed a blessed sight for us, but that is the way the Spirit of God introduces the Lord here, ere He commences His public ministry. The one who had ruined the first man and reduced the earth to misery through sin, to start with, and then brought in corruption and violence, here assumes to put his hand on this blessed, holy Man, but it was only to be defeated absolutely. And mind you the devil tempted Christ just like he tempts you and me. That is, he took Him up on the very point where he thought He was weakest. If Jesus were an hungered — and there was nothing wrong in His being hungry — the question is raised of how to get Himself bread to meet His hunger. But you will see that He defeats the devil by obedience to and dependence on God. And, beloved friend, there is no other way of victory for you or for me but by being in the same path as the Lord Jesus.

But, first of all, see how the Lord is introduced here. He comes out into notice after His baptism by John. Observe what takes place as He is baptized. The Gospel of Luke adds this particular, that He was praying (Luke 3:21). He was a dependent Man. When baptized He comes up out of the water and the heavens are opened. There are four occasions where you find them opened in the New Testament. They are opened here for God to look down to earth to see a Man in whom He could completely delight. Next they are opened when Stephen looks up and sees that same Man glorified in heaven (Acts 7:56). The next time is when Peter saw them opened and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet, knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth, and received up again into heaven. He saw all sorts of four-footed beasts and creeping things and fowls of the air in it (Acts 10:11-12). What is the meaning of that? Nothing goes into heaven but what comes out of it. How am I to get there? That is a serious question. If there be not the work of God in my soul and yours, let us not dream of heaven. That is the lesson I get in Acts 10.

And where is the last time the heavens are opened? They have not been opened as yet, but they are going to be opened for the fourth time (see Rev. 19:11 and so forth), for this blessed Man to come out and take possession of all things, to which He has right and title on the ground of what He was personally as the Son of man, and also on the ground of redemption; for He has earned it, as Man, by going into death. He is going to take in this way His world-kingdoms, which the devil proposed in the wilderness to give Him without treading the pathway of suffering, but at the expense of the truth, at the expense of the homage that was due to God, and which the devil has always sought to have rendered to himself. Do you know what took place there? The Lord refused Satan's way at the cost of His life, blessed be His name. He went to death, but that death has delivered us who believe, and enabled Him to associate us with Himself. Thank God, what He refused from the devil's hand that day, is what He is going to come out of heaven for by-and-by, and we shall be with Him in the day of His glory. Ah, friends, there is a grand day coming for the world when Christ gets His rights.

But now, look again at this scene on Jordan's banks. The heavens are opened here, and the Father says, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). For thirty years He had been in retirement at Nazareth, and men had seen nothing of Him. As a child of twelve He was up at Jerusalem and was found in the temple, "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46). Then for eighteen years God drops a veil upon His life. All we know of that period is this, that when He came out men said, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" (Mark 6:3). So I conclude that this blessed Son of God, here in human form on earth, wrought with His hands. Let not any one think then that service or toil is a menial thing to be shunned. Toil has been ennobled by the pathway of Christ, even as the grave has been sanctified by the fact that He has gone into it. Ah, beloved friends, wonderful indeed is the pathway of Christ.

And now the thirty years are over, and He comes out. The Father's heart is delighted then to say, as the Spirit of God, descending like a dove, lights upon Him, "This is My beloved Son." In Noah's day the dove went out of the ark but came back because it could not find a resting-place. For four thousand years the Spirit of God had been looking all over the earth to find a sinless man, a man suited to God's heart in every respect, but every man was sinful. No resting-place was found. At length there comes a Man upon whom this Holy Spirit can descend and abide (John 1:32). There is the resting-place the Spirit of God has found, a man suited to God in every spring of His being, every thought of His heart, every act of His life. He came into this world to do the will of God. And you will see how in doing God's will He is preserved, when the enemy comes to Him.

What a joy must it have been to Him to hear the Father's voice saying, "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). Notice this. People are sometimes troubled about the Trinity. You have it here. "The Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him." Then "a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased." There you have the Son, a real, true Man, before your eye. A Man whose only thought was to do the will of God. Beloved friend, have you any doubt about the Trinity? If you have, you will never make progress in your soul as to God's truth. It is not that I find the word in Scripture, but I find the thing. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are each before us in this scene. The Son was come here to make the Father known. And moreover, in the power of the Spirit, He was come to do the work by which man is delivered, as well as Satan absolutely defeated.

Are you not yet clear about the Trinity? It is vital to have the sense of what the Trinity involves, and to rejoice in it. Christ is the revealer of the Father's love. He became incarnate that He might reveal God, redeem man, and absolutely crush and break the power of the enemy. And I want you, my friends, to see that the Man who adorns the throne of God tonight has defeated Satan. I quite admit He has not taken sin out of the world yet, and the devil has power yet over men's minds, but the title to everything is in the hand of Christ. He met Satan in the wilderness and defeated him morally. Then on the cross, and in His death He utterly destroyed his power. And now redemption is accomplished, and Christ is risen, and the consequence is that if you have come into this hall tonight in your sins and in misery, you may go out with the sense that your sins are gone, because the Lord Jesus, when upon the cross, bore the sins of sinners, that He might put them away forever. And if He has not put them away, He never can do it, and He never will do it. Why? He will not die again. Then you say, "What am I to understand?" That a work has been done by this blessed Man that enables God to let you know your sins are blotted out. And if you get hold of the truth of redemption as revealed in the cross, you will go on your way, beloved friend, with your heart attached to Christ, and you will seek to do, in your pathway, what He did perfectly in His pathway — the will of God.

I love to hear that voice, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Perhaps some of you say, Why do we not here get the word "hear Him," as on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17? It seems to me that at this part of Christ's life man is being tested, and further, it goes without saying, that everybody ought to hear Him. Should not you hear Him if He be God's Son? I appeal to you from the oldest to the youngest in this hall tonight, ought we not to listen to Him without being told? Yes. And that is the point. At this stage, therefore, the word "hear Him" is absent. When we come to Matthew 17 Peter is bungling sadly when he says, "Let us make here three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias" (Matt. 17:4). Moses the Law-giver, Elijah the Reformer, and Jesus, the Son of God, he put on a common

level. The Father could not stand that. He swept Moses and Elijah off the scene as a cloud overshadows them, while the Father's voice is heard saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5).

This is the day of Jesus. Moses' day has gone by, and so has Elijah's. This is Jesus' day; hear Him. I have heard Him. Have you? I am not going to ask you to come to Christ tonight. But if I can so preach Christ that the effect is that your heart is attracted to Christ, then you will go down that lobby saying, By the grace of God, Christ for me from this night forth. Oh, cling to Him, trust Him, the blessed One who has charmed the heart of God, and defeated the enemy.

Well now, we read, "And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil" (Luke 4:1-2). Now look at the difference between the temptation of Christ, and the temptation of Adam and Eve. They were in Paradise, with everything at their hand that the goodness of God could surround them with, and there they fell. When I come to the Lord Jesus, He is not in Paradise, but in the wilderness, with everything against Him. He is there for forty days.

What a wonderful forty days we see here — the most wonderful forty days that we have in Scripture, at least so far. If Moses went up to the mountain-top, what was it for? To spend "forty days" with God. If Elijah went forty days in the strength of divinely provided food, it was to meet God in the end, and to have wonderful communications from God. Here I find One who had always walked with God, and is now led by the Holy Spirit. He is taken into the wilderness to have forty days of conflict with Satan. This touching and wonderful scene is not recorded in exactly the same words in each scripture. Luke says, "Being forty days tempted of the devil." We are not told what the character of that continued temptation was, but the three instances that are named here suffice. The character of the temptation that the blessed Lord sustained at the hand of the enemy during the forty days would seem to have a veil flung over it by God's own hand, but the final assault of the enemy is fully recorded for our profit and encouragement.

After the forty days were ended, Jesus was hungry. Then came the tempter, with four thousand years of experience of how to tempt man. He knows our weak spot. Oh yes. Down in the bottom of every heart there is a little bit of lust after something. To that the devil appeals. Satan knows exactly how to tempt every one of us. With one man it is love of money; with another some fleshly lust, perhaps a glass of whiskey. Another man he knows is upon the very verge of a moral precipice, and he will present a lure and drag him over. Satan knows the weak points of every Christian too. I do not think he exactly tempts sinners, but he knows how to work for their downfall. He does tempt the children of God because he knows they have escaped his grip. Unbelieving sinners he effectually controls, for of such it is written: "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them" (2 Cor. 4:4). So he leads them on to destruction.

And now, look well at Christ, hungry, and note how the enemy assails Him. "And the devil said unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread" (Luke 4:3). There are two ways in which you may look at that word "if." Casting a doubt on His relationship to God, or getting Him to act on the fact of that relationship. I think the audacity of Satan is sometimes surprising. He says to Jesus, "If Thou be the Son of God." That too is the way in which he will seek to upset you. He will with you raise the question whether after all you are a child of God. To the Lord he says here, "If you are really God's Son, command this stone that it be made bread." That is, God has kept you hungry, now then, your opportunity has arrived, take yourself out of God's hand, for you are able to make those stones into bread, and satisfy yourself. No miracle apparently had been wrought by the Lord Jesus up till this moment, but Satan had a true idea of who He was. He sought to upset this blessed One, and to trip Him up in the most plausible way possible.

There is no sin in hunger. It is incidental to man as he passes through this scene. If the Son of God become a Man, and enter into the world where men are, He must at least expose Himself to the vicissitudes of human life. Well, He was hungry. "And now, help yourself," was Satan's suggestion. Oh, hear what Jesus says. He had said before, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Psa. 40:7-8). He was only here to do God's will, hence when Satan says to him, "Command this stone that it be made bread," His answer is very beautiful — "It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). Notice, dear friends, the Lord Jesus not merely quotes Scripture, but He quotes it as Scripture. Mark what He says. He does not merely say, "Man shall not live by bread alone," but "It is written." He had the most profound respect for what God had written. I should like you to notice that, dear friends, because we live in a day when people say the books of Moses are not to be received. They are just human compositions. Know you this, that the answer with which Christ overcame the devil was quoted from one of these books? The first quotation is from the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, and the other two instances named here are from the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy. Christ puts His emphatic stamp upon Moses' writings over and over again, affirming their authenticity, and that they were God's word.

And now you be warned, you young men, for today the devil is busy casting doubts on Scripture. Some people say the Word of God is not to be relied upon. Look at this blessed One, He should know its value and reliability. All that He ever was He brought into manhood. He was the incarnate Son of God, and therefore, as God, He knew perfectly what was and was not Scripture. He takes the place of dependence, and then He quotes that striking verse which Moses uttered to the children of Israel: "That He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" (Deut. 8:3). The devil meets Jesus in the wilderness where Israel had been, and he tempts Him, as he tempted them. His resource is Scripture, the sword of the Spirit, God's Word. He hangs on God's Word. He is here the truly obedient, as well as the absolutely dependent One, and Satan is foiled. How are you and I to meet Satan? Exactly the same way.

We will now pass to the second temptation which Matthew gives. Satan is very wise. He is very crafty. If you foil the enemy once by dependence upon God he will still come back to you. If he does not get in at the front door, he will come again and try to enter by the back door. And what will he come with next time? Very likely a text, since he finds that you believe in Scripture. So is it here. "Then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down" [again notice the "if"]: "for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning Thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Matt. 4:5-6). This mangled quotation is taken from the 91st Psalm, which describes our Lord's pathway as the Messiah. Turn back to it for a moment. See how it starts. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psa. 91:1). It is an oracular description of what Christ would be as Messiah upon earth. He then speaks: "I will say of Jehovah, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust" (Psa. 91:2), and indeed Jehovah was His refuge. The Spirit then addresses Messiah thus: "Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence" (Psa. 91:3). If I might so say, here, in this wilderness episode, is the fowler seen spreading a snare.

Further down in the Psalm we read, “Because thou hast made Jehovah which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling” (Psa. 91:9-10). And now observe those words: “For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Psa. 91:11-12). Satan did not quote the whole of the verse. He left out those four words “in all thy ways.” Ah, how crafty is the enemy. To the blessed Lord he as it were suggests: “The scripture is plain that that promise applies to You. Now is Your opportunity to show that it does apply to You.” He suggests to Him that He should fling Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and thus He would prove that the scripture had its application to Him, and thus make Himself an object of great interest to men.

It is, however, never the way of a saint to put God to the test; so the Lord Jesus says, “It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God,” quoting this time Deuteronomy 6:16. Do I need to put God to the test to know that He loves and cares for me? No. And there is the whole point of this temptation of the Lord. If Satan suggest this text to Him, boldly misquoting Scripture, His blessed dependence upon God preserves Him, as He says, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” I do not need to put God to the proof.

I do not doubt Satan thought He had got a very strong point here with the blessed Lord, but when the heart is right it is always kept. There was nothing in His heart but a desire to do the will of God, and He was maintained in the most beautiful, perfect trust in God. He says in effect, “There is no need for me to put Him to the test.” Blessed, perfect, holy Man, He knew the heart of God. He knew the love of God. He trusted in God. And what was the result at that moment? He is preserved from the snare of the fowler, and the enemy is utterly beaten. And that is the only way you and I can beat the enemy, by confidence in God and the humble use of Scripture, which then becomes the sword of the Spirit, by which the foe of our souls is driven off

But now there is a third attack recorded. If you have beaten Satan twice, he will come again. A third time he comes to the Lord. “Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:8-9). How many a man has fallen down and worshipped Satan for a very little. Have you not noticed that? The god of this world easily deludes men. But here, what was it? Satan proposes to Christ, as he shows Him the kingdoms of the world, in a moment of time, and the glory of them, to give them to Him if He will fall down and worship him. You know that men like glory, power, and authority. Christ, however, is the only One who is worthy of these; hence in the Book of Revelation, they are, in the songs thereof, ascribed to Him alone. All that men set so much stress upon, but which they generally use to their own self-exaltation, heaven’s voice, by-and-by, is heard in one blessed note, one universal strain, ascribing to Jesus, as they say, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing” (Rev. 5:12). That is to say, other men’s hands have held those things and abused them; but finally the universal judgment is that there is but one hand worthy of holding the scepter of power, and it is the hand of the Man that first overcame Satan in the wilderness, and then was nailed to the cross to atone for sin and save sinners. It is our joy to anticipate that day and say now that His is the only hand that is worthy to hold the scepter of authority and power.

But look at the craft of the enemy as he endeavors to turn the Lord aside. He seeks to get for himself that which is due to God, the Creator. Satan is a creature, but here he seeks to get for himself what belongs to God alone. Each temptation reveals some peculiar beauty in Jesus. In plain language, if I get obedience evinced in the first temptation, and dependence marking the second, it seems to me in the third

that you get the most beautiful unfolding of the fidelity of His heart to God. Man is to worship God alone, therefore He says, “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10). And what does Satan do? He leaves Him. Observe this, he is overcome; he is foiled; he is defeated.

It is important to notice the different order of the three temptations as recorded by Matthew and Luke. As I have already said, Matthew gives us the historical, and Luke the moral order. The historical order shows that when the Lord bids Satan depart he obeys His word and leaves Him. As Luke presents this wondrous scene, however, the temptation on the mountain top comes second, and, as it now reads, in our ordinary English Bible, has this ugly appearance, that Satan stood his ground and did not go when so bidden of the Lord. This is not the case, and you should know, if you do not already possess the information, that what the Spirit of God records by the pen of Luke in verse 8 of his third chapter is this, “And Jesus answered and said unto him, It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.”

Carefully observe that the words “Get thee behind me, Satan,” are not there. Evidently in copying the ancient manuscripts some scribe judged that the previous copyist had omitted in Luke the words, “Get thee hence, Satan,” which do occur rightly in Matthew 3:10. This supposed error was sought to be corrected by the careless insertion of the words, “Get thee behind me, Satan,” which occur in Matthew 16:23, and are addressed to Peter. Having thus crept into the text, they remained, and are found in our otherwise very correct English version of the Scriptures. Read the passage, however, as God wrote it by Luke, and all is comely, for no command is given to Satan to depart, and the following temptation comes in its moral order, void of the ugly appearance I have indicated.

But you may ask, “What do you mean by moral order?” I mean the order in which Satan’s temptations usually reach us, as they reached Eve at first, and all the world since. It is written, “And when the woman Saw that the tree was good for food” (the lust of the flesh), “and that it was pleasant to the eyes” (the lust of the eye), “and a tree to be desired to make one wise” (the pride of life), “she took of the fruit thereof and did eat; and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat” (Gen. 3:6). The order here is akin to Luke’s account of the Lord’s temptations, and exactly what the Spirit of God elsewhere thus describes: “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16). Poor world! Its composition is after all only twofold, lust and pride. Lust is seeking what I do not possess, pride is self-exaltation on account of what I do possess. These principles form and actuate the world-away from God.

Now in Jesus there was nothing of this, so when Satan sought to move Him in regard to the bread, which in us would appeal to “the lust of the flesh,” he was foiled. Again, “the lust of the eyes” He was absolutely free from, and though He sees the kingdoms of the earth they attract Him not. Further, to fling Himself from the temple parapet, be unhurt, and become an object of admiration and interest, presented no charm to Him, for “the pride of life,” which might easily lead us to act on similar lines, had no place in His being. Blessed, perfect, lowly, dependent, obedient Man that He was, to do God’s will was His meat and drink, and in doing it He escaped the fowler’s snare, and utterly defeated the enemy of God and man. May we all remember that “the world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” (1 John 2:17).

Jesus is seen here as the moral Conqueror of that malign being who has upset every man but Himself. By dependence and obedience He has, however, utterly defeated and routed him. When Jesus at length at the end of the forty days' temptation said, "Get thee hence, Satan," he obeyed and departed from Him. Ah, but that is Christ, you say. Yes. But do not you forget this scripture, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Christian, get hold of this, Satan is a beaten and defeated foe. You and I could not overcome him, but the Lord did, and He shares His victory with us.

And now we read, "And, behold, angels came and ministered unto Him" (Matt. 4:11). To me there is a great charm about this. That wilderness scene angels had watched with the deepest interest. They had seen a Man that would not relieve Himself at the expense of the character of God; and when the testing time was fully over and Satan utterly routed, angels came and ministered to Him. I do not know what they brought in their hands, but they ministered to Him. "Oh yes, but that was Christ," you again say. True, but do not forget that we read of angels, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:14). I think, beloved friends, we have little idea of how much we are the objects of angelic ministry.

Have you ever noticed how they figure in the Gospels in relation to Christ? They predict His incarnation (Luke 1:30-33). They come and tell of His birth (Luke 2:9-12). In the moment of His victory over Satan, angels have the pleasure of bringing to Him that which suited Him at that moment (Mark 1:3). He is strengthened by them in the hour of His deepest sorrow in Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). They roll back the stone from the door of His tomb, sit thereon, and then announce His resurrection (Matt. 28:2; John 20:12). And when He comes again to earth they will be His happy attendants (Matt. 16:27; 2 Thess. 1:7).

Let me now say one word to you, in passing, with regard to Satan. I hear some say that Satan is not a person. I do not believe in the personality of Satan, you say. Perhaps you do not. But you forget this, that the very thing that would delight him best of all is that you should not believe in him. If you believed in him you would be afraid of him. I will ask you a question: Do you believe in the personality of Christ? Oh yes, of course I do; Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour. And you hope to be saved by Him? Yes. What kind of a Christ must you have to save you? He must be a sinless man, that is certain. I agree with you. Now, let me ask you another question. What is Satan, then, if he have no personality? Do you reply, as many others today — Satan is the proclivity to evil which is found in man's heart. That is plain, at least. Satan is not a being who can trip men up? No I Satan, forsooth, is the tendency to evil in man's own heart. Now, then, you tell me you must have a perfect Saviour. True, but I want you to notice that if you get rid of a personal devil, you get rid at the same time of a personal Saviour. They both go together. How is that?

You tell me that the devil is only the proclivity in a man's heart to evil. There will be sin coupled with that. I read that Christ was tempted of the devil. Had He any proclivities to evil? Oh no, you exclaim. How, then, was He tempted of the devil? If Christ was tempted of the devil, and the devil be the proclivity to evil in a man's own heart, then He must have had such, for Scripture affirms that He was tempted of the devil. Do you see, my friend, where you are? You have a Christ before your mind with proclivities to evil in His heart. If that were true He would not be perfect, and He would not be a truly holy man. God forgive me for saying the words. But I am only showing you where your false and hell-born ideas as to Satan are taking you. Their issue is the complete destruction of Christ as a possible Saviour, because He must have a fallen nature to have proclivities to evil in His heart — since out of it are the issues of life. That man cannot save me who has such a nature. A Christ with any proclivities to evil in His heart could not meet my case nor yours. No, my friend, by your casuistry and infidelity you have swept the devil and Christ off the scene together, and you have left yourself where you are, a sinner in your sins, and on your road to hell, and when you get there you will find that there is a devil, who will be your companion for eternity.

But further, I press on you that there is a Christ, whom, if you go on in your present sad and awful condition, you will never meet but once, and that to get at His hands the judgment you have earned. Ah, my friends, you may say, I do not believe in judgment. Satan is clever enough to keep you from believing that too. There are plenty of men who say, "Did God prepare hell for men?" No, He did not. "And did God prepare eternal fire for men?" No. The Lord Jesus will yet say, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). But do you not see, that if you will not have the company of God's Man for eternity, you must have the company of God's foe for eternity? If you are not going to spend it with Christ, through faith in His blood, and through faith in His name, if you are not going to spend it with the One who defeated the devil, and the One who loves to deliver and save you, you will spend it with the one who has deceived you. The first and last acts of Satan are identical — deceiving men. (See 1 Tim. 2:14; Rev. 20:3,8-l0.) My friend, better far wake up to the truth now. Better far take your place as a poor, good-for-nothing, ruined, undone sinner, and let this blessed Son of God, this Man who is the Victor over Satan, bless and save you. How will He do it? Follow His history, and you will soon learn.

I find now in the end of the fourth chapter of Matthew that Satan being overcome, Christ comes out to bless and deliver man: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Matt. 4:23). In plain language, He fulfills that striking verse found in Luke's Gospel. There the Lord Jesus says, "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoil" (Luke 11:21-22). And what is the meaning of that? Satan is the strong man, and he is armed with everything that can encircle and hold his vassal — man. This strong man keeps his palace. His armor is the knowledge he has of the weakness of man, a weapon which he has well learned to use in upsetting and overcoming man. His palace is the world. His goods are sinners. And while he holds them thus, they are in peace. You were never in anxiety about your soul? Never. You have been in peace all your days. You do not believe in Satan. Not you. You are just an illustration of the truth.

Well, who is the stronger Man? This blessed One I have been telling you of. He overcame Satan, and bound him morally in the wilderness. He took all his armor from him. Christ has gone into the devil's camp of set purpose, hence we read, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). He has come here to refute the devil's lie that God did not love men. God is love, and He has given His own Son to death for us, at a great cost.

When the devil left Christ in the wilderness, we are told by Luke that it was "for a season" (chap. 4:13). Another time Satan crossed His path in the garden of Gethsemane. Regarding that attack the blessed Lord said to His disciples, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (John 14:30). He had met Him once before, and been defeated by Him. But, unabashed, he came to Him again in the garden. Then he evidently pressed on Him the awful consequences of His pathway if He would go on, even death. What was Christ's action? We read, "Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from (or out of) death, and was heard in that He feared" (Heb. 5:7). His agony was so deep then, that "his sweat was as it were great drops of

blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22).

Doubtless Satan then suggested to Him to pause and not drink that cup, for it would cost Him His life, and the forsaking of God. He looked into the cup and measured its contents. It was all God's judgment against sin. If He drank it He must be forsaken of God, and be cast off, upon the cross. Not merely was it the physical suffering and sorrow that man could give Him, as they nailed Him to the tree, but the inevitable sense that God and He must part company. Hence as He looked at that cup, He said, "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done." He knew that if He did not drink that cup of judgment upon the cross, you and I would have to drink it in eternity. If He did not drink the cup in our room and stead, there was no deliverance, no salvation, no pardon, no cleansing, possible for you and me. As He looked at that cup He shrank from it in all the perfect holiness of His being, and deprecated it with the utmost intensity. Then He took it, and drank it to the very dregs in the perfection of His love. Blessed Saviour! Well may each redeemed one cry, Hallelujah, I am saved; I am saved by His death. We are saved because He drank God's cup of wrath, to the very dregs, so that He, in tender love and divine righteousness, might put the cup of God's salvation into our hands, and press it to our lips. May we not joyfully say, "What hath God wrought?"

Nor is this all. He died to save us, He now lives to succor us. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). What is that? Just what we have been considering — the temptation in the wilderness. And now He is able to succor us. "For in that He himself suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). He is able to save, He is able to succor, and He is able to sympathize (Heb. 4:15). Note well the passage" Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). What is the meaning thereof? That blessed, great high priest, now at God's right hand, understands perfectly all the pathway of the Christian here. He has gone through it Himself. He took up all our sorrows in His life that He might sympathize, and He took up all our sins in His death that He might save. Now on high He can succor and deliver His people absolutely. Hebrews 4:15 alludes to the temptation in the wilderness, and Hebrews 5:7 gives us the agony in the garden, as He looked at the cup, shrank from it, and then drank it.

With Him, then, it was "prayers and supplications." Do you know what the apostle connects with prayer and supplication for us? "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication WITH THANKSGIVING let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6). Thank God. Christ's prayers and supplications were coupled with strong cryings and tears, ours are to be coupled with thanksgivings, for His death and resurection have brought us into peace, liberty, and rest before God.

And now, let me again ask, who would not have this blessed One as Saviour, Lord, and Friend? Who would not seek to follow Him? He is the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him, for He has overcome Satan and spoiled his goods. Fellow-Christian, you and I were once servants and slaves of the devil. But what has happened? The Lord has picked us up, saved us and cleansed us, filled our hearts with peace and joy, and given us the privilege of telling other people of Himself.

What a wonderful thing is the grace that picks up the vessels of Satan's power, delivers and cleanses them, and then deposits in them some spiritual gift by which others may be helped. Christ ascended on high that He might send down the Holy Spirit with the glorious news which, when believed, delivers sinners from Satan's power, and brings them from darkness to light. And there is the value of preaching. The preacher goes out and tells the simple tidings of the love of Jesus and the value of His blood. Any one that believes and decides for Him, God will give His Spirit to, and very likely make him the means of blessing to somebody else. That is the way the gospel spreads. First of all you receive the gospel yourself, and then constrained by His love you go and tell others what Jesus has done for you. Like the man whose eyes Jesus opened, you can say, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). Who wrought this marvel? Jesus. My hearer, believe in Jesus, and then go home and tell your friends: "I have found the Lord. I am delivered. I am set free. His blood has washed all my sins away."

Now, the gospel is not only that Christ has overcome Satan morally when tempted in the wilderness, but that He has gone right down into death, and there destroyed his power. Further, He has risen triumphant, and the devil knows it well. As a consequence there is peace for you. You learn to know a risen, triumphant Christ at God's right hand. The Man who overcame Satan morally in the wilderness — while He was on His way back to God's right hand — has on the road carved the pathway for me to accompany Him, and has opened the doorway right up to God's presence through His death and resurrection. As He died He said, "It is finished." When He rose, He said, "Peace unto you." The Holy Spirit has now come down to tell us that the Victor is in the glory. And the man that believes in Him shares His victory, and enters into the spoils of His conquest.

If you have never before made up your mind for Christ, surely you will believe Him and confess Him tonight. Then you can joyfully go through this world and say: "Come, see a Man that has overcome Satan, borne all my sins, saved me forever, and now fills my heart with peace and joy. His name is Jesus." If this be the case, God will make you the means of blessing to others. May He grant it for His name's sake.

Night Scenes of Scripture, Night of Flight, A

(Matt. 2:13-23)

It is an intensely solemn fact that Christ is not wanted by the very people that need Him most, unless the Holy Spirit has raised the question of sin in their souls. No matter where you find the Lord drawing near to man, this is ever the case, and the testimony of the wise men to Herod first demonstrates this truth, after the Son of God became incarnate. At the very outset of His course He was rejected, and that is why we read in the opening chapter of John's Gospel, "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto his own (property), and His own (the Jews) received Him not" (John 1:10-11). Whenever you bring in the truth about Christ into the world, whenever there comes the testimony of the Holy Spirit to men of the world — introducing Christ — do you know the effect? What was it then? "When Herod had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." Now would you not have thought that they would have rejoiced, and been delighted to hear the news? When they heard the question, "Where is He?" would you not have thought there would be a desire to know where He was, and who He was? Alas! they were not prepared to receive Him, but they were prepared to say, "Not wanted." Somebody said to me only today, "What do you mean by a rejected Christ?" My dear friend, do you know what rejection is? You are not wanted. Sinner! you do not want Him, do you? Indeed, from the date of His birth, I might say, the sad truth came out — He was not wanted.

He was needed. But was He wanted by Herod? No! Did the scribes want Him? No! Did the men of the world want Him? No! Do you want Him now? Well, if you are an awakened sinner, you do; but if you are not, you do not. Oh no! Do you know the finest way to spoil a worldly party? Go into the midst of it and speak about Christ. Go into a ballroom, or on to a racecourse, if you like, and witness for Christ, and you will find He is not wanted. The world does not want Jesus.

Some years ago I was in a third-class carriage coming up from Musselburgh on a Saturday night. The train was crowded, and the carriage I was in had five communicating compartments, so there were over fifty people in the carriage. As we journeyed a party of ten who occupied the middle compartment began to sing. They sang very well — Scotch songs — and all the rest of the people in the carriage stopped talking and listened. When we reached Portobello they got out, and other people got in. At that moment I rose and said: “My friends, I have observed that you have been listening with interest to these Scotch songs. I am not a Scotchman, but I should like to tell you about the song of my native land.” Everybody looked and listened. Then I went on: “My native land is heaven. I belong to heaven. I am redeemed by the blood of the Savior, and belong to heaven. I cannot tell you the tune of the song sung there, but its words are these, “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” From these words I preached the gospel for two or three minutes, and then sat down. At the same moment the train was drawn up by a danger signal, and there was a dead silence. The first words that broke the silence were, “Is he drunk?” They came from the further end of the carriage, and the speaker was a working-man. “No,” said another man, “I do not think he is drunk; I think he is a good man.” “He is not a wise man,” said a third. “And why not?” asked a fourth. “Because he does not know the time nor the place for these things,” said the first speaker. This sentiment was applauded. It just expressed the world’s opinion. It never has time or place for Jesus. Sinner, the fact is you have no time for Christ; you have no place for Christ. Alas! you do not want Jesus.

My hearer, you will want Him one day. He was rejected in the day of His birth, and He has been rejected ever since. You say, Oh, things are altered since then. Are they? How many times have I stood with others at the corner of a street, and sought to speak a word for the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, and gathered a crowd around us, and just as we were beginning to get into the sweetness of the proclamation of the gospel, Policeman No. B246 has come along and said, “Move on, please; by the order of the magistrates; we can’t have the thoroughfare blocked.” “All right,” says some one, and we move on. We go down three blocks, and there, at the foot of a street, is a German band, with the listening crowd reaching over to the other side of the thoroughfare, but you do not find Policeman No. B246 coming and telling them to move on. No, the world likes music, but it cannot tolerate Christ.

Some day you will sadly want Him, friend, when you cannot get Him. You will want to get to Him when you cannot get near Him. But do tidings of Christ trouble you now? You are like Herod. “When Herod heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” I would to God that you were troubled, but on a right account. Would to God that you were anxious about your soul, and crying, “What must I do to be saved?” It would be a good thing for you if you were to heed the Scriptures too. Herod did, but not for salvation. In his trouble, “when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.” It is a very striking thing that if you want solid information you must go to the Scriptures, and even that godless man Herod had to go to Scripture. Whence did Herod get his information? From the pages of Scripture. And where do men get real light and truth today? Again, it is from the Scriptures.

Let me exhort you, young man, to hang on to the Bible. Do not let the infidel professors of a theology that suits the world rob you of a single letter of Scripture. They are very busy, indeed, cutting out this section and that. Believe them not. A young man wrote me a letter last week, in which he stated that he had been filled with doubts as to Scripture, and, strange to say, that it was the teachers of religion who had upset his faith. Well, I have not much respect for such teachers. Men who will teach the truth, and give their hearers undiluted and unadulterated Scripture, are above all things wanted now. The man who tampers with Scripture will do so only to his own cost, for he will find out in the end that he has been tampering with the words of the living God. Thank God, He has long patience with all such, but there comes a moment when His patience is wearied out. My friends, thank God for the Scriptures. All the difficulties of the Scriptures, that men so often speak about, are really not such when rightly understood. Errors do not exist in them. God forbid the thought. There are no errors in Scripture, and the difficulties become the greatest beauties when they are rightly apprehended. There is all the difference in the world between what God says, and what man says.

If you take the finest thing man has made, say for instance the finest work in steel, which has been most highly finished off, and burnished, and put it under a microscope, what a rough, wretched, scratched concern it is. There is no smoothness in it at all, Now I put the wing of a butterfly under the glass; and the more you magnify it, the more beautiful it becomes. That is the difference between what man makes, and what God makes — what man writes, and what God writes. So do not you let into your head any of the current, flimsy and withal infidel, ideas as to there being errors in Scripture. I will tell you where the error lies. In the vision of the man who is reading it. He has got a spiritual cataract — a blindness about his moral vision; and he does not see things clearly. Blind men do not see. Every one knows that; and if you think you see errors in Scripture, be sure you have not a clear vision. That is not complimentary to me, you say. I know it is not. I do not want it to be. I want the legs knocked from under you, my infidel friend. I want to see you get down, and say, “Let God be true, but every man a liar.” You listen to God, for He speaks the truth, and His truth is exactly just in all its proportions.

It is a striking testimony to the value of God’s Word that Herod, in the middle of his confusion, is obliged to turn to, and listen to Scripture. When he gets the knowledge, he turns it to bad account, like many another sinner. “Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also.” He had no thought of that. That was mere deceit on his lips. He was set on murder, not worship, in his heart. You know what took place. Although on his deathbed, as we are told, he sent out his headsmen, “and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.” Such is man’s hatred, that he plots, as soon as he hears of His birth, to cut off the blessed Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, Now do you not think it startling when you come to look at Scripture, and at what God tells us about His Son? Yes, it is very startling! He was not wanted. Herod’s awful project the magi did not aid in carrying out. When they had seen and worshipped the Lord, they repaired, warned of God, to their own country. Scripture tells us that “being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.”

And when they were departed Joseph had a dream. Joseph got a word from the Lord. And the wise men got a word from the Lord also, and they are obedient. They are obedient as well as worshipful. That same night apparently Joseph had a dream, saw an angel, and heard this word: “Arise, and take the young child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy Him. When he arose, he took the young child and His mother by night, and departed into Egypt.” Only think that the Son of God, come here to save man, must flee the land of His nativity in order to escape the murderous intent of man. In the darkness of night — to evade observation — a start is made for Egypt. But why Egypt? “That it might be fulfilled, which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called My son.” How wonderful are the ways of God! These words, “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” (Hos. 11:1), are to be fulfilled. You may say, How can that be? Christ retraces in His own Person the pathway of Israel, and He begins that history in Egypt, out of which He comes when Herod was dead. You then find Him at the Jordan, which Israel also crossed.

And in the fourth chapter of Matthew we find Him in the wilderness, where Israel utterly failed, but He did not fail. In all this pathway of Jesus you are on truly historic ground. He was the true Israel — spoken of so often by Isaiah. Jesus was going to take up in His own history the responsibility of the people of God, and that is what enables Him to be a Savior. Where every other man had failed, He glorified God, and then, in grace, died for those who had failed, and therefore needed redemption. His perfection as a Man qualified Him to be the Redeemer.

The going down into Egypt, then, was that Scripture might be fulfilled, and the next thing we read is that Herod sends out his bloody edict that another Scripture might be fulfilled. “Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not” (Matt. 2:16-18; Jer. 31:5). Why Rachel’s voice? While Bethlehem belonged to the tribe of Judah, Benjamin was next to them; and you recollect Benjamin was Rachel’s son. Bethlehem is first mentioned in connection with Rachel’s death (Gen. 35:16-20), and her sepulcher was “ in the border of Benjamin, at Zelzah” (1 Sam. 10:2). This bit of land, belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, dipped down into the land of Judah; and about a mile north of Bethlehem, on the main road from Jerusalem and Bethel, the site of her tomb is marked by a little building to this day. Herod was so determined to sweep the coast clear, that not only in Bethlehem, but in “the coasts thereof,” that is, the parts of Benjamin just alluded to, were the children slain.

The quotation from Jeremiah is a remarkable application of Old Testament Scripture. Rachel had been dead for centuries and centuries, but the Spirit of God puts it in this remarkable way, as if her spirit had risen from the dead; and in connection with this fearful slaughter of so many of her own children, as well as the murdered infants of the tribe of Judah, Rachel’s voice is lifted up in weeping, and her cries of sorrow are heard even in Ramah, the chief town of Benjamin. It is highly interesting to see how one passage of Scripture interprets another, and is interwoven with all Scripture. We should not have expected Rachel to meet us here, but, as I said before, Bethlehem was the place where she died. There also her children died, just because it was the spot where her Savior and theirs, and thank God, my Savior, was born. Is He your Savior? If He is, we shall both thank God for Bethlehem by-and-by.

“But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child’s life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.” I may just say you will not find that expression “Nazarene” in the Old Testament; but Nazareth was a despised place, and Jesus was brought up in that despised and disgraced place. Do you not remember what Nathanael says in the first chapter of John, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” What came out of Nazareth presently? The blessed Lord came out. My dear friends, Jesus of Nazareth is a living, and a loving Savior; but He has been rejected. Rejection met Him at the outset of His history. The world has never wanted Him. From His birth He has been rejected, and now He has gone out of sight.

Jesus the Nazarene — Jesus of Nazareth — the blessed Son of God has passed through this scene — alas! — unloved and unwanted by man. He was rejected. “He came to His own, and His own received him not,” but then, as now, grace has led some to care for Him, and of them it is written, “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name” (John 1:11-12). But though He was a rejected Savior, He would still be a Savior. Nothing chilled His love. He is rejected still; but, friend, what I want is your heart for that rejected Savior now, and if you have never yielded your heart to Him till now, I ask you, Is He not worthy of it? And do you not think the day is coming when God will vindicate Him, and judge the world that has rejected Him, and the man who has refused Him? You may be certain He will.

Let me then urge you to come to Him in time, and confess and own Him now. God give you, my friend, this moment to receive that blessed One as your Savior. You may say to me, You have not told us much about His work. You have heard plenty about His work, and have not been converted. I want you to see tonight that He is a rejected Savior. The world has rejected Him, and you either side with the world who rejected Him, or with Him who is rejected. God has yet to settle with you, my friend, as to how you stand in relation to Jesus. God has said to Him, “Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.”

How do you stand in relation to the One who was rejected by the world, which at the outset would not have Him, and at length spat upon Him, scorned Him, and finally crucified Him with malefactors? How do you stand in relation to Him? Yours is an awful case if you are on the world’s side, for, mark this, He will appear, He will come back in power and glory; and woe betide the man who is not on His side then. God help you to take your stand with Jesus, and for Jesus. Where is He? At the Father’s right hand. Whom will He save? Anybody that will trust Him. Whom will He receive? Anyone that will come unto Him. “Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.” If you are wise you will say tonight, “From this moment forth, Lord Jesus, I will be on Thy side, whoever may be opposed to Thee. Yea, Lord, I am Thine.”

Forty Days of Scripture, Resurrection Scenes: Mary's Friends and Their Message: The Lord Jesus' Forty Days

(Matthew 27:57-66; Matthew 28:1-20)

I have no doubt that the second company of individuals who saw the Lord in resurrection were the women who are named in this twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew. We saw last week that Mary is a type, if you will, of the heavenly saint. That is the saint who knows Christ where He now is. He had said to her, you remember, “Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father: and to My God, and your God.” And she went and told the brethren the truth of the present moment, that is, that our position, our portion, and our relationship to God are identical with that which the blessed Lord now occupies. We are in union with Him and in association with Him where He now is, in the Father’s presence, the Father’s house on high. In fact it is heavenly ground. Whether we have touched it or enjoyed it, is another question altogether.

Now you would notice as I read the twenty-eighth of Matthew just now, that when the Lord met this company of women, and said, “All hail,” that “they came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him” (Matt. 28:9). Now, why should He say to one woman, “Touch Me not,” and permit another company to touch Him and hold Him by the feet, while they worship Him? Well, beloved friends, I think the reason is very simple. Mary was to introduce the heavenly side of the truth, and is herself a figure of the heavenly company, who by faith know the Lord where He now is in heaven. Such is the blessed privilege which belongs to you and me now, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. But the heavenly side of Christ’s reign in the hearts of men is not everything. He is coming back again to head up all things by-and-by in heaven and on earth.

Our portion is heavenly, but there will yet be an earthly company and earthly blessing, for the Old Testament Scriptures speak largely of promises and blessings for earth and an earthly people. I grant you that everything is gone into ruin and failure on the earth for the time being, and Satan’s power is only too manifest, but, thank God, the earth will yet own the sway and delight in the presence of Jesus; and there will be a redeemed and renewed Israel on earth, who will have Him in their midst as their King, and who will own Him and delight in Him, just as those women do here.

Old Testament Scripture is full of the fact that the glory of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. But then His glory cannot fill the earth till He Himself takes possession of the earth, nor until He puts the earth right. These “times of the restitution of all things,” as Peter calls them (Acts 3:21), will be connected with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ upon earth by-and-by. His feet will yet stand on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4), and there will be an earthly people delighted to welcome Him.

Now I make these remarks just at the beginning, because they will help us to understand the way in which this truth comes out in the last chapter of Matthew’s Gospel. What we have in the closing chapter of Matthew is exactly what I should expect. You know that Jesus had come as the King of the Jews, and Messiah; but He had been refused the throne; He had been ignominiously rejected. Nothing therefore could be more suitable or beautiful than to see the way Matthew’s Gospel closes. It presents the King in the midst of a company upon earth who have Him and hold Him, who know Him, and worship Him. If we had only got the Gospel of Matthew, we should suppose the Lord to be upon earth just now, because there is no account of His ascension in Matthew.

It is beautiful to see the way in which Matthew’s Gospel closes, with the blessed Lord having round Him upon earth those that delight in Him. The instruction that is connected with this fact is by no means unimportant. I daresay you know, that there are many who have thought the Gospel of Matthew incomplete, just because you have no account of the ascension of the Lord therein. One noted Anglican divine has gone so far as to say that he believed there would yet be found a manuscript of this Gospel containing an account of the Lord passing up to heaven. Now to have the ascension in Matthew’s Gospel would be to spoil it entirely, and I trust I shall be able to show to you the reason for that statement. Among my hearers I know that there are many young Christians, and if they get the outline of this Gospel, they will see why we have not the ascension here, and how this falls in with what has gone before.

Now just go back and see how we have the Lord Jesus presented in this Gospel. The four Gospels present the Lord Jesus in four different aspects. Matthew presents Him as the King of the Jews, the Messiah, but as the rejected King. Mark gives Him as the Servant. Luke delineates Him as the Son of man. John presents Him as the Son of God.

Matthew opens most beautifully with the genealogy of the King, because if it be a question of a throne and kingdom, the One who claims that throne and that kingdom must give the most incontestable evidence as to His right to it. Now that is just the way in which the Gospel opens. The genealogy of the Lord Jesus furnishes the most irrefragable proof of His claim to the throne of David.

Just turn back to the first chapter for a moment. “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1). And then we read, “And Jesse begat David the king; and

David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias” (Matt. 1:6). So you have there, in the middle of the genealogy, what I call the keynote of the Gospel struck. It is the genealogy of the King. I do not go into the detail of it, but there you have the Lord’s title to the throne of David, proved in the most unmistakable way.

I must just point out in passing the wonderful way in which the grace of God comes out, dear friends, in this genealogy. There are here introduced the names of four women, that any one but God would have kept out of the genealogy. Who, of set purpose, in preparing a genealogical tree to prove a title, would have brought in the story of Rahab the harlot, or Bathsheba, or Ruth, or Tamar? Ah, none but God. You see God wrote this Book and not man. Man would have carefully excluded the names of Tamar, and Rahab, Bathsheba, and Ruth. Not that Ruth’s name was foul, yet she was a Moabitess, and as such forbidden to enter the congregation of the Lord to the tenth generation forever (Deut. 23:3), but the other three had the foulest tarnish on their names that a woman could have. Man would have carefully omitted all reference to such palpable blots on his family escutcheon. Not so God. When He is about to narrate the genealogy of His Son, become a man to bless man, God brings them in. That is to say, in these four women you have the most beautiful illustration of how the grace of God can rise above the sin of man, and even permit that which is the outcome of man’s weakness and sin to be the very occasion for the introduction into this scene of His own blessed Son, who was to be the Saviour of the world, as well as the King of the Jews.

Chapter 2 gives you the birth of the King, and the first question in the New Testament, as the Magi say, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” (Matt. 2:2). Thereafter comes His flight into Egypt, that Scripture might be fulfilled (Matt. 2:15), as regards that, and also His later dwelling in Nazareth (Matt. 2:23).

Chapter 3 introduces John the Baptist, proclaiming the fact that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. In plain language he announces the advent of the King, and then he baptizes the One who is the King.

The King comes upon the scene, not in display, might, and glory, but lowly, and taking His place among the remnant of Israel, the godly.

Then chapter 4 gives you the story of the temptation in the wilderness. Looked at from the Lord's side it is the lovely display of His moral beauties as a dependent man, but, I think, viewed from another point, it is to bring to light the actual deposition of the usurper. It is Satan beaten. The true King morally defeats and overturns the one who, so to speak, filled the throne of the world. And that is Satan.

When you come to chapters 5, 6 and 7, you find one continuous subject. All the instructions there found may not have been spoken by the blessed Lord at one moment, but they are taken up by the Spirit of God, put together consecutively, and you have before you there what is often called "the sermon on the mount." Those chapters give you in detail the laws of the kingdom, the principles that are to rule the kingdom which is to be introduced by the blessed One who comes as the King. Only notice, He never says He is the King. It is most beautiful to see that there is only one instance in the whole of the pathway of the. Lord Jesus, in which He says He is the King (see Matt. 25:34,40). When describing the future judgment which will mark His kingdom, He twice calls Himself the King. But He never claimed kingship. I fancy that had it been you or I we should have claimed our rights. That was not Christ's way. He could not take the kingdom in its then condition of sin and rebellion. He will get it by-and-by, according to God, and on the ground of redemption.

In chapters 8 and 9 you will find grouped together all the powers which mark the introduction of the kingdom of Messiah, as foretold in Isaiah 35, which you should study. You have the miracles of the Lord condensed and brought together. There are twelve miracles in these two chapters, and they are brought together, I have no doubt, to form a dispensational picture, and show in the most incontestable way that He, who was the Messiah that should come, was here. And He was here doing that which Jehovah alone could do. That is the point of chapters 8 and 9.

Then, when you come to chapter 10, you will find the Lord calls His twelve disciples, whom He names apostles, and bids them go out and preach the kingdom. The kingdom of heaven is announced by His authority, and the apostles are sent out to preach it. Now you would have thought that, this being so, the King would have been accepted, and the kingdom would have been set up. But, alas I what you find is this, in chapter 11, John the Baptist doubts Him, and the Pharisees and everybody disbelieve Him. In plain language His testimony is not received. When you come to chapter 12 the spirit of opposition to Him is deeper, and though "the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David?" the religious leaders of the moment — the Pharisees reply, "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils" (Matt. 12:23-24). His mighty power to heal and bless they ascribe to Satan, and not to the power of the Holy Spirit. In plain language they absolutely refuse Christ altogether, and as a consequence, in the close of chapter 12, He refuses to own the nation as God's people any more. The link is broken, and the Jews are cast off for the time being. Every thought of setting up the kingdom on earth is abandoned, for if the King be rejected, how can the kingdom be established?

Coming to chapter 13, you there get the similitudes of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom is now in mystery, and you get the truth relating to the Church of God — the new work of Christ — unfolded. But, as far as the kingdom in manifestation on earth is concerned, it is abandoned. The next thing is this, the leaders of the nation begin to plot for Messiah's death. Judas becomes the tool in Satan's hands to deliver Him to His enemies, and the end is soon reached. They nail Him to the cross, and, above His head, the inscription, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (Matt. 27:37). That was His crime nailed up over His head. As you know, when the Romans condemned a man to death, they always placed the crime for which he was to die over his head. Now what was His crime? That He was what He said He was. And what was He? He was Jesus of Nazareth, Jehovah the Saviour, and King of the Jews. Then the chief priests come and say to Pilate, "Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am the King of the Jews" (John 19:21). "Pilate answered and said, What I have written I have written" (John 19:22). He had the sense that what he had written was true. Thus the King died, crucified by His own subjects, and the Scripture was fulfilled, "And after the three score and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and have nothing" (Dan. 9:26). It is very interesting to see the way, particularly in Matthew, in which God records the facts concerning the death of the Lord Jesus, as also His burial, and His resurrection.

The careful reader of Scripture cannot but be struck with the great number of times the expression "That the Scriptures might be fulfilled," occurs in Matthew's Gospel, far more frequently than in any of the other Gospels. Not infrequently you get, "As it is written," in each Gospel, but Matthew goes further, and twelve times says, "That the Scriptures might be fulfilled" (see
Matt. 1:22; 2:15,17,23; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54; 27:9,35).

Now let us notice what occurred after the Lord was dead. "When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: he went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed" (Matt. 27:57-60). You must understand of course that a Jewish tomb was not like our graves, a hole dug in the earth. In this instance Scripture is careful to tell us it was hewn out in the rock, and it was a new tomb. And why a new tomb? Because Christ must ever have the first of everything. He will not take the second ride on an ass (Mark 11:2), the second place in a tomb (Matt. 27:60; John 19:41), or the second place in your heart or mine.

The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah had predicted what you have here. Just go back and look at it. "He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare His generation? for He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of My people was he stricken. And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death," or more truly, "And His grave was appointed with the wicked, but He was with the rich in His death." What is the meaning of that? The Jews had designed undoubtedly to put the blessed holy body of the Son of God, along with both the bodies of the criminals, who died by His side, into the common pit. Satan's malice not only suggested that He should be betrayed by a familiar friend, but that after He was dead His body should be cast into the common pit. God's answer to this insult to His Son was already recorded. "His grave was appointed with the wicked, but he was with the rich in His death." This is beautiful, and the reason yet more so. "Because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth" (Isa. 53:9). In that terrible hour when everything seemed over, and when His own had all lost hope, and Satan thought he had then everything in his hand, God remembered that "He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth," and the rich man of Arimathea, Joseph, stepped in and secured His body.

What Jesus had been in all His pathway suited God absolutely, and here we see that the very care of God for His body in death was connected with the beauty of His life. Do not let us forget it. It was not loosely penned by the Spirit of God that, "with the rich man was His tomb,

because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth" (Isa. 53:9). I do not think that could be said of anybody else. Christ was absolutely transparent in everything, and therefore, the rich man turns up. That is to say, the death of Christ produced what His life had never produced. Joseph had previously been "a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews"; but now you notice he comes boldly out, claims, gets, and then buries the body of Jesus in his own new tomb.

Now we read in another Gospel, "Wherein was never man yet laid" (John 19:41). Why is God so careful to say that? The answer to that question is found in the Old Testament, and its perusal will help you to observe how carefully God guards everything connected with the person of His blessed Son. Go back to the Second Book of Kings, where we read: "And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men: and they cast the man into the sepulcher of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet" (2 Kings 13:20-21). I think it is easy to see now why it was said to be a new tomb "wherein was never man yet laid." If the Spirit of God had not been careful to record this, Satan and the Jews would soon have had the story in circulation that Jesus was risen from the dead, but that was nothing new. That was what happened in Old Testament times. He had been put into a tomb where the bones of some prophet lay, and consequently He had revived again. God foresaw that lie, and has taken great care to tell us it was a new tomb.

And there they laid Jesus, "And there was Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulcher" (Matt. 27:61). That took place on what we call the Friday afternoon. "Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can" (Matt. 27:62-65). I have no doubt, from the way in which Pilate speaks, that he had a deep sense that the Lord would arise from the dead. Could any power keep that blessed One in the grave? Impossible. And I think Pilate knew it in the bottom of his heart. "So they went and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch" (Matt. 27:66). It is a most awful thing, when you come to think of it, that the religious world did its very best to keep Christ out of the scene. Fancy sealing in a dead Man, and then setting a lot of soldiers with drawn swords round Him. The fact is this, they issued the finest testimony possible that He had risen, when the time came (Matt. 28:1). Satan always defeats himself.

Now we read, "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher" (Matt. 28:1). You must bear in mind that the Jewish day began at six o'clock in the evening, so the Sabbath had gone by, and the first day of the week begun when those women at eventide came out. Elsewhere we are told that they "rested on the Sabbath day according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56). They obeyed the law. They had prepared spices, "that they might come and anoint Him" on the Friday evening, and then rested on the Saturday. That was the Sabbath. The Lord's Day has nothing at all to do with the Sabbath. The Sabbath is the last day of the week. There is no such thing as the Christian Sabbath, although men often so speak. There is the Lord's Day. The first of the week is the day that belongs to the Lord. And I claim a greater sanctity for the Lord's Day than the Jew does for the Sabbath. You and I give the Lord the first day of the week.

The point here is, that on the Sabbath Day they were obedient, and rested. Now apparently they go out in the twilight, free from legal restrictions, for really the first day of the week had begun. Out go these two in the gloaming to see the sepulcher. What took place then? We are not told. Did they spend the night there? I do not know, for we are not told. But what I want to show you is this, that you must not read into Matthew 28:1-2, what is not there, and come to the false conclusion that they were present when the Lord rose, and present when the angel rolled away the stone. That cannot be so; because, if you will turn to Mark 16, which gives us another account, you read this, "And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him" (Mark 16:1).

They evidently thought of Him only as dead. "And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun" (Mark 16:2). Here Mark gives us a little bit of light. They were there at the rising of the sun. They must then have been there twice. I do not doubt it. Whether they went back overnight is not the question. They came out at the rising of the sun, but then, ere they got there, and ere the sun was risen, the blessed Lord had risen. "And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great" (Mark 16:3-4).

The same story is given to us by the evangelist Luke. "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them" (Luke 24:1). When they get there, an angel meets them, and having heard his communication, we are told they go back. I have little doubt that it was Mary's lingering behind her friends, which became the occasion for her to see the Lord as we considered last week. Evidently her female companions were going towards Jerusalem when the Lord met them, as recorded in Matthew 28:9. I have said, and I think you will find it is correct, that verses 1 and 2 of that chapter are not immediately consecutive in point of time. There is an interval of some hours between them. Verse 1 stands by itself.

The women went out in the evening to see the sepulcher, and I conclude, and am pretty sure I am right from other scriptures, that they were not there, because they had gone back to the city before verse 2 was enacted. Read it: "And, behold, there had been a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow" (Matt. 28:2-3). Verses 2, 3 and 4 are brought in to show what had taken place. There was an earthquake when the Lord died, and there was an earthquake when He rose. Man, the creature, was insensible to the wonderful work of Calvary. The earth, created by the Son of God, shook to its very center when He, who had been its Creator, died, and thereafter was buried, completely ending the history and life-page of the first man. And then, when He arose, again to its very center it was shaken. What had happened? The most wonderful thing that ever took place, because infinitely greater in its issue than creation, was the resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God.

But you may tell me that creation was a wonderful thing. I know it. Something far more wonderful was the death of Him who was the Creator, and all that was effected by that atoning death, when He bare sins, met all the claims of God, glorified God in death, and then passed into the tomb. On this resurrection morning He rises out of death, and leaves every trace of it behind forever. Scripture says, "Christ was raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom. 6:4); and again, that He "was quickened by the Spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18); and again it says He raised Himself, for it is written, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19), for " I lay down My life that I might

take it again" (John 10:17). But the point is this, He rose, and I have no manner of doubt that He rose before the stone was rolled away.

It was not rolled away to let the Lord Jesus out of the tomb, but to let you and me look in and see the wonderful proofs of that which had taken place. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the evidence that death was annulled, the power of Satan broken, God perfectly glorified about sin, and that sin forever put away. He defeated Satan morally in the wilderness first, then came out and spoiled his palace, but now He goes right down into the very center of his kingdom, meets him in the citadel of his strength — death — and overcomes him absolutely. By death He destroys death, and him who had the power thereof (Heb. 2:14). And then He rises from the dead, the mighty Victor, and hastens to bring others into all the blessed fruits of His glorious victory.

Now you will find how this works out in this chapter. As has been often said, there is no singing here. Why? The reason is very simple. Redemption was not for angels. It was for sinners like you and me. Ah, friends, we have good title to sing. And we have ground for singing too. And if we do not sing, I want to know why? I tell you what it is, whenever a saint is downright happy he always sings. "Is any merry let him sing" (James 5:13). Joy in the Holy Spirit is that which marks the soul now that has the sense of what it is to be quickened with Christ and associated with Him where He is now before God, alive from the dead.

And now the angel addresses the women, who again appear upon the scene, and says, "Fear not ye." The first words you get from the lips of the Lord in resurrection, that we are told of, were, "Woman, why weepest thou?" The first word He said to the company of His disciples was, "Peace unto you." But I think the first testimony of the angel here is very beautiful. "Fear not ye." Now what is the great thought in resurrection? The dispelling of everything that would bring in fear. Fear must go, for "fear hath torment" (1 John 4:18). Have you any fear? You do not know Christ in resurrection. We find an angel saying, first to the women, "Fear not," but what does Jesus say to them when He meets them? "All hail." An angelic note sweetly falls upon their ears to begin with, but how beautifully is it confirmed by the Lord Himself. Beloved friend, if you have learned the value of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, you are brought into an atmosphere where fear does not exist. People think it is almost right to fear, and they are afraid of this, that, and the other ill. Ah, my friend, I wish you would listen to the opening testimony in resurrection — "Fear not."

We come now into an atmosphere where everything is redolent of Christ and His victory, hence the believer in Him is to have power and victory. On the cross He was the Victim. And what is He now? He is the Victor. Get these two things in your soul. When I see Him dying, He is the Victim. When I see Him risen, He is the Victor. All power is in His hand. What room is there for fear and doubt? "Perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:11). Oh, beloved friends, it is a wonderful reality this. It is like letting in light where darkness has reigned. If only believers got in their souls the sense of what it is to be in association with Christ in resurrection, their experience would be wonderful. He brings us into a new place and sphere altogether. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:2). I do not say they touched it all that day. If you, fellow-believer, have not touched it, you have missed God's mind for you. Thank God, I can say I have touched enough to make my heart rejoice. Year in and year out, heaven is commenced already for the heart that is in the joy of resurrection, and in association with Christ.

And now notice what the angel says to these women, "For I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified" (Matt. 28:5). It is a fine thing for those who look on to say, "We know ye seek Jesus." What do you think the world says about you and me behind our backs? Do you seek Jesus? It is a fine thing that. What you want is Jesus. You are all right if you are seeking Jesus. The angel then adds, "He is not here: for He is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matt. 28:6). I suppose the angel took them by the hand and led them to the door of the sepulcher. They are to face not death but an empty tomb, the witness of resurrection. How people shrink from this! I have seen saint after saint, who when death came in view, was quite upset. Why? Because they have not been in this chapter, and really heard the words, "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." And what is to be seen? Death annulled. That is the point. A risen Christ is to fill the horizon of our souls with peace.

And now the angel says, "Go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead." If you have this blessed knowledge yourself, go and tell somebody else. Tell it to others. Further, "And behold, He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you" (Matt. 28:7). Why Galilee? Ah, He was "Jesus of Nazareth," that despised place down in Galilee. He was not to be seen in Jerusalem, the center of the world's system religiously. He was absolutely outside all that. And so it is today. If you are going to have the joy of Christ, you will have to take an outside place. "Inside the veil" (Heb. 10:20) and "outside the camp" (Heb. 13:13) go together. They are like the two blades of a pair of scissors. They must be pinned together; one is no use without the other.

You cannot get on in Jerusalem, so to speak; if you really want Christ, you will have to go where He is to be found. And where is that? In Galilee, then despised of Israel, and the symbol now of our outside place as followers of Christ.

Another evangelist tells us that the angel says, "Go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee" (Mark 16:7). I think it very instructive to see that the very servant — John whose surname was Mark — who broke down in his own service, and for a while turned back from the Lord's work (see Acts 13:13), should be used of God to record the sentence, "Go, tell His disciples and Peter," a message of deep comfort to another servant who had also broken down. Unless we have ourselves been broken down, we are not really able to help those who are broken down. There is wonderful grace in the words, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter." His Lord had not forgotten him. He had not cast him off, and, blessed be His name, He does not drop us because we have been feeble and failing.

"And they departed from the sepulcher with fear and great joy, and did run to bring his disciples word" (Matt. 28:8). There is a wonderful mingling of feelings there, "Fear and great joy." There was fear on the one hand, and great joy on the other. "And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail." Here is the second interview. What is the meaning of" All hail "? I could not put it into words exactly; but for these lovers of Christ, whose hearts had been broken with the thought they had lost their blessed Lord, all of a sudden to hear His gracious voice thus saluting them, was joy indeed. To them surely it was "Welcome." That is the idea. It said in effect to them: Every difficulty is over: the darkness has gone by, all is bright and clear. "And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped him" (Matt. 28:9).

Why does He not bid them not touch Him? Because He is here the risen King alive from the dead, standing on earth in the midst of an earthly people who love Him, and worship Him. It is a miniature picture of His coming earthly kingdom. And if it be no joy to your hearts, it is to mine, that the Lord Jesus will yet stand on earth, that His head shall be crowned, and that He will be surrounded by a people who will own Him, delight in Him, and worship Him.

The Psalmist says, “Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion” (Psa. 65:1). That is true, because Zion’s voice is silent now. But it is going to break forth in praise by-and-by.

In the meantime what has happened? The Holy Spirit has come down, and while the Jew has been cast off, the Church is brought in, and she takes Israel’s place, but a much better place than Israel ever had. And we worship Jesus now. The blessing of the Church is of a double character. Christ is the Object of the worship of our souls now, and we have also the privilege of testimony for Him, as we pass through this scene, while awaiting His coming again.

Having accepted their homage, the Lord said to those who held Him by the feet, “Be not afraid: go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me” (Matt. 28:10). He confirms to them the word the angel had given to them before, that Galilee was to be the meeting place. This all beautifully falls in with the scope of the Gospel. It is an earthly company here who are to have the King in their midst, and they go down and meet Him. To His own, so assembled, He says, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Matt. 28:18). Let us never forget that.

Well, beloved friends, their Jesus is the blessed One that you and I know through infinite grace, not upon earth now, for He has gone on high, is there crowned with glory and honor, and we delight in the thought of the place where the Lord is now. If Mary Magdalene gives you, in figure, the heavenly portion of the saints now, it is well to see that these Galilean women, the second to whom Jesus showed Himself, bring out the earthly side of His kingdom. The heavenly portion is the first, and then comes the earthly. The order is just what we have in the Old Testament. Isaac’s seed was to be as the stars of heaven, and Jacob’s as the sand of the sea. That is the heavenly and the earthly. And Christ is the center of both. One loves to think that an earthly people will yet receive, believe, and love Him, and He will say, “All hail,” in a day to come, to the repentant remnant of the nation that rejected Him when He came as Messiah the first time.

Streams From the Fountain of Life, Are You Ready?

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed Omit? lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of man cometh."— MATT. 25:1-13

THESE are the words of the Lord Jesus, and you may say, "What is there involved in that?" Well, beloved friend, precious and profitable as is every word of God, whether spoken by the Lord Himself, or by any of His servants, yet there is always something very specially impressive and instructive in the words spoken by the Lord Jesus Himself. There is one simple point I want to press on you now; one thought I have before me, and it is this, that if you are not ready when Jesus comes, He will bid you depart into everlasting punishment; if you are not ready, there is nothing before you but eternal woe—eternal punishment.

"They that were ready went in," those that were not ready were left outside. There is nothing more simple, dear friend, but there is nothing more solemn. "They that were ready went in," and oh, if the Lord came just now, what joy it would be to our hearts who know Him! The voice of the archangel and the trump of God would be heard, and His own voice, the voice of the Savior, would bid us rise up to meet Him. We should be caught up to scenes of joy and rest with Jesus. But, my friend, are you ready? ready to meet Jesus, ready for that trumpet's call, ready to go in? "No," you say, "1 am not." Then do not lose a moment, I entreat you, "be ye also ready," be ready now.

God wants to have you as the companion of His Son for all eternity. He is seeking a bride for His Son, just as Eleazer goes down through the desert and tells Rebekah of all Abraham's wealth and greatness, and that unto his son he had given all that he had. "That is," says he, "there is a bridegroom in the far-off land, and I want a bride for him, I want a heart that is prepared to go out to meet him." So God is seeking now hearts prepared to go out to meet Christ.

There was a going forth in early times, in the apostle's days, there was a constant expecting the Lord's return; but then wise and foolish all settled down and went to sleep. The wise were wrong in going to sleep, but there was this difference between them, that when the cry was made, "Behold the bridegroom cometh," the lamps of the wise were alight; they needed trimming, but there was oil in them, they had never gone out. I have no doubt the Lord is gathering out a people now to wait for His Son, and one day when the world is expecting nothing, without any warning, He will come. He will come, and we who trust Him shall go up to meet Him, and the door will be shut. "They that were ready went in with him to the marriage.”

He shows the bright side first, the joy of the marriage supper. "I desire," God says, "to make you the companion of my Son in Heavenly Glory. My heart's wish is that you shall share with Christ that bright scene of eternal blessedness." "No," answers the soul. "Then," says He, "you must share the fate of the devil and his angels; there is no alternative.”

Soul, listen, listen! You must be with Christ for eternity; you must share with Him that bright scene of glory, or you must share for all eternity the fallen gloomy fortunes of Satan. Which is it to be? Soul, make your choice, your eternal choice. With Christ, or with Satan—which?

“Oh," you say, "I should like to be with Christ, of course; I have long made a profession of Christianity." Yes, but are you really a Christian? Are you ready? Profession is not enough; it is the lamp without the oil in it. Who are those who had the oil? They are those who had given their souls no rest till they had the certainty of salvation. The oil in the vessels is the Holy Ghost. They had not only "heard the word of truth, the gospel of salvation," and trusted in the Lord Jesus, but, as Paul tells us in Ephesians 1: 13—they were "sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.”

Many souls are stumbled because of this, they think they have to possess the Holy Ghost in order to believe. Not so; you believe, and then you get the Holy Ghost. It is like a man buying a number of sheep, and then marking them as his own. God buys with the blood of Christ, and marks with the Holy Ghost. The wise virgins had the oil, and if you are in earnest you will not be content without knowing you are saved; and surely it is high time you were in downright earnest. God is in earnest in His desire to have you; the devil is in earnest in his desire to damn you; I am in earnest in my anxiety to see you brought to God, you are the only one who is careless in the matter, and it is your soul which is at stake for eternity. O, ye heavens, look down on this awful sight-a sinner unconcerned about his eternal salvation! God was so concerned as to send His only Son that you might not perish. The Lord Jesus was so concerned that He came, and suffered, and died, the just for the unjust. The evangelist is deeply concerned that you may be converted. The devil is thoroughly concerned to seek to hinder your coming to Christ. You only are unconcerned about the matter. Appalling spectacle! an unsaved sinner on the verge of hell, totally unconcerned!

Oh, dear soul, the day of your concern is coming. What concern there will be when you wake up to find there is no oil in your lamps, what earnestness, what terrible earnestness will be depicted on your face, as outside the door you stand. "Too late!" says God. "Too LATE?" exclaim you. "TOO LATE" will be the echo of the arches of heaven, resounding though earth, as then you cry, "Lord Lord! open to me!”

Oh, be in earnest now, the Lord would have you roused to your state, you may never have another opportunity. Can you risk being among that number who are refused from His door, or hear those awful words, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!" This is no imagery of mine. These are the Lord's own words, most solemnly true. If you are not the Lord's you must be damned. If you are not linked with Christ you must be lost. If you are not His by living faith now, there is nothing before you but one of these two things, either to knock too late outside that door, or to hear from His lips, "Depart from me." I have no doubt from Scripture that if the Lord comes and finds you unconverted, your history is over; the door will be shut, and not a solitary ray of hope will ever again fall on your benighted soul—the door will be closed forever, Now ONLY is your time—oh, be in earnest NOW!

I believe the Lord is separating His own more thoroughly now. The Lord's people are banding together more, the world and the faithful are beginning to separate more and more even now, and much of worldliness as there is among the saints of God, yet the line of demarcation between them and the world is more distinct. What a tide of blessing too has rolled over the land; what means it all? He is coming! He is coming! coming quickly too. Are you merely a professor carrying the lamp in your hand? You must have the oil too. Have you ever known what it is to be broken down under a sense of your sin? Have you ever been in earnest about your soul's salvation? Have you ever bowed in heart to Jesus? Have you ever been really, converted? Are you ready to go in? Do not say, "I hope so," that will not do. It is not enough. You would not be content with a mere hope about things down here. No, it is only in the interests of their immortal souls that men are foolhardy and careless.

Do you ask, my reader, "How am I to get to Christ?" If you are in earnest you will soon find the way to Christ. "But," you say, "what do you want me to do?" I want you to take salvation from the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want your heart for Christ. I want you to bow down to Him, to love Him, to adore Him. May God turn your eye on His Son; for remember, He is coming. The heavens conceal Him now, but another hour and it may not be so. He may have come out, and those who are ready may have gone in, and the door may be shut, and shut on you forever. Would you like to be outside? He wants to have you inside. He wants you to believe in His name, to believe in His love. He wants not merely to rescue you from the power of the devil, not merely to save you from hell, but to make you a sharer of the joy that is His, to taste the grace of His Father's heart, to bring you into association with Himself in the bright scene of his heavenly home. Oh let there be reality now in your heart, do not be content any longer with being a mere professor! Perhaps your first real confession to Him may have to be, "I have been only a hypocrite, and never a real believer at all," very likely: but believe Him simply just now, for if you are only dreaming of being a Christian some day, the time is soon coming when your dreams must be rudely broken.

“At midnight there was a cry made, Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him." Why midnight? The darkest time of all had come, and the dawn was near, the morning of His coming. The bright hope He gives to Christian hearts is that they shall be caught up to meet Him. If the Lord were to come today, there would be enacted a scene, of which the mount of transfiguration was a lovely picture. Moses is a type of those who have passed through death; Elias a type of those who go up without dying at all, but all are together with the Lord. Again, we shall be like Enoch, translated, taken off the earth without passing through death' at all. No doubt Enoch was considered a pest to society in his day, because he prophesied of coming judgment, and warned men of their ungodliness. Men do not like to hear of coming judgment, but it is coming.

The last time the world saw Christ, they put a reed in His right hand in bitter mockery, and then they pierced that hand with nails and fastened it to the cross. The next time the world sees Christ, He will be holding the rod of power, wielding the sword of judgment. Will you meet Him in grace now, or risk meeting Him in judgment then? Would you like to meet Him if He came today? "Well, no, I cannot say that I should. I would rather put it off a little 'longer." Quite so! that answer just shows where you are. You do not know Him. The soul that knows the Lord will always like to go to meet him. Every child of God delights to think he shall meet and see Jesus. My Savior is the one Who loved me and died for me, and I know nothing so sweet as this simple thought, to be with the Lord Jesus. It is transcendently sweet. Whose company does one love best on earth? The one dearest to us, of course. It is very simple; and whose company is so dear to us as His?

"Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps; and the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out." Their lamps had gone out, there was no oil in them; there had been the profession of Christ; no doubt they had been baptized, and if they lived where confirmation takes place, had been also confirmed; had been members of churches, but there had been no question of real conversion. Have you been really converted? Have you the oil? Have you the Holy Ghost? How do I know I have the Holy Ghost? Because I am quite sure God is my Father, and it is the Spirit of adoption that makes me cry "Abba, Father:" the soul that is really brought to God—could you hear that one on his knees alone with God—would be heard to say, "Father, Father." Do you look up and call Him Father? "How can I call God, Father," you ask. By believing in Jesus you become a child. "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." God gives the Holy Ghost to those who believe in Jesus. The moment you, as a poor sinner, take your place at the feet of Jesus, believe in Jesus, trust Jesus, have done with confidence in yourself, and trust Him, that moment you become a child of God, and the next thing is the gift of the Holy Ghost. You get the oil in your vessel.

But the wise answered, saying, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you, but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. "Why does it say buy? Does it contemplate the possibility that anything we could give could purchase the gift of the Holy Ghost? Not at all." Thy money perish with thee, "Peter says to Simon Magus, when he suggests such a thought," because thou hast thought that the gift of God

may be purchased with money. "It is without money, without price, and still he says," Come buy, "and again," I counsel thee to buy of me gold," and why is this? Because it contemplates a soul willing to pay any price; it contemplates a thorough; positive, earnest desire in the soul to get what it needs.

Friend, are you in earnest, again I say? Are you ready? You ask, "Can a soul be ready?" Yes. "But what about my sins?" Did you never hear this—"Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many?" He settled for me the question of sin when He suffered, the just for the unjust. How do I know I am ready? Because He died for me, He bore all my sins on the cross, and met all the claims God had against me. Are my sins to be put away by what He will do? No, by what He has done. A Christian stands, between the first coming of Christ and the second; between the cross and the glory. I look back to the cross and see the work all finished there, when He was offered up. If I think of my sins, I am ready, because of what Christ has done; our readiness consists in this, that we have believed in the One who died and rose again, and we look forward now to Him as the coming One, enjoying meantime all the fruits of His finished work.

Do you say, It is presumptuous to be sure? Well, if God says, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more," am I to believe God, or am I to doubt Him? "The gift of God is eternal life." Now what do you do with a gift from a friend, do you send it back, or do you take it? "I take it, of course," you say. Are you presumptuous to take it? I say if He speaks to me, I will believe His word. If He sends me a gift I will take it, let who will call me presumptuous. John says, "These things have I written unto you that believe in the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life." I either believe God, or make Him a liar. I believe Him when He says I am a ruined sinner; shall I not believe Him when He says He gives me eternal life? I must believe the witness to me, before I can get the witness in me-believe before I can feel. Is He not worth believing? Is He not worth trusting?

Trust Him now, do not delay: remember, "they that were READY went in and the door was shut.”

But you say, "I do not like that word, the door was, shut '." I do, because it prevents the possibility of the believer ever getting out again, he is shut in with Christ forever. I grant you it is an awful word for those who are outside, and once more therefore ere I close, I would solemnly ask you if the master of the house rose up this hour and shut the door, which side of the door would you be? Do not risk it longer! Do not be infatuated, do not be outside the door in that day, with only the devil's portion for eternity!

And now, dear Christian, what a glorious future is before you, to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air! It is part of the victory of the Lord Jesus that you and I need never taste death, because He has tasted it in all its bitterness and woe for us. It is part of the spoil that He has wrung from Satan, that you and I may go up to meet Him without being taken through death at all. May the Lord keep our hearts waiting more simply for Himself, and may the Lord press these words on your heart, dear unsaved one,

“THEY THAT WERE READY WENT IN, AND THE DOOR WAS SHUT!”

Do not sleep this night without knowing that you are ready, for you may lay your head down on a bed of feathers and awake in a bed of fire. May the Lord have mercy on you who have no mercy on yourselves!

Simon Peter: His Life and Letters, His Questions

Luke 12; Matthew 17; Matthew 19

In nothing is simplicity more evidenced than in a question. The number of questions which Peter put to the Lord, and which are recorded by the Holy Spirit, is very noticeable and instructive. He was evidently an exceedingly simple man. This the character of his queries evince, while, at the same time, they show what an observant listener he was to the discourses of his blessed Master, and how his mind pondered on the heavenly ministry he was daily getting. That this ministry was beyond his then comprehension seems often apparent; but the abrupt way in which he propounded some question which was exercising his mind, and which had always a distinct connection with the subject of the Lord’s foregoing instruction, betoken an activity, as well as a reflective condition of mind, which the impulsive character of the man scarcely prepares us for. Of these queries many are related, and to them we owe much valuable instruction from the lips of the Lord. We will look at them in the order of their occurrence, so far as I can gather their sequence from the gospel narratives.

Responsibility And Recompense.

Question 1. “Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?” (Luke 12:41). We may here well inquire, What is a parable? In Scripture it is often “a thing darkly or figuratively expressed” (Imp. Dict.). Thus, “I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp” (Psa. 49:4); “I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old” (Psa. 78:2), said the sweet Psalmist of Israel, and from his language we gather that a “parable” and a “dark saying” were synonymous. That Peter regarded the lovely instructions of Luke 12 as a “dark saying” is pretty clear from his question, but how he could regard such plain and simple ministry as having anything of the nature of a parable about it is difficult to see, save on the ground that the Holy Spirit had not yet come down, and did not indwell the disciples. Let us glance at the chapter, and profit by the so-called parable, the beauty of which is very great.

Luke always groups his facts to form a moral picture. Neither chronological nor dispensational truth is his special point. Matthew gives us the latter, and Mark evidently is the chronological evangelist. In Luke 11 Christ has been definitively rejected by the nation of Israel. Chapter 12 Therefore supposes His absence from earth, and His disciples set in the place of testimony on it in the power of the Holy Spirit (to come when He went on high), and the world in opposition to them. The snares and the resources of His own, during His absence, and the attitude they should occupy till His return, are the main points of the passage. 1St, Hypocrisy — want of reality — is avoided by the light of God. All will be revealed (vss. 1-3). 2nd, The fear of man is cast out by a greater fear — the fear of God, while the heart is filled with the sense of His protection — the hairs of their head being actually counted (vss. 4-7). Third, faithfulness to Christ would be acknowledged (vss. 8-11). 4th, The Holy Spirit would help them as to what to say if arraigned before synagogues (vss. 11-12). What motives and encouragements are here given! God’s light, God’s care, Christ’s reward, and the Holy Spirit’s power!

The Lord then, as rejected, refuses to be a judge; and, from the circumstance brought before Him, bids His own “beware of covetousness.” Here He really speaks a parable concerning the rich man. Alas! what became of his soul? The remedy for the disease that afflicted him — covetousness — is being “rich toward God” (vss. 13-21). The great practical principles that are to mark His own are then unfolded. They are not to think of tomorrow, but to trust in God. “Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things” is a lovely word indeed. If God’s kingdom were sought, all else would be added. Precious instruction for our anxious hearts (vss. 22-31). Thus fear, covetousness, and care, three terrible foxes that spoil the grapes in God’s vintage, are disposed of: the fear of man, by the fear of God; covetousness, by being rich toward God; and care, by the care of God. Thus does the blessed Lord set the heart free from earth, to enter into what is heavenly, and be occupied with Himself, while waiting for His return.

But there is more than this: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Our hearts might fear lest we had not a crust for tomorrow; His heart shows itself by giving us the kingdom. The knowledge of this lifts the saint up. He becomes practically a pilgrim, and a stranger. He can part with things here, for he has a treasure in heaven; and “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (vss. 33-34). The world’s motto is “Slave, and gather.” The Lord’s injunction to His own is “Sell, and give.” What a difference! But this the saint never will do until he has a treasure in heaven — even Jesus Himself. Do I hear you say I “I am trying to make Him my treasure.” You will never manage it that way; but when you learn that He has a treasure on earth, and that you are that treasure, then, without an effort, you will make Him your treasure. “We love Him because He first loved us.” Moth, rust, and thieves sooner or later sweep away all we set our hearts on here. How good to have “a treasure in the heavens that faileth not”!

Notice that here three things influence the heart — the Father giving the kingdom, the prized treasure in heaven, and the expectation of the Lord’s return. “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.... Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not” (vss. 35-40). Until the Lord comes they were to wait and watch, the lamps burning, and all ready; the whole position expressive of expectation, while devoted service marked the waiting hours. When He returned, He would bring them into the Father’s house, gird Himself, make them sit down to meat, and serve them. This, I take it, alludes to His ever remaining in manhood, in which He has already served us in love. Love it was that led to His incarnation, and to His death; and when He has His own in glory, He will yet serve them, for He will never cease to love. Love delights to serve; selfishness likes to be served. How great the contrast between Jesus and us oftentimes!

Now the teaching of this chapter seems plain enough, though confessedly it be difficult always to walk up to it; but evidently Peter was dubious as to its application, and so says, “Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?” The Lord’s answer is plain enough, as He says, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath” (vss. 42-48). Responsibility is the point here, connected with profession. All who profess the name of the Lord are clearly comprehended here. Whether true or false is not the question, although the issue to the false is sad in the extreme.

Two things are to mark Christ’s disciples — 1. They are to wait and watch for Him; 2. They are to serve Him till He return. “Occupy till I come” is the Master’s word, and the loving laborer’s motto. The true-hearted watcher, that waits with girded loins for His return, labors patiently till He arrive, and then finds his reward and rest in being with His Lord, is feasted by Him — joy and happiness being ministered to him by the Lord Himself — while his faithfulness in service gets its recompense by his being set over what belongs to His Lord. If there be professed servants, without reality, the end of such is detailed to Peter (vss. 45-48) in a way that I doubt not left its mark upon his soul, a mark that reappears clearly in his Epistles — especially the second — as we shall see in a future chapter. God requires of men according to their advantages. If this be so, who will be so guilty as those who, while professing to be the servants of the Lord, neither do His will, nor wait His return? All Christ’s professed servants would do well to carefully heed the Lord’s reply to our apostle’s earliest recorded query.

How To Forgive.

Question 2. “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” (Matthew 18:21-22). This query flowed very naturally out of what precedes it in the chapter, which contains principles of immense importance for the child of God. Matthew 18 supposes Christ to be absent, having been rejected, as chapter 16 foretold, and the glory of chapter 17 not yet come. It connects itself with chapter 16, in which, it will be remembered, two subjects are treated of by the Lord — the Church, a new thing which He was about to build; and the kingdom of heaven, a well-known subject, the keys of which He promises d to give to Peter. These two subjects the Lord again speaks of in chapter 18, unfolding the spirit which is to mark His followers, as suitable to His kingdom, and then the place which the 11 Church was to occupy on earth, in discipline, and in prayer.

The meekness of a little child, unable to assert, its rights in a world that ignores it — the spirit of humility and dependence — alone befitted the kingdom (vss. 1-4). Carefulness not to offend these little ones is enjoined, combined with the most stringent severity as to self. To be a stumbling-block, or a snare, to one of the little ones that believed in Christ, was to ensure terrible judgment. Tender care for the weakest, and severe self-judgment, was to be the rule of the kingdom. If this existed, no stumbling-block would offend the least, and no snare entangle the disciple (vss. 5-9). Further, the Father thought of these little ones. They were the objects of His favor. He did not despise them, but admitted them to His presence, lowly as they were; and His Son — the Son of man — had “come to save that which was lost” (vss. 10-14). Moreover, if offense arose, if a brother trespassed; the fullest grace in forgiveness was to obtain. This is the spirit of the kingdom; it is the spirit of grace. On the one hand, the disciples were to be like little children in dependence and humility; and on the other, they were to imitate the Father, to be thus morally like Him, and thus to be truly children of the kingdom.

Christ having gone on high, the Church was to represent Him, and really to occupy His place on earth. Did a brother offend, the disciple was to gain his brother. Human pride would wait for him to humble himself; divine love goes after the evil-doer. This is just what God has done. When ruined, and far from God, what met our case? Did God wait till we did right? No! He sent His Son after the lost one. This is the principle on which the child of God is to act. God has so acted, and His children must follow Him. You belong to Clod, you are His child? Yes. What will you do if your brother wrongs you? Go after him, and set him right. It is love in activity. Love ever seeks the good even of the one who has gone wrong. Love is bent on gaining the erring brother.

It therefore goes quickly after him. “If he shall hear thee, thou hest gained thy brother.” Observe, it is not the offender, the trespasser, that is before the mind of the one who thus walks in Christ’s steps. It is thy brother.

If he hearkened, the matter would be buried in the heart of the one who had been offended. Should he despise this grace, two or three witnesses were to go, to endeavor to reach his conscience. If all this were unavailing, the matter was to be told to the Church; and should he refuse to hear the Church, “let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” This is not the public discipline of the assembly, but the spirit in which Christians are to walk (vss. 15-18). Heaven would ratify that which the assembly bound on earth; and further, if two or three agreed on earth to ask, anything, the Father would hear and answer, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them,” says the Lord (vss. 19- 20). What could be more solemn, and withal more sweet and encouraging? Whether for discipline, or prayers, the Lord lays down the immense principle, that if only two or three be really gathered unto His Name, He is in the midst of them. Whether therefore for decisions or prayers, they were as Christ on the earth, for Christ Himself was there with them.

The immensity of the truths thus unfolded evidently penetrated Peter’s soul as he heard them, and the desire to clearly know the extent of the responsibility of acting in grace, where a brother was in question, led to his query, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” The largest idea of grace that Peter had was “till seven times.” That certainly was beyond the day of law — which demanded righteousness, and knew naught of forgiveness — and may be beyond the practical state of many of our souls, but it will not do for Christ. Peter’s question was this: Suppose my brother sins against me, over and over again, how often am I to forgive him? The Lord’s answer was: “I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven.” Under the reign of law forgiveness was unknown, it was “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth”; but in the kingdom of heaven, and under the rule of a rejected, a heavenly Christ, forgiveness takes its character from Him, and is to be unlimited. The Lord insists that practically there is to be no limit to it. It is to flow out constantly. It is the reflection of God’s own ways with man.

It must be remembered that this is a question of sin against us, not against the Lord. The Church cannot forgive any sin against the Lord until He has forgiven it, and He only forgives on the confession of sin. But, as believers, we are to forgive each other unlimitedly. “Till seventy times seven” is to be the Christian’s motto in this respect. This is really divine. God will not be outdone in forgiveness; but even a man on earth — a saint, of course — is called on to forgive after this heavenly pattern. May we all learn so to walk. If we only did so walk, what joy would fill our own souls, and what happy assemblies of saints would be everywhere found. Alas! we are very few of us up even to Peter’s “seven times.” We think we do well if we forgive once or twice; anything beyond that could not reasonably be expected of us. Peter’s question, however, reveals an altogether different line of conduct to be the command of our Lord. May we each one heed it.

Devotedness And Reward.

Question 3. “Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” (Matthew 19:27). Peter is painfully natural here, and his query robbed his devotedness of its value, for it showed that he valued it, and that he had not really counted all things but loss for Christ. Such is the flesh. It appears in one form in the young ruler, in another in Peter. The ruler had inquired, “What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” (vs. 16). He had not learned that he was “lost,” so would fain “do” to gain life. The Lord takes him up on his own ground, saying, “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (vss. 17-19). The Lord quotes the second table of the law. “The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?” What ignorance of himself, and of his own need! He really lacked everything worth having, and what he possessed on earth was the greatest hindrance to his getting God’s richest blessing. “Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me” (vs. 21). The teat of his reality was presented to him. Did he prize more, eternal life, or his possessions? “When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.” These he loved better than Jesus. Alas I for man, the advantages of the flesh are absolute hindrances to the Spirit. Jesus knew his heart, and all his surroundings, and put His finger on the covetousness that really governed him, and was fed by the riches he possessed.

Riches are a hindrance when God’s kingdom is in question. This the Lord distinctly declares, saying, “Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly (that is with difficulty) enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of Clod” (vss. 23-24). It is beyond nature either for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, or a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. “When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?” (vs. 25). The Lord’s answer is absolutely perfect: “Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (vs. 26). As far as man was concerned it was impossible; a profoundly solemn truth as regards his condition. If it be a question of man doing anything to get into the kingdom, riches are only a hindrance, for he would like to take them with him, as well as anything else that makes something of himself. All that is of man, however, is only an impediment to his reaching the kingdom — nay more, it makes it impossible, as far as he himself is concerned. With God, however, all things are possible, and it is only by the actings of His grace that man does reach the kingdom.

Another has well said of men: “They cannot overcome the desires of the flesh. Morally, and as to his will and his affections, these desires are the man. One cannot make a negro white, or take his spots from the leopard: that which they exhibit is in their nature. But to God, blessed be His name! all things are possible.” His hand is not limited, and, no matter what the difficulties, He can and does work. Hence we find a rich Zaccheus blessed, and a rich Joseph claiming the body of Jesus. Again, in His sovereign love, He called some from Herod’s house, and converted some in Comes palace; while the surrendered lands of a Barnabas showed what grace could do in his case, as well as in the devoted life of a Saul of Tarsus.

It was these instructions with regard to riches that gave rise to Peter’s question, “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” (vs. 27). What is to be the portion of those who have renounced all for Thee, Lord? He had heard how hard it was for the rich to be saved, and thought he might now ask what they were to get who had become poor, that they might follow Jesus. The Lord’s answer to Peter is tantamount to this — You have done very well by following Me. He says, “Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And 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 first” (vss. 28-30).

Sorrowful as it was, and manifesting as it did how the carnal mind may mix itself with the life of grace in the believer's history, Peter's question leads to instruction of a most blessed and cheering nature. Everyone who has renounced anything for Jesus' sake will assuredly receive a hundredfold here, and inherit everlasting life, but, further, each will have his own place in the kingdom. The twelve apostles will have the first place in the administration of the earthly kingdom, when, under the reign of the Son of Man, there shall be an entirely new state of things, here called the regeneration. Each will have a reward answering to what the pathway has been for Christ here. The doctrine of reward is very clearly taught in the New Testament, not indeed as a motive — that Christ Himself alone can be — but as an encouragement. Reward, in Scripture, is always an encouragement to those who, having from higher motives entered into God's way, are suffering shame and persecution therefore. It is the call of Christ that leads the soul out. He had called Peter and his fellow-disciples, and therefore says, "Ye which have followed me... shall sit," &c. They had found their motive in Himself — and they would find their reward according to their devotedness.

We must never confound the doctrine of grace with that of reward. Grace pardons our sins; and gives us a place in heaven; our ways practically will determine our place in Christ's kingdom. The doctrine of grace must never be used to deny that of rewards, but Christ Himself must always be the motive for the daily, hourly walk of the saint. Nevertheless we shall receive of the Lord according to that which we have done, whether good or bad (see 2 Cor. 5:10). It is, however, good always to bear in mind the Lord's word, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first." This Peter needed to hear as he brings his devotedness under the Lord's eye. It was indeed a plain hint to Peter to be careful. May we each profit by the lesson which his all too fleshly remark brought forth.

Prayer And Forgiveness.

Question 4. "And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he (Jesus) was hungry: and seeing a fig tree afar off, having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves: for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever. And his disciples heard it. And in the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, calling to remembrance, said unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away." (Mark 11:12-14,21-22). Now this remark of Peter's, although not put in the form of a question, would appear to have much of an interrogative character about it. This we gather from the Lord's reply. While Simon only said, "Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away I" the Lord interpreted His servant's remark to mean, "Lord, what is the lesson we are to learn from this remarkable judicial dealing?" The Lord's reply is most instructive, both from a dispensational, and a moral point of view.

"And Jesus, answering, saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily, I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that these things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. 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. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (vss. 22-26).

The dispensational lesson is plain. Israel, as a nation, was represented by the fig tree. The curse about to fall on the nation is exhibited in this remarkable figure. Israel was the fig tree of Jehovah; covered with leaves, but bringing forth no fruit, it cumbered the ground. The fig tree, condemned of the Lord, immediately withered away. So was it to be with the nation. Possessed of every advantage which man in the flesh could enjoy, this unhappy nation, spite of all the divine Husbandman's care and culture, brought forth no fruit for Him.

Of Israel it is written, "To whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen!" (Rom. 9:4-5). Spite of all these privileges, they bore no fruit to God, though the leaves — all the outward forms of religion — were abundantly manifest. But man in the flesh — man under the old covenant — in responsibility to bring forth fruit, never has yielded, and never can yield fruit. The ultimate evidence of this was the rejection of Jesus, and, in refusing Him, Israel signed their own death-warrant. The fig tree, then, is Israel as they were, man in the flesh, cultivated by God to the very uttermost, but all in vain. No fruit was apparent. Man's history is really over.

Some have found a difficulty in this passage from the expression, "for the time of figs was not yet," and therefore said, "How could the Lord expect to find them at such a time?" The inference drawn is that His judgment of the tree savors of injustice. Far be the thought I If the nature of the fig tree in its native soil is borne in mind, this difficulty at once disappears. A. peculiarity of the fig tree is that it bears two crops of ripe fruit during the year, and, while one crop is ripening, another is just developing. Thus, no matter what time of year the eye rested on it, there should always have been some fruit; whether ripe or not, is not the question. It had no fruit. "Nothing but leaves" was its state. Hence the ground of its judgment.

The Lord's word to His disciples regarding the mountain being removed, and being cast into the sea — although it be a great general principle for faith — I doubt not refers to that which would happen to Israel through their ministry. Israel was the great hindrance to the gospel going out. It was the mountain of obstruction. Faith would remove it. As a fact, looked at corporately as a nation on earth, it was to disappear, and be lost in the sea of nations — the Gentiles — among whom it now is lost.

But there is more than this dispensational prediction in the Lord's reply, namely, the moral point, which we should carefully note. He assures His disciples that whatever they asked in faith should be accomplished, but that to ensure this they must walk and act in grace, if they would enjoy this privilege. If praying for a thing to be done, there must be forgiveness "if ye have ought against any." Now, I doubt not that the reason why we so frequently do not get replies to our prayers, is that our hearts are not really right before God in this respect. Some old grudge is kept up, instead of being forever dismissed. To enjoy grace, and to utilize the privilege of prayer, we must 'constantly act in grace towards all men. This was quite an unlooked for outcome of Peter's remark on the withered fig tree. The Lord grant us grace to heed this now lesson.

Watching And Working.

Question 5. "And as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be loft one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked Him privately, Tell us, when shall those things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled" (Mark 13:1-4). In the question which this

passage records, it is observable that Peter is associated with others. His name heads the list, and there is little doubt, from the peculiarly prominent place he has, as a questioner in the gospel narratives, that he was again the spokesman on this occasion. Be that as it may, the occasion was momentous, and to the query here put the Lord gives an immensely full reply, embracing a view of the early and later history of the Jews, the calling and the character of the Church, and finally the blessing and judgment of the Gentiles. The detail of this is more fully given in Matthew 24-25, than in the passage above quoted from Mark, wherein Peter's name occurs. Matthew gives the development of the dispensation, and the ways of God with respect to the kingdom. Mark, on the other hand — true to the character of his gospel — takes up the service of the apostles in the circumstances that would surround them. This service the disciples would accomplish in the midst of Israel. They were to render a testimony against all persecuting authorities, and preach the gospel among all nations before the end came. They were really to take the Lord's place as a witness here amongst Israel, and as preachers to render a distinct testimony, not only to that nation, but to all nations, and then He would return in power and glory.

Of the hour and day of that coming no one knew, hence the special injunction given is, "Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is" (vs. 33). This command is followed by specific instructions to the servants, which are of general application, and of immense moral value to everyone who loves the Lord. Let us quote them. "For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who loft his hour..1, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning; lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, WATCH" (vss. 33-37).

Two salient points are to be observed. While watching is the attitude of the servant, working is his characteristic. How sweet to notice that the Lord has given "to every man his work." There is room for all, place for all, and work for all, that love Him. No two have the same work, nor can another really do that which is allotted to each. Therefore to know one's work, and then to stick to it, is of prime importance. Were we each to get really hold of this divinely important principle, how it would foster the work of the Lord. What a cure would it be for the little petty jealousies that, alas! often spring up amongst the Lord's servants, and hinder His work. It is a happy moment in the soul's history when it can say: "I have my little bit of work from the Lord to do; I can do no one else's little bit, and no one can do mine." Coupled with the diligence and responsibility of service, how sweetly is here intertwined the call on the affections to "watch." Blessed Master, help us all to watch unremittingly for Thy coming; and, till Thou comest back, to work unweariedly in Thy harvest field!

Intimacy and Its Results.

Question 6. "When Jesus had thus said, He was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, That one of you shall betray Me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom He spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter then beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom He spake. He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto Him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when He had dipped the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon" (John 13:21-26).

We have here reached the close of the Lord's earthly pathway, when the question that revealed the traitor is put. The last supper, with all its attendant ministry of love, was in course, when the Lord's evident distress of spirit touched Peter to the quick. "One of you shall betray me," was surely enough to arouse every genuine heart; and, persuaded by the truth of His words, all the disciples looked one upon another, with the sincerity of innocence, save in one case. Nor is this all, for we read in another gospel that each, including even Judas, said, "Lord, is it I?" (Matt. 26:22-25). The Lord, although knowing who it was, evidently was slow in indicating the guilty one; and Peter, always ardent, thereupon beckoned to John "that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake."

Now we may well inquire, Why did not Peter put this question himself direct to the Lord? The answer seems pretty clear. John was near the Lord, Peter was not He lacked that which John had, a concentration of spirit, and constant occupation of heart with Jesus, that kept him near His beloved Person. John did not place himself near the Lord in order to get this communication; but he received it, because at the moment when such nearness was a necessity, to get the secrets of the Lord's mind, he was, according to the habit of his heart, near Jesus. He ever speaks of himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Counting on that love liking to have him near, he had laid his head on the bosom of Jesus, was conscious of the heavings of that breast, in a moment of such sorrow to the Lord, and, therefore, was just where he could receive the Lord's communication. The love which Jesus bore to him formed John's heart, and molded his life. It gave him beautiful constancy of affection for the Lord, and childlike confidingness in His delight to have His loved disciple near Himself. It was no other motive that put him so near the Lord, a nearness that others might have had, but did not take. Being thus near, he could receive communications from Jesus, but it was not in order to receive them that he placed himself close to Him. He was near the Lord because he loved to be near Him, and was assured that Jesus delighted in having Him near.

This place of nearness we too may know, where the heart enjoys the affections of the precious Saviour, and where He can communicate to us what is in His heart. If we would have these communications, we must be near Him too. Nearness to Christ is the secret of all spiritual progress and power. It is after this sort, thank God, that we may yet learn to know Christ. The more we know His love to us, the more shall we delight in getting and keeping near to Him.

That Peter knew that the Lord loved him there can be no manner of doubt, and that Peter also loved the Lord is certain, but there was as yet, however, too much of Peter for intimacy, such as this scene unfolds. Later on, when he became a broken and self-emptied vessel, God might and did use him in service most blessedly; but to learn intimacy with Jesus, one naturally turns to John — and finds it — rather than to Peter.

Self-Confidence and Its End.

Question 7. "Therefore, when he (Judas) was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall also glorify Him in himself, and shall straightway glorify Him. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say unto you.... Simon Peter said unto Him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterward. Peter said unto Him, Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt, thou lay down thy life for My sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice" (John 13:31-38).

The scene of this question is the same as the last — the supper table. Judas, detected, receives the sop, and the covetousness which governed his heart gained the day. Satan using this to his destruction, hardens his heart against all feelings of common humanity, and of man towards the man of his acquaintance, against every amiable sentiment of nature. Nearness to Jesus, if unaccompanied by faith, and if the heart be not influenced by His presence, only hardens in a terrible manner. Satan enters into that heart to yet further harden it, leads him to do the basest act conceivable — to betray an intimate companion while covering him with kisses — and finally abandons him to despair in the presence of God.

Morally all was over when Judas went out, and in the Lord's heart all the import of this unspeakably solemn moment is present to His spirit. "Now is the Son of man glorified," He declares. His soul views all that lay before Him on God's side — not on that of His own wounded affection. He rises to the thoughts of God as regards the issue of Judas's perfidy. The base act of the latter was to be the means of introducing a crisis — the cross — which stands alone in the history of eternity, and on which all blessing from God to man depends, alike from the moment of man's fall to the introduction of a new heaven and a new earth. Holiness and love are both demonstrated and reconciled in the cross — the holiness that must judge sin, and the love that can save the sinner. God having been there glorified by the Son of Man, straightway glorifies Him at His own right hand. But though the end of the path was glory, the pathway was through the cross — no one could there follow Him. Who but He could pass through death, the power of Satan, the forsaking of God, as being made sin, the judgment of God, the billows of His wrath, the grave, and yet finally beyond all these pass into glory? Peter, not comprehending the unfathomable purport of His Lord's words, says, "Lord, whither goest thou?" The Lord answers, "Whither I go thou cannot follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterward." Implying, as it did, his own martyrdom, this should have sufficed him; but, ever ardent, as well as self-confident, he continues to query, saying, "Why cannot I follow thee now?" and without waiting for the Lord's reply, insists, "I will lay down my life for thy sake." Everyone will see the gravity of the Lord's reply to Peter. It was an absolute statement as to the impossibility of his, or any one's following Him then. It should have sufficed Peter to be thus told of the Lord that he could not follow Him, but ever full of himself, though really attached to the Lord too, he is betrayed by his natural fervor into the asseveration of devotedness which the Lord can only read as being the energy of flesh, and not the power of the Spirit. To have heard that he could not then follow should have sufficed him, instead of prompting to bold declarations of devotedness. Boasting is always easy, but ever sad work. The Lord rebukes him by sadly announcing his fall. What a lesson to us all to walk softly!

Night Scenes of Scripture, Night on a Mount, A

(Matt. 17:1-8; Luke 9:28-36)

Does it not seem strange to you that of this incomparable night scene, which these scriptures depict, it is written, "They kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen"? (Luke 9:36). Does it not seem to you strange that they should be silenced about this wonderful scene? Methinks if I had seen it, my tongue would have wanted to tell others about it. Now, why were they silenced? We read that "Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of Man be risen again from the dead." But more than that, I think the truth is they could not understand it. It was a marvelous moment. It was the dead of night, and they saw the mountain top lit up with brightest glory. The glorified body of the Son of Man lit up that scene at the dead of night, when darkness reigned supreme. Do you know, my friends, there is coming by-and-by a wonderful time, when there will be no need of the sun or moon, and of that scene Scripture says, "The glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof" (Rev. 21:23). Are you going to be there?

Well, you say, I should like to see what Peter and James and John saw. They saw Christ glorified as a perfect man on earth. We shall never see that, but, thank God, we shall see a scene that eclipses it in a certain sense, and you will find it all described in the end of the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation. It is a scene of holiness, purity, blessing, and rest for eternity, into which every believer through grace shall pass; and what I am gravely anxious about is to get you, beloved friends, to have a title to, and a part in that scene when it takes place. Have you ever yet been brought to know the Lord, because everything turns on knowing Jesus? Everything turns upon your relation to Christ. You cannot be right for eternity if you are not right about Jesus now. Whether you are right about the Lord or not, what you think of Him, what you feel about Him, what your relation to Him is, I do not know, God knows. But what I want to show you from this scripture is, that everything hangs upon your relation to Jesus the Lord; and it is an immense mistake not to be with God in His thoughts of Jesus. It is an immense mistake on every ground not to be in communion with God.

The man of the world is making a huge mistake — the Christian that is in the world, and is sailing with the world, is making a great mistake, for he has not the thoughts of the Father about the Son. True blessing today lies in knowing God's thoughts about Jesus. Perhaps you are enjoying them. You could not fail to enjoy them if you had them, because the revelation of the delight of the Father in the Son fills to overflowing the heart that gets that revelation.

Let us now look at this interesting scene, and you will observe that, what I may call its setting — what it flows out of — is what you find recorded in the preceding part of our chapters regarding the Lord when here. As He passed along one day He turned to His disciples and asked, "Whom say the people that I am?" (Luke 9:18). He had gone apart — as this part of Luke's Gospel shows — to pray. This eighteenth verse of Luke 9 is the fourth time in this Gospel where we find this blessed dependent Man in prayer before God. He was alone, that is, He had retired from the world; nevertheless His disciples were with Him. They had watched Him clearly in prayer. Then He turns to them and says, "Whom say the people that I am?" He would like to know, for the moment, what they thought of Him. He had been in this scene — I mean in active service — for many months. I speak not of the thirty years' retirement, before He came out into the active service of the gospel He had been two years and some months before the eyes of the people in His work of blessing and of goodness. He had given full testimony to His mission. The Father too had given His testimony at the moment of His baptism, when you first find Him praying (Luke 3:21).

You remember that in the moment when He was baptized in Jordan the Holy Spirit fell upon Him like a dove — that emblem of purity and gentleness — not like "fire," but like a dove. The dove had found, so to speak, a resting-place. You will remember also that when Noah sent out the dove from his ark, he sent it out twice, and it came back. And why? Because there was nothing on the water but carrion, and there was no resting-place for the feet of the dove. At length, on the third occasion, the dove found something above the water as a resting-place; in a resurrection scene she found a place to rest her feet. And long did the Holy Spirit hover over this world before He could find a

resting-place. At length He came in the figure of a dove on Jesus. The Holy Spirit had hovered over the world for four thousand long years, and what did He see? Moral carrion everywhere! Mark it, weigh it, challenge it if you like! He had seen nothing but moral carrion. What do you mean, you may ask, by moral carrion? That which is dead, offensive, and only fit for the scavenger. He saw man, every man, in his real state of sin as God sees him.

Read the history of man in the Old Testament. What do you find? God looked down to see if there were any that did good, any that sought God, or anything that was suitable to God. And did He find any such? Nay. “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually,” Scripture says (Gen. 6:5). And for four thousand years the Holy Spirit sought in vain for a holy, sinless, spotless, perfect man, on whom He could come and dwell in him. I deny not that He did come, in the way of power, on certain men, to do the will and purpose of God. He could and did use evil men, like Balaam and Saul, or godly men, like David and Isaiah; but He only came on them for the time. He never tabernacled with any of them, or abode in them. Sin was everywhere; but at length comes the moment when a sinless, holy Man appears in this scene, and the Holy Spirit falls upon Him like a dove. At last the heavenly Dove has found a resting-place in this world of sin. Ah, it was a marvelous moment.

Why did it not rest on others? There was, you see, sin everywhere. Redemption was not accomplished. The Holy Spirit could only dwell in sinful men where redemption was known, and where the power of the redeeming blood of the Savior was really applied. But at length there comes One on whom He can rest, in virtue of what He was in His own Person, sinless, the Holy One of God, and upon Him the Holy Spirit falls, like a dove, and abides upon Him.

The testimony of God to John the Baptist was “Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.” And the Baptist adds: “And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:33-34). He was a real, true, absolutely perfect Man; but He was a man as much as I am — sin excepted. In the third chapter of Luke’s Gospel, you find that He is baptized in the Jordan, and while He prays, the heavens are opened, the Holy Spirit descends, and the voice of the Father says, in infinite delight, “Thou art My beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.” Now mark this! At that time the Father did not add these words, “Hear Him.” In the scene I have read to you tonight, there is again the expression of the Father’s delight, with the added words, “Hear Him.” If you have never heeded Him before, now then “hear him.” Why did the Father not say so at the baptism in Jordan? If I may so say, it went without saying that others would delight in Him. Man was being tested by Him. A year or so goes by, and then He says to the disciples, “Whom say the people that I am?” They reply, “Some say You are John the Baptist, some say You are Elias, and others, that You are one of the old prophets raised from the dead.” Nobody knew Him. Ah, what a revelation of the heart of man! The Father had declared who He was, and He had come to His own, but His own received Him not. He was in the world, and the world saw His works; but while they saw what He did, they did not know who He was. Do you know who He is? I repeat — Do you know who He is? “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” That was God’s word — His testimony to His personal glory; but the miracles He wrought, His mercy and His goodness, and the beauty of His life, had not opened the eyes of the people. They indeed felt that He was, in a certain sense, One whom God sustained; but it was evident they knew Him not as the Son of God; they knew Him not as the One who was to be the Savior of the world.

He went about doing good — “full of the Holy Ghost,” as Scripture says. He opened blind eyes, unstopped deaf ears, made the lame to dance, caused the dumb to speak, bound up the broken heart, set free the captive; and no matter what the misery was that crossed His path at every turn, He met it in the most marvelous grace; and though He blessed, and healed, and helped people right and left by thousands, yet He never urged one such to follow Him — not one. He never told any man who had been healed by His mighty power to follow Him. No, grace does not buy hearts; it wins them. Mark that I Jesus never seeks to compel one to follow Him. If you are not following Jesus, He will not compel you. There is nothing, in that legal sense, compulsory with the Lord. You may follow Him. It will be a great mistake if you do not. You may do so tonight, and it will be blessing for you, for time and for eternity. But mark! He will not compel you. He will bless you — He loves to bless you; but He then says, so to speak, “Go thy way.” To blind Bartimaeus, He said, “Go thy way.” To the healed demoniac He said, “Go home to thy friends.” And then there is Jairus’s daughter, twelve years of age, whom He raised from the dead. Does He say, “Now that girl must follow Me?” Not a bit of it. He says to the mother, “Give her meat,” but He leaves her at home. That is Jesus’ way. Christ wins hearts, but He wins them by the attractiveness of grace. He wins them by love. There is no must. The heart that is acted on only by a must is not enjoying Christ’s grace. If you are controlled by a must, you are a poor miserable legalist, or a self-tortured ascetic, for there is no must where grace is concerned. There is may, and then by grace the heart says, I will; but there is no must.

But, you say, it is written, “Ye must be born again.” I admit there is a must there. That is the must of necessity in regard to new birth — not discipleship. The following of Christ is a beautiful spontaneous act; and you know whether you are following the Lord or not. If not, I hope your heart will be won for Jesus this evening. You may get into fellowship with the thoughts of the Father tonight.

The varied answers to the Lord’s query, “Whom say the people that I am?” were but guesses — and all wrong. Then “He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Oh, He loved that answer — “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” “And Jesus answered, and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven.” Let me tell you this — you will never learn Christ from the schools of men; you will never learn Christ from the synagogue; you will never learn Christ from the mind. No! If you ever learn Christ, it will be from the teaching of the Father. You will have to get near to the Father. “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven.” No man cometh unto Him except the Father draw him, and of every one that the Father draws He says, “Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.” He came to do the Father’s will here, and nothing else. And what was the Father doing? He was introducing souls to His Son. That is what He is now doing. Are you going to be introduced? Introduced! What do you mean? Introduced! My friend, I recollect when God introduced me. I shall never forget it. Do not you recollect, my Christian friend, when you were introduced — when the Father led you as a trembling, wrath-fearing sinner to the Son, and the Son gave you blessing, bringing your troubled soul into rest, and your guilty, sin-stained conscience to peace? I see many smiling faces here as I speak, who are all saying, “I recollect the time when the Lord blessed me.” Aye, and you will never forget it. That moment in the history of your soul you will never forget, whatever may have come afterward.

Then the Lord tells Peter the solemn truth that He must die. Peter does not like that. He could scarce believe it. But the Lord says that He “must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” He unfolds the solemn fact that He must go to death. Although He was in Himself a spotless, holy, sinless Man, upon whom death had no claim, yet He unfolds the purport of His earthly mission — that He was going to die. And why? Because He knew that you and I could never

get life if He did not die. Therefore, in heavenly grace, He yields Himself to be rejected, spat upon, smitten, and killed, and raised again the third day, accepting at the same moment on the cross the whole weight of God's condemnation of sin. He knew what was the scene of moral carrion that presented itself to God. He knew every man's sin, and that there was nothing here fit for God. He knew that the first man was utterly rejected of God, and He knew that nothing could redeem or deliver man or bring him to God save His own death, and therefore He brings out distinctly that He must die. This was not pleasant to Peter, and, desirous of saving his Master from shame, he says, "Be it far from Thee, Lord." The Lord rebukes him with the solemn words, "Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offense unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

Then the Savior says, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? "Now, I pray you, if you are not yet on the Lord's side, tell me, What is a man advantaged? Young man, what advantage have you? You are in the world, and of the world, and known by the world to be a worldling. "What is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away," or "lose his own soul"? as Scripture elsewhere puts it. What is the worth of your soul? The Blessed Son of God gave Himself for my soul; and, if I want to know the value of the soul, I look at the cross, and at this holy, sinless, spotless One going down to death to redeem it. That is the value of the human soul. You perhaps never thought of this before. Let me beseech you, ponder the Savior's question, "What is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?"

All, you say, I have life before me. Have you? Are you sure of that? I see a young man here who is just starting out in life. He has it all before him, and he means to have the world for a time. Stop, dear youth, God may cut you off before you have time to enjoy much of the world's things. Perhaps you reply, I do not think it is likely I shall be cut off. Ah! my friend, did you see those two hearses going along Princes Street yesterday afternoon? Yes! but death is a common thing. Yes! I know it is; but it was the heavy shower that so refreshed the earth, in the middle of last week, that swept these two men whose funeral you saw, into eternity. Poor fellows! they were working in the city drains, and the torrent of rain overwhelmed them ere they could get out. They were caught in a trap, as it were, and drowned. The devil would much like to catch you, my unsaved friend, in a similar trap. And I will tell you more. There is an unyielding and immovable grating at the end of all his traps. Ah! you say, that is where those poor fellows were found, just inside the outlet grating — drowned. Yes, and, sinner, mark you, that is just where you will be found if you go on in your sins, ruined and lost for eternity. And what then? You will find you were the dupe of Satan. One could not but feel deeply sorry for the poor entombed men, and for those who were left behind to mourn their loss; but what effect has this lesson upon you? Come now, friend, let us be honest. Had it been you who were buried yesterday, where would you be now? In eternity. Face it, and say where. In heavenly glory, cleansed by the blood of Christ? Oh, no! Nobody ever mistook you for a Christian. God knows well, and you know well, you are unsaved. God save you now. You may never get another chance.

"What is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed." Do you hear that? You have been ashamed of Jesus. You know you have been. You ran away if ever you saw a Christian coming up to you to speak personally about Jesus. You were ashamed. Listen. "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels." Oh, then, He contemplates coming back, does He? Yes, He is coming back in His own glory. He is coming back in His Father's glory, and in the glory of the holy angels. But, tell me, will you be with Him then? Who is on the Lord's side? Oh, you say, I hope I shall be on the Lord's side then. But, say, are you on His side now? That is the point. I used to be ashamed of Jesus, and now I am ashamed that I ever was. My dear friend, I hope you may be henceforth ashamed that you have ever been ashamed of Jesus. Ashamed of Jesus! Ashamed of love! Ashamed of infinite grace! Ashamed of the One who gave up everything for us, who did everything for us, and who fills our hearts full of joy for eternity in the Father's house. Ashamed of Jesus! God forbid that you and I should be ashamed of Jesus.

And now the Lord adds, "But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God." You may say, What did Jesus mean by that? I think the answer is in the next verse: "And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray." Observe that. This is the fifth time in Luke's Gospel that Jesus is seen praying. "And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistering." St. Matthew puts it thus: "He was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light." By His side you see were Moses and Elias. "There be some standing here," He says, "which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God," or, as Matthew has it, "till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." It is the same thing. The Lord has not yet come in manifest majesty and glory, as King of kings, and Lord of lords, but He will thus come as the Son of Man, and no doubt here He gives His beloved disciples a miniature picture of the coming kingdom. If you have any doubt as to that interpretation, you will have all doubt dispelled if you listen to what one of the eyewitnesses says, for you must observe that the Lord had three men with Him that wondrous night, and they were eye-witnesses of His glory. Moses and Elias were His companions in that glory. That is what you and I are going to be, my Christian friend. Peter, James, and John were eye-witnesses, and that is what Peter refers to in his Second Epistle, when he says: "Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount" (2 Peter 1:15-18).

Peter makes perfectly plain what he saw, since he calls it "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Look at this scene. I conclude from the narrative given that it was night, for the disciples had gone to sleep, and they slept long. Clearly they awakened from their sleep confused. The whole circumstances point to this scene being at night. You find the Lord frequently spending the night in prayer. Here He was in prayer, and what took place? While His three disciples were "heavy with sleep." He was transfigured, and when they were awake they saw His glory." Roused from their slumber, Peter, James, and John saw it. As that Man bent before God on the mountain-top in prayer, the Father expressed His delight in Him, and "He received from God the Father honor and glory." He had traveled three-and-thirty years in blessed dependence on, and devotedness to God, and now from the mountain-top He might have passed up into heaven unchallenged, and been rapturously welcomed. But if He had gone up into glory then, He would have left you and me behind, for redemption was unaccomplished.

The Father, in this wondrous scene, expresses His delight in Him, He receives honor and glory, and for the time being He has a glorified body. That glorified body illumines — lights up — all that mountain-top, and by His side are seen two men, Moses and Elias, and I need not say with what joy they occupy that place with their Lord and Savior. Moses and Elias had been pillars in Jewish history. Moses, the lawgiver, had died,

and been buried by God's own hand. Wonderful indeed was his history. You know what his great desire was? To go into the land of promise. But God said, "Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto Mount Nebo, and behold the land of Canaan; thou shalt see the land before thee; but thou shalt not go thither unto the land which I give the children of Israel" (Deut. 32:49,52). Poor Moses! I think he was very heart-broken because he was not allowed to go into the land. If he had gone into the land then, he would have gone into it in very poor company. Where do we see him in this night scene? He is in good, yea, the best of company. He is in the company of the Son of God. Raised by God's own hand he stands with the incarnate Son of God on that mountain top. He got far more than he missed, as the poet has touchingly written:

"And had he not high honor?The hillside for a pall;To lie in state, while angels wait, With stars for tapers tall;And the dark rock pines, like tossing plumes, Over his bier to wave,And God's own hand, in that lonely land, To lay him in the grave.In that strange grave without a name,Whence his uncoffined clayShall break again (oh, wondrous thought?)Before the judgment day;And stand with glory wrapt around,On the hills he never trod,And speak of the strife, that won our life,With the Incarnate Son of God."

The site of the Transfiguration has been supposed to be Mount Tabor, but much evidence militates against this view. We do not know the place except that it was in the Land of Promise, and Moses was there with Jesus, in the company of the blessed Son of God. And Elijah, the prophet-reformer, who had gone up without dying, was there too. Moses and Elias are there as the companions of the Lord, and you have thus a picture of the coming kingdom, the heavenly side as well as the earthly. What is the heavenly side? The Son of Man in glory, and at His side, sharing that glory, one who had died and been raised, and another who had been taken up without dying. That is just what will be manifested shortly. The kingdom of the Father gives us the heavenly side, while the kingdom of the Son of Man presents the earthly side.

But you may inquire, Who form the heavenly side? Those who partake of the first resurrection, those who already have passed into the grave, and whom the Lord when He comes will take out of the grave, "raised in glory" to be with Him in glory. There will be also many alive on the earth when the Lord comes, and these — changed into His likeness — will be caught up to meet Him in the air. "So shall we ever be with the Lord." Moses is the figure of those saints who have fallen asleep, been buried, and will be raised — mark — "in glory." Moses and Elias in this scene were in a glorified state. That is the point. They appear in glory, and are in association with the Son of God, they are the companions of Jesus. Did you ever think what heaven will be? You get a very beautiful picture of it here. It will be heaven to be with the Savior.

Fellow-Christian, should the Lord come back tonight, you and I through mercy would not see death, we should be caught up like Elias into glory. That is the Christian's hope. In Peter and James and John you have the earthly side of the kingdom prefigured, while, withal, they are eye-witnesses of their Lord's majesty and glory — glory which God conferred upon His Son. This was not His intrinsic, personal glory, as the Son of God. It was acquired glory, conferred on Him because of what He was as man in this scene. He had done all for God's glory, and God's glory only, and the answer to this wonderful pathway of humiliation and self-emptiness is that He is glorified as Man, while He stands upon earth. No one surely wonders that He is glorified now. He came from glory, and is gone back to it, and in His cross has opened up the way, and laid the basis, in redemption, of our title, to go there also through His rich grace.

And now we read: "And, behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." Could anything be more wonderful? They are talking with the Lord about His death. How striking a theme on that mount of glory! These two men are conversing with Jesus as to His death, while they at the moment see Him glorified. Marvelous mystery! He told them, as He had told His disciples a few days before, that He must die. Why die? Because there is no way for you and me into God's presence except through death. There is no life for you and me except by death; not our own death, but the death of One upon whom death had no claim, and who was going down to die for God's glory, to destroy the power of Satan, and to deliver and redeem man. And Moses and Elias were talking with Him about His death. And do you know what you and I will do in heaven? We shall always be talking either with Him, or about Him, and about His death.

What is the song of Revelation? "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood." Eternal paean of the redeemed! The love of Christ will evoke it, for although He said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13), yet Christ has laid down His life for us when we were not His friends but were opposed to Him, and when we did not love Him. Could you honestly say that you have loved Jesus? No! Then learn this — Jesus loved you, and, sent of God, He went down into death for you; and therefore death is the basis and groundwork of salvation. It is by His death that our redemption is accomplished. It is by His death that sin is put away. It is by His death that Satan's power is broken, and by which you and I are brought to God. It is only by His death — nothing but His death.

And now at this moment we are told that Peter, James, and John wake up, for "they were heavy with sleep, and when they were awake they saw His glory, and the two men that stood with Him." It is all perfectly plain that there will be recognition in eternity. There will be recognition in the Father's house. They knew Moses, and they knew Elias. They confounded neither of them. They were confident about each. I do not think when, by-and-by, we pass into eternity, that we shall fail to recognize each other, for recognition after resurrection is clearly seen here. The relationships of life are for time, but individuality is clearly maintained into eternity, and a very blessed thing for us that it is so. Peter, ever impetuous, and stirred by this marvelous vision, yet not knowing what He said, exclaims, "Master, it is good for us to be here." That was quite true. It was a very nice thing for him to see the glory of the Lord. And you, Christian friend, will say similarly some day, "It is good for us to be here," when you see His glory.

Peter's heart began to get warm, and I see the reason. He saw the Messiah, the lawgiver, and the reformer together, and was charmed. He saw everything that was important to a Jew's mind and a Jew's heart. In Moses he had the lawgiver; by his side was Elias, the prophet and reformer; and, above all, now he sees the Messiah — and to his Jewish mind the scene was so beautiful that he desired to perpetuate it. He spoke out first as they were retreating out of sight. Matthew and Mark do not note this circumstance, but Luke records when Peter said these foolish words: "And it came to pass as they departed from Him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said." And what had he said? What had he done? He had put the Son of God, the Messiah, Moses the lawgiver, and Elias the reformer, on a dead level. He had equalized them, so to speak. He thought this scene should be perpetuated, and to retain them he would give each a tabernacle. But "while he thus spake there came a cloud, and overshadowed them; and they feared as they (those) entered into the cloud" — Peter, James, and John feared as the cloud enclosed the others. And what was the cloud? The Shekinah — the glory of God. The cloud that had tabernacled with Israel in the days of the wilderness reappeared to guard the person of the Son of God. That cloud bespoke the immediate presence of the Father — was, in fact, the expression of the Father's house, and into it Moses and Elias go. Thank God. That is where you and I, fellow-Christian, are going. And we need not be afraid

to go there. If you have the Father's thoughts about the Son, all is right. Moses and Elias had got the thoughts of the Father about the Son. And what is the result? He stoops down and takes them into the cloud. Poor Peter! How foolishly had he spoken, and then must have felt. "Let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias," was his estimation of the comparative value of his Master. You will understand that the Father could not brook this insult to His Son. And immediately there comes out of the cloud this voice, "This is My beloved Son; hear Him." Ah! hear Him! Not "Hear Moses." No; his day is gone by. Nor Elijah? No; his day is also gone by. Hear Jesus, and Jesus only. This is Jesus' day.

Do you think the law, or Moses, can help you? No; they can only condemn you. Do you think Elias can help you? Oh, no! He can tell you that you are wrong, and exhort you to reform, but cannot help you. Elijah may exhort you, and Moses will condemn you, but Jesus only can save you; and therefore the voice of the Father says, "This is my beloved Son; hear him." That is the Father's word now — "Hear Him." You must listen to Him. Let me ask you, Have you listened to Him? Oh, friend, you had better hear the voice of Jesus; you had better listen to what He says. You know what He said to the religious unconverted man? Perhaps you are that person. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN." The Father says to you, religious, unsaved soul, "Hear Him!" Worldling, do you not hear His voice? "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37). You had better hear Him. Are you a troubled, anxious soul? Hear what He says to the troubled soul: "Thy sins are forgiven. Thy faith has saved thee. Go in peace" (Luke 7:48,50).

Listen again, the Father says, "Hear Him." Ah, friend, it is life to hear the voice of Jesus. To you He says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). And if you hear His voice it will be life to your dead soul. "Hear, and your soul shall live," says Scripture, by the pen of Isaiah (Isa. 4:3). Again the Apostle Peter says: "Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: Him shall ye hear in all things, whatsoever He shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:22-23). Jesus was that Prophet. Have you heard Him? I ask, for "Faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). He rose from the dead, and now from the heavenly glory He says, "Look unto Me and be ye saved"; "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And the Father says concerning Him, "Hear Him! "Ah, friend, have you heard Him?

The effect of this word of the Father's was very great on these three men. I read that the "disciples fell on their face, and were sore afraid." They felt that they had missed God's mind entirely. But "Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid." Are you troubled, and trembling, and feeling anxious, because you have missed the mind of the Lord, and missed blessing by not hearing Him, and loving Him? "Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid." He is not changed. He is the same Jesus now. He filled their hearts with peace, not fear. He says to you, as to them, "Arise, and be not afraid." That is what the Savior says to a troubled soul.

"And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only." Thank God. I am very thankful that I live in a day when I have only got to do with Jesus. I have not to tremble before Moses now. I have not to fear Elijah now. I have not to think that redemption is to be got by what I ought to be, or by turning my thoughts in upon myself. Neither law-keeping nor reformation can meet my case. The moment has arrived when God the Father says, "This is My beloved Son, hear Him." I have heard the voice of Jesus. Have you heard His voice? Have you not? Ah! do you not hear it now? If you hear, you live. Thank God, you have to do with Jesus only.

There is something brought out in this scene that is analogous to what we find in the seventh of Acts. There you see that, when they were stoning Stephen, he looked up and "saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God." He saw "Jesus only," and was sustained. You turn your eyes upward, and you too will see the risen Savior in glory. What has He done between this night scene on the mount and that recorded in the seventh of Acts? He has glorified God infinitely about sin. He has gone down into death, and annulled it. He has broken the power of Satan. He has borne the sinner's sins, and put them away. He has accomplished redemption. He has been raised for the believer's justification. He has been among the dead, but He came out of death. He is risen from the dead, and He lives now on high the sinner's friend, the mighty, blessed Savior, Jesus only." Is it only Jesus you need, you want now? Then you may have Him just now; and if you receive Him as your Savior you will be truly happy, and you will want everybody to know the Jesus you know. Oh! may God give you in His grace to receive Jesus simply, to believe Him, to confess Him, and to enjoy Him.

The Church: What Is It?, New Departure, A

Matthew 16:1-21; 18:15-20

In touching the subject of the Church, I think it will help us very much if we notice what a complete and perfect change in the ways of God, and in the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, occurs in this sixteenth chapter of Matthew. It is a very common thought in the minds of Christians today, that God's way of dealing with man has been pretty much the same all along the line; that what we have in the Old Testament, in relation to Judaism, affords a certain measure of divine light as to the Church, and that while Christianity gives us a great deal more, it is but a continuation of Judaism.

Now this is a great mistake, and if that thought is in our minds, we shall have to dismiss it, for this reason—that the Old Testament says nothing whatever about the Church. It gives us God's dealings with an earthly people, whereas the Church is heavenly in its nature. Until Christ died and rose again, redemption being accomplished, the veil rent Christ gone on high as Man, and the Holy Spirit come down, there could not be that which you find the New Testament speaks of as the Church of God—Christ's Assembly. In the chapter before us the Lord announces a most important thing to Peter. There was something He was about to build. Let us hear His teaching. What we have to do is not to be careful to retain what we may have received from any human source as to this subject, but to see that what we believe we have received from God. God's Word is our only lesson-book, and the sooner we are quit of what is not found in God's Word the better, because it is valueless. We can only grow by the truth, and be formed by the truth, and therefore the importance of the word, "Buy the truth, and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23). If someone says to me, "You are wrong about the Church," my reply is, "Then set me right," because I want to be right. I want to have the truth, and I take it you do also.

Let us inquire what is the change in the ways of God to which I have referred. The Apostle Paul wrote thus: “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers” (Rom. 15:8). If I understand the meaning of Jesus Christ being “a minister of the circumcision,” it is that He was the One who came to fulfill to the Jew the promises made by God to the fathers. Further, He came according to prophecy, and in fulfillment of prophecy. How was He received? We are told, “He came unto His own, and His own received him not” (John 1:11). They did not want and would not have Him. That opened the way for God’s eternal purpose regarding the Church to come out. Hence that scripture goes on to describe what is known in Christianity—the distinctive blessing of those who believed in Jesus” But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name” (John 1:12).

God’s principle of action was this, “To the Jew first,” and to the Jew the blessed Lord came. The promises made by God to the fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—are often alluded to in Scripture, and are all in relation to Christ, who was the seed of Abraham, the One of whom it is written, “All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2 Cor. 1:20). The descendants of Abraham, brought out of Egypt, were put upon redemption ground by the Red Sea—typically the death and resurrection of Christ; then they voluntarily placed themselves under law, only to break it.

The Old Testament gives us the history of the complete testing and thorough breakdown of the first man, no matter where you find him, or his progeny. That was the time of the testing of the first man in responsibility, and began to draw to its close at the moment of which Scripture says,” But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal. 4:4).

When man had been tried and tested in every possible way, and, on account of their sin and idolatry, God had been compelled to root out His chosen people Israel from Palestine, and they had been carried captive to Assyria and Babylon (though a remnant somewhat later had been recovered and brought back to Judea), God sent forth His Son. The fullness of the time was when the complete ruin of everything put into man’s hands in responsibility was manifest.

Men came the Lord Jesus Christ personally, and He was the last test. Man was tested in innocence, he failed: without law, he was lawless: under law, he was a law-breaker. When God appealed to His people Israel by His prophets—for we read, “I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them” (Jer. 7:25)—they did not heed them. When John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, came, they “knew Him not, but did unto Him whatsoever they listed” (Matt. 17:12).

The last test was in the Person of God’s Son, and the effect of that was what makes the Gospel of Matthew so interesting. Christ was the fulfiller of all promise even as He was the subject of prophecy, hence all the Old Testament prophecies relate to Him, and give glowing descriptions of the glory of the kingdom in which He will yet be manifested, and in which there will be blessing for man upon earth. He was the One who should come to fulfill prophecy. He was the Messiah whom God had promised. Hence, to be the fulfillment of the prophecies that announced the full realization of God’s promises, Jesus—His own Son, the Messiah, the King of the Jews—came.

Now notice, please, that the Gospel of Matthew emphatically presents Jesus as the King of the Jews, and they are tested by Christ as such. This accounts for this saying in our chapter,” Then charged He His disciples that they should tell no man that He was the Christ” (Matt. 16:20, RV). Had that truth come out? It had. Was He the Christ? Undoubtedly. But here He says, Tell them no more that I am the Christ. Why this remarkable charge? Because all the proofs given of His Messiahship had been in vain to the nation. If you read it carefully you will find Matthew’s Gospel incontestably gives you the continuous presentation of Christ to the Jews as their King, their Messiah, their Head, with all the necessary proofs of the glory of His Person, and His title to the throne of David.

A glance at the chapters which precede the sixteenth, which I have read to you, will make this plain. Chapter 1 gives us His genealogy as Son of “David the king” (vs. 6), and demonstrates His indefeasible title to the throne of David. In chapter 2 the wise men of the East came to Jerusalem inquiring, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” As a result His life is sought, and He is taken to Egypt, to fulfill Scripture (vs. 13). In chapter 3 He comes back to Galilee, and at the end of those wonderful thirty years of private life, of deep interest to the spiritual mind, but of which God has told us little, He emerges, comes to John to be baptized, and he baptized Him. What is the result? Praying at His baptism, the heavens are opened, the Spirit like a dove descends upon this blessed Man, and the Father’s voice is heard declaring, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (vss. 16-17). The Baptist heard and saw this, and his testimony, as recorded by John the Evangelist, is: “And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:33). The Baptist’s clarion voice, that had already rung throughout Israel, charged on them their sins, and roused multitudes to repentance, had from that moment a sweeter tale to tell, viz., This is the Son of God, fulfiller of prophecy, and promise likewise, and He which baptizeth with the Holy Spirit.

Long before John’s day, God, by the pen of David, had written: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed ... yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee” (Psa. 2:2,6-7). When was that fulfilled? At His incarnation, when He came into the world. In the day of His birth He is owned by God as His Son, in fulfillment of Psalm 2, and in the day of His baptism He is announced to be such from the opened heavens by the Father’s voice. But the Jews did not hear the Father nor see Jesus at the Jordan, and, alas, they did not believe that the Scriptures which so plainly marked Him out to be the Son of God found their answer and fulfillment in Him. They were not, however, incredulous about the Old Testament in that day. It is very strange how incredulous men are in this day. Are you incredulous? If you are, I pity you—you are missing a great deal. At Jordan, the Father announces the glorious fact that the lowly praying Man whom John baptized was His beloved Son, in whom was all His delight, and John the Baptist passed on the word, which Peter by his confession and others bring out later.

Then in Matthew 4 we have the temptation in the wilderness. He who was the true King, ere He goes out into the scene of man’s misery and sin to deliver him, defeats the usurper, Satan. He becomes the moral victor of the enemy, by never departing from the place He had taken of dependence and obedience, as Man. Thereafter we have a summary of the wonderful deeds He did (see vss. 23-24)—miracles which proved Him to be the Messiah of whom Isaiah spoke (chap. 35). Then in the so-called Sermon on the Mount, we find in chapters 5, 6, 7, what are manifestly the laws of His kingdom—the principles which should characterize those who enter it.

Chapters 8 and 9 bring together twelve remarkable miracles, which declare the powers of His kingdom, and reveal the loving and tender heart of the King, attesting His Messiahship to the uttermost. In chapter 10 He sent His disciples out to preach the kingdom. Was their testimony

believed? Alas, no! for chapter 11 records that the places where His mightiest works were done repented not; and then all the deeper glories of His Person come out, when rejected upon the line of earthly promise in which He had been presented to Israel.

Chapter 12 records that “the Pharisees went out and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him” (vs. 14), and accuse Him of being in league with Satan. The nation utterly rejected their Messiah at this point, and He consequently rejects them. This is figuratively taught as He got into a boat, pushed off from the shore, and taught the wonderful lessons of Matthew 13. The seven parables there unfolded bring in the idea of an entirely new departure and manner of activity on God’s part. The law addressed itself to man as though God had hitherto been seeking to get something from man. He got nothing. Now, that day was over, and there was to be a new kind of ministry altogether—God was going to put something into man, instead of trying to get something out of him, which was the principle of law—“A sower went forth to sow.” Further, “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” take the place of the kingdom in manifestation. This last is deferred to a day of glory yet to come.

In chapter 14 John the Baptist is beheaded, and in chapter 15, which is full of deep significance before chapter 16, the whole state of man in the flesh is judged, whether on the religious side of it as presented in the leaders of the nation, or in its purely natural state (vss. 16-20). The Pharisees and Sadducees were the leaders of religious ideas and thought, and what the Lord said about them we do well to heed in our day. They might be and doubtless were outwardly very sanctimonious, but they were opposing God’s work and God’s Son, hence the Lord says, “Let them alone.” A Pharisee was one who went in for ritualism, and the improvement of the flesh. The Sadducee was a rationalist, who denied revelation and a future state. We are surrounded by both these principles now. Each equally hated Christ, for He exposed both. The truth is never palatable to man, because it cuts up and exposes him. It shows man wherein he is wrong, and he does not like that. The Pharisees did not like the Lord’s assertion that the hypocrisy of forms had been substituted for truth in the inward parts, and that man’s heart—spite of his use of legal religion—was the source of evil only. At this they were greatly “offended” (vs. 12), and His disciples told Him so. “But He answered and said, Every plant, which My heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (vs. 13). What is not of God cannot stand. Then follows the injunction: “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (vs. 14).

There is a great principle here in “let them alone.” Now mark—if you have a blind leader, and you are blind yourself, the ditch is the only end of your road. Christianity, however, is not the blind leading the blind; nor the seeing leading the blind; but the seeing leading the seeing. God delights to give us light that we may see His things, but for their enjoyment and profitable use all depends upon our subjection to Christ, to the Holy Spirit, and to the Scriptures. God makes very little of man, whether you, me, or any other. And the more man is out of sight in divine things the better—he is very often in the way. What Christians have to do in the present day of Church crisis and Church difficulty is to take their eyes off every man, and every system man has set up, and seek to learn what God says about His Church in His Word. I believe that today God would turn His people back again to the Holy Scriptures for light and guidance as to the Church. I came over the Tweed more than forty years ago, and there is a marked and very sorrowful difference in the way Scripture is regarded now and then. At that time it was generally believed and revered. Now it is almost universally disregarded and set aside; and what I desire that we should do is to turn more reverently, really, and truly to the Scriptures—the only source of real light for man here—to learn God’s mind regarding that Church which He calls His.

Having instructed His disciples in chapter 15 as regards the leaders, namely, to “let them alone,” you find that the Lord Himself in chapter 16 “left them and departed” (vs. 4), a significant expression of what was to happen to Israel. But the judgment goes deeper, even to the total setting aside of man in the flesh, his heart being only the corrupt spring of every form of evil. At this point the Lord gives up the Jewish nation, in the person of their leaders. It was at that moment that “the Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired Him that He would show them a sign from heaven (Matt. 16:1). He replied that they could understand the weather, but not God’s ways, and then added: “A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas” (Matt. 16:4). What was that? It was the death and resurrection of Christ as the only sign that could be added to the marvelous one that had been given them in Immanuel, the Virgin’s Son, to which they were totally blind, else they had not asked for a sign from heaven.

“And He left them, and departed” (vs. 4), is what inaugurates the totally new ministry of Christ, as now He leaves Judaea and goes to Caesarea Philippi. This town—now known as Baneas—was outside the limits of the land of Israel, situated at the foot of Mount Hermon, and close to the most easterly source of the river Jordan; and must not be confounded with Caesarea, the Roman seaport capital of Palestine, where the gospel first reached the Gentiles (Acts 10). On Gentile ground Jesus puts the most serious question that can be presented to any human heart, that is, Whom men in general said that He was. The Jew had failed to see that He was the Messiah, and the day was over for the Jew. But was He not still the minister of the circumcision? Yes, but the circumcision would not have Him, the nation was about to refuse Him, and prefer a robber and murderer to Himself. Hence He breaks with Judaism, and brings out the wonderful truth that we have in the latter part of the sixteenth chapter.

Just then it was that “He asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” (vs. 13). It was in principle, “What think ye of Christ?” What was the effect produced upon the hearts of men by what had been manifested in that blessed One? No proof was wanting of who He was. They had been furnished with plenty of opportunity to know who He was; John the Baptist had declared Him, and His own mighty works had borne witness of Him, and the Father Himself had done so also. We read (Luke 8:1) that He went “throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God.” There was not a hamlet where the blessed feet of the Son of God did not carry Him in grace, to tell out to men the heart of God; and to deliver from every form of the oppression of Satan’s power. But the end was really this—We do not know who He is. Some said He was John the Baptist, risen from the dead; some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets; it little mattered which. These were simply the guesses of profound moral indifference. All was a matter of opinion, not faith, resulting in that careless uncertainty which always marks the soul that has no sense of need. Where need exists in the soul, no rest is found till Christ is really known. The Pharisees and Sadducees were hostile to Him, and the mass of the nation were heartlessly indifferent.

To the little group of disciples His grace had gathered around Him He then says, “But whom say ye that I am?” Peter, to whom the Father had revealed His Son, furnishes the answer of faith. He now apprehended Him to be much more than the Messiah, the fulfiller of promise and prophecy, and said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (vs. 16). Full, blessed confession, in which was no uncertainty of mere human opinion, but the result of the revelation to his soul of the Person of Christ, which the Father had been pleased to make to Him, as the Son of God in a power of life superior to death.

On a previous occasion when many went away, and walked no more with Him, “Jesus said unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? THOU HAST the words of eternal life. And WE BELIEVE and ARE SURE that Thou art THE HOLY ONE OF GOD” (see RV, John 6:67,69). That was a fine confession of Peter’s; and the man that confesses Christ according to the light he has will get more. Peter got more. In John 6 he says, “Thou hast the words of eternal life,” and “Thou art the Holy One of God.” He saw in measure what He was and what He had. What He is forms the immovable resting-place of our souls as we repose in Him and His work. What He has becomes the everlasting supply to our souls in their manifold needs. You get into your hearts those blessed words, “Thou hast,” and “Thou art,” and all the need of your soul will find its full answer in Christ, for He loves to minister what He is and what He has to the longing heart.

Peter gets a distinct advance here. It is not merely that Christ was the fulfiller of the second Psalm, which Nathanael confessed when he said, “Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel” (John 1:49); and Martha too acknowledged when she said, “I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world” (John 11:27). There were souls here and there that had the sense that He was God’s blessed Son; but Peter goes further, as he confesses, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” He owns Him to be the Son of Him in whom is life and life-giving power. The life of God cannot be destroyed, and the Son of the living God cannot be overcome. In Him is that power of life which nothing can vanquish. Satan had the power of death; the Son of God has the power of life. The unchangeable power of life, even though He go into death, cannot be overcome of death. It is the very reverse. He annuls death. Every other man was overcome of death; the Son of the living God could not be. It is well to notice here the force of “living,” because He speaks of death, and “the gates of hades,” which refer to Satan’s kingdom. That Assembly which is founded on the unchanging power of life in the Son of God cannot be affected by the kingdom of death. Glorious truth!

Now mark the four things which the Lord brings out—four deeply important things. The first thing is the revelation made by the Father to Peter of who Jesus was; second, the new name again given to Simon by Jesus, who by his confession of faith in the Person of the Son of the living God was thereby manifested to be a stone of the building Christ was about to build on the foundation revealed in what the Father taught Peter; third, the announcement never made before that “upon this rock I will build my church”—the Assembly yet to be built by Himself on the foundation of His own Person, acknowledged by faith to be “the Son of the living God,” and known as such in resurrection; and fourth, “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” which He would give to Peter, that is, authority of administration in the kingdom on earth, in His name. And here let me say, we must be careful not to confound the kingdom with the Church; they are two distinct things. The first is one of the dispensations of time and the last of them, the latter is not. The Church is a heavenly structure, though formed on earth. The kingdom is an earthly dispensation, though ruled from heaven, because the King is there now.

How did Peter get this wonderful revelation? I think he had been to college—not a college that man instituted. It was the Father’s College. He had been taught by the Father. The Father, in His favor to Peter, taught him that the blessed, lowly, gracious Man whom he was following was His Son—the eternal Son become a Man, that the Father might be revealed in Him. “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him” (Matt. 11:27). There are inscrutable depths of glory in the Person of Christ that no human mind can fathom, but what we cannot fathom, we can enjoy. Without doubt it is the inscrutability of the glory of His Person that is the guarantee to faith of the divinity of Jesus—divinity which His self-renunciation—in emptying Himself and assuming humanity—might have hidden from the eyes of unbelief. But can you not understand, now that it is revealed, God’s Son becoming a Man, to bring out according to all that was in His heart, the heart of God to you, and to bring you to God, and into the apprehension and enjoyment of so great a love?

Carefully note that to know Christ personally as He has been revealed is the basis of all blessing to the soul, and paves the way to deeper enjoyment of God’s mind. Here the Lord says, Peter, My Father has told you who I am; now I will tell you what you are. The Father had spoken to Peter, and now the Son in His own right speaks. “And I also say” (RV)—not “And I say also,” invert those words; He has somewhat of deepest moment to say to Peter—“I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my assembly; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (vs. 18). The Greek word here translated “church” in our version, meant originally an assembly of the citizens of any particular state. The word as used by the Lord—“MY ASSEMBLY” gives it an unique character; and marks it off from every other assembly. It is the Assembly viewed in the character of a house—not a place as men now use the term generally. And what was Peter? A stone. And what is a stone? A bit of a rock. Every Christian by faith in Christ, the living stone, is a stone, a bit of the rock.

Peter, you see, gets his new name confirmed here. When he was at first brought to the Lord by his brother Andrew, the Lord said to him, “Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas (Peter), which is by interpretation, A stone” (John 1:42). If the rock has a certain nature, a certain character, so has the stone which is a bit of it. It is a wonderful thing to be a Christian; he is identified by life and nature with Christ. He belongs to Christ, he is the subject of the Father’s love and favor, and of the Son’s salvation, and there has been a work wrought in him that nobody has wrought but Christ.

You will remember how beautifully Peter takes up and applies this thought, when he says, “If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious; to whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:3-5). Who are these living stones? All true believers in Christ. What was personal to Peter in Matthew 16 he passes on, to all who have come to Christ, in the epistle. Are all professing Christians such? Oh no. Profession is one thing; possession is quite another. I expect you are a professing Christian; but whether you are a living stone is another thing altogether. Peter, by faith in Christ, had come to have part in Christ. The Lord had quickened him, and now He quickens us. To all true believers in Himself, who come to Him, tasting that He is gracious—and oh, how gracious He is—He imparts His own life, and thus they become living stones—like Peter.

We get the illustration and earliest anticipative expression of this glorious truth in the twentieth of John. There the Lord came into the upper room, where the apostles and other believers were gathered together, and “breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (vs. 22). As the last Adam alive from the dead, He breathed on them—recalling the action of God with the first Adam, in creation—and thus brought them into life in a new condition, that is, that of the risen Christ—His own risen life. He had already said to Mary, “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (vs. 17). Christianity is this—Christ risen from the dead, taking into association with Himself, all that are His own, and putting them one and all into the place that He now takes before God, as Man, risen from among the dead. His Assembly, those that are now His, are spoken of under four different figures in the New Testament—a House, a Body, a Candlestick, and a Bride, as we shall see later.

Let us consider a little more what He says to Peter in Matthew 16, “Upon this rock I will build My church.” Now, what was the rock? Was it Peter? We have been told so, but you do not believe it, do you? Do you think Peter was the rock? A shifting sort of rock poor Peter would have made. He was a stone, and sometimes rather like a rolling stone too. And have not you found yourself to be like a rolling stone sometimes? Undoubtedly the rock was Christ. The confession of His name, by faith in His Person, as Son of the living God is all important. It is His Person that is here contemplated as set forth in resurrection, for on this glory of His Person all is founded.

Resurrection is the proof that He is the Son of the living God. We read, that He is “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). He was the Son of God before He died; He was declared to be the Son of God by resurrection. He was the only man ever taken out from among the dead; but God has taken Him out, and He is alive today at God’s right hand. He is proved to be the Son of God, with power over all the domain of death, by resurrection, and it is upon this Christ builds His Assembly. Observe carefully the Lord’s words: “Upon this rock I will build My assembly”—not “I have built,” nor “I am building”; it was a future work, necessarily connected with His death and resurrection, which brought to naught the power He speaks of as “the gates of hades.” “My assembly” is a beautiful word. People usually think of a church as composed of stone and lime, that which the eye can see, but “the assembly” in Scripture carries quite a different idea, being Christ’s redeemed people, born of the Spirit, washed in His blood, and sealed by the Holy Spirit. It is made of stones; and what is the cementing, the uniting bond? The Holy Spirit. And what kind of stones are they? Living stones. And who made them living stones, and built them in? Jesus. Man is not the builder here. Peter did not build the Church—he did administer the kingdom. You must keep distinct the difference between what Christ builds, and what man builds in responsibility. That may or may not be good building, and what is worthless will disappear in the fire (see 1 Cor. 3). What Christ builds can never be destroyed, undermined, or overthrown, “and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it.” What are “the gates of hades”? All the power of Satan—that is the idea. It is a figurative expression.

Satan had the power of death, but in the cross of Christ not only was redemption accomplished, the claims of God met, and the blood shed that would blot out sin, so that we could be righteously justified before God; but there is also the absolute annulling of the power of Satan. Christ went down into death—the very citadel of Satan’s power—overcame him, and left the stronghold of the enemy without strength, i.e., He burst “the gates of hades,” annulled death, and broke the power of the tomb. God raised Him from the dead, and today He is a risen, victorious Christ; and upon this rock of the unchangeable power of life in Him the Assembly is built. If you be a part of what He calls “My assembly,” no power of Satan will ever be able to dislodge, undermine, or upset you.

There are two other scriptures I will now allude to, as to the Church, where the Builder is manifestly divine. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, says, You “are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). In his day the work was going on, but who built? Paul? No. The apostles? No. Why? Because they were stones—if foundation stones—in the building, not builders; stones do not build themselves in. The apostle says, Ye are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets”—they were connected with the foundation. In Matthew 16 it is Christ building; and in Ephesians 2:20 the work of building is equally divine—no man has any hand in it. We read of Paul as a master-builder in 1 Corithians 3, but you must not confound Christ’s building with what man builds. It is the mixing up of the two that has brought in all the confusion and false doctrine which we see today, culminating in the confessional and the blasphemy of man being able to forgive sins. We must not mingle the things that differ.

Again, we read from the pen of Peter: “If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:3-5). The work is still going on, it is not finished yet. Christ had not begun it when He spoke to Peter. He began it after He rose from the dead, and ascended on high; and when the Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost, His Assembly began to be built. His work is still going on, hence Peter says, “You are being built up,” and it is a very blessed thing to find yourself a stone in a building which the Lord has built. Such being the case, you can rejoice in the fact that Satan has no pick-ax that can pick you out.

Here then we find that not only Christ builds the Assembly, the foundation of which is the revelation of His name, but that its origin is divine—it is purely a divine work. All this is confirmed if we look now at Revelation 21, where we see the Church as “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven” (vs. 2). The Church of God belongs to heaven. In its nature, origin, character, and destiny—yea, its absolute being before God—it is heavenly. The city comes down out of heaven from God. Its origin is from God, and its nature is heavenly; and it is a great thing for every Christian to see that he is heavenly—he belongs to heaven.

Now for a little let us look at the kingdom, and seek to understand what the Lord means, as He says to Peter, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:19). Did Christ give Peter the keys of heaven? Impossible. Men have painted pictures of the Lord and His apostles, and Peter with keys hanging at his girdle, while a flock of sheep surrounds them. Hence many people think that Peter has the keys of the Church. There are none such. This is a pure fallacy. Sheep are not fed by keys, and Christ does not build with keys. The important truth which the Lord taught has not been seized. The value of keys is to open doors, and when the doors are opened the keys are of no more use. It was a privilege Peter received of the Lord, a great favor—he was to be the administrator of the kingdom of heaven. The King has been refused, and before the King comes back again, and the kingdom is set up (as it will be in the millennial reign), the whole of the truth of the Church is brought out—the Assembly is built. Peter, as the servant, is used of the Lord in the preaching of the gospel, and he administers that which is connected with the kingdom. Christ the King is in heaven, and He can administer things down here by a special servant, or by His Church, which was to occupy Christ’s place on earth. Hence we read elsewhere: “Tell it unto the assembly; but if he neglect to hear the assembly, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 18:17-18). The Assembly is to act for and in Christ’s name during His absence—the only successor, known to Scripture, of the authority committed to Peter in Matthew 16, but note, in a different sphere. It is the Church in this passage, not the kingdom of heaven it applies to, but neither Peter nor the Church can bind things in heaven, though what they bound on earth heaven would ratify.

Peter has nothing to do with letting people into heaven. Christ has the keys of heaven, be sure of that. Hear His words: “I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of death and hades” (Rev. 1:18). He keeps those keys, but in His service down here He may and did use Peter, and put into his hands two keys wherewith to administer the kingdom of heaven. Why not one key? He had to open two doors. In Acts 2, where he preached his first sermon on the day of Pentecost, he put one key into the Jewish

door, and opened the way for them to get blessing. The name of that key was “Repentance,” I’m inclined to think. In Acts 10 he went down to Caesarea and opened the door to the Gentiles, and the name of that key was “Believe.” The Jew was called to repentance, and to clear himself from his nation now guilty of the murder of their Messiah. To the Gentile, that had no link with, and no claim on God, Peter says, “To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

Remission of sins, and the reception of the Holy Spirit, so as to form part of the Assembly of God, is a divine work; man has no hand in it. It is Christ’s work, and will stand. Of the thirteen hundred different sects or so-called churches in Christendom which man has built it may be safely affirmed that not one of them is the Church of God. They are all human systems which, after different man-conceived patterns men have built. Very possibly many true Christians may be found in each one of them, but they fail to represent the scriptural thought of “My assembly,” which embraces all that are Christ’s at any time on the earth, till He comes, or the aggregate of all called out in this special epoch when He comes. But you and I are now concerned about what Christ builds, and where we are in relation to that building should exercise our hearts. Let us then be like the Bereans of whom it is written: “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Night Scenes of Scripture, Another Night in Bethlehem

(Matt. 11:1-12)

All of you, who are conversant with Scripture, will have noticed the difference between the record given us by the Evangelist Matthew, as compared with that which is portrayed by Luke, concerning the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Both gospels, however, open with night scenes. Luke, as we have seen, shows us the shepherds of Bethlehem visited at night by the wonderful tidings that to them was “born that day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” His record, while replete with all the surrounding and lovely attendant circumstances, purposely emphasizes the truth of the incarnation of the Son of God — of how God’s Son came to save that which was lost, by Himself becoming man, that, as man, He might die for men. That is the burden of Luke’s Gospel.

Now Matthew’s Gospel has a totally different purpose. It is written, not, like Luke’s, for the Gentiles, but is clearly written for, and presents scripture to the Jew, and deals with the earthly history of the blessed Savior in relation to the Jewish nation. You have Him, in plain language, presented by Matthew as King of the Jews. Perhaps you have not been accustomed to read the four gospels, as presenting Christ in four entirely different aspects; but it will greatly help you, if you carry this simple thought with you: that Matthew presents the blessed Lord as King of the Jews — alas, rejected; Mark portrays the perfect servant; Luke unfolds the Son of Man; and John delineates, as far as any writing can, the Son of God.

I want now to bring before you, for a little, man’s treatment of this blessed One, who was thus born King of the Jews. The first chapter of Matthew gives us His genealogy — always an important point for the heir to a throne. The second chapter opens with the fact that certain magi, wise men of the East, Gentiles, I suppose, had traveled an enormous distance, and had come up with this query on their lips, “Where is HE that is born King of the Jews?” A very striking question is that — the first in the New Testament; and very different from the first question in the Old Testament. Have you ever observed it? God said to Adam, “Where art thou?” Oh! what a question for the sinner — Where art thou? Friend, where art thou? What is your relation to God? The New Testament opens with the question, Where is He? “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” was a question of immense importance. If the One the magi sought be King of the Jews, His right and title to the throne of David must, in the most clear and perfect way, be presented, and the first chapter accordingly gives the genealogy of the Lord Jesus; beginning with Abraham, and coming down through David — the royal line — till at length we have Jesus born into this scene in the way Matthew describes, and the Scripture was fulfilled” Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” Wonderful tidings! dear friends. God on earth — God here, on man’s earth, and in human form — Scripture fulfilled. The Old Testament, I repeat, clearly and distinctly fulfilled. Astounding news here! that God was on earth in the form of that young child!

He is born, and His name, already foretold by the angels, is JESUS, which means “Jehovah the Savior.” This name is given Him with divine purpose. “Thou shalt call His name Jesus” — why? “For He shall save His people from their sins.” I do not doubt that primarily “His people” meant the Jews; but still it is equally true in a broader sense that “He saves His people from their sins,” and therefore, the sooner you get among “His people” the better for you I do not say, The sooner you profess to be a Christian — that would be no good to you — but, the sooner you get among “His people” the better will it be for you.

“Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins,” was the word to Joseph. He is born, and receives the lovely — the heaven-born — the charming name of Jesus. Jesus! Do you love that name? Does that name awaken a chord in your heart, my friend? Has the name of Jesus no charm for you? Oh! I pity you if it has not. Jesus! Jesus! It will be the song of my soul for eternity. It will ever be the theme of the saved, and He who bears that name will be the object of worship forever of all God’s people. Oh! my friend, what do you think of Jesus? Perhaps you have never thought much about Him. Very likely! for we are not any of us in a hurry to get to Christ. You know the last thing the sinner will do is to go to Jesus. Yes, it is the very last thing. I do not think any sinner goes until he is, so to speak, driven at the point of the sword — that is, until there is soul — exercise and until he has learned his own good-for-nothingness, and that there is no one to pity him, to help him, or to save him, but Jesus. We learn Him first as a Savior. I do not think that was the character in which these wise men of the East regarded the Lord. They came up, you observe, “when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Juda,” inquiring, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship Him.” A most remarkable mission these men had.

To me there is something exceptionally charming in this picture of these Easterns coming hundreds — possibly thousands of miles — to greet the Son of God, as He entered this world. You may say, What was the reason of their journey? Well, it is pretty well known, that about the time of the birth of our Lord, there was a widespread expectation in the East that a great and mighty being — a certain wonderful King — was to be born into the world. How, exactly, they fixed that particular date is not for me to say; but there is no doubt that the astrologers and astronomers, and the men who interested themselves in these subjects, had fixed upon that moment, towards the close of the reign of Herod the Great, as the time when this wonderful personage was to be born. The Old Testament Scripture had, I doubt not, led to this. That wicked man Balaam — a poor wretch who loved money better than truth, or the service of God — had been led to say once, as I daresay many of you

remember — and he spoke the truth, though he himself was not in any sense under the power of it — “I shall see Him, but not now; I shall behold Him, but not nigh.” Ah! take care, my hearer, that you are not Balaam’s companion for eternity. You will see Him, mind you, but oh, what an awful thing if it be not nigh. “I shall see Him, but not now; I shall behold Him, but not nigh; there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy the children of Sheth” (Num. 24:17). Yes, he spoke prophetically of that wonderful Star, and no doubt the prophecy was often repeated and never died out, and at this moment, curiously enough, these magi were seeking the truth, and found it, as all earnest seekers are sure to do.

I have no doubt that the hand of God was upon these men, who had traveled such an enormous distance, as they come up and say, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him.” I know perfectly well that infidels have tried to make a stock difficulty about this star, and the time of the appearing of the star. They say that a new star could not have appeared. My dear friend, you need never trust an infidel in his allegations against Scripture, because he believes nothing, and knows nothing. If you have been getting infidel notions into your head, the sooner you get them knocked out of it the better. The wise men had evidently seen the star. What star did they see? I do not know if I am prepared to prove what star they saw. Very likely they saw two which appeared to them as one.

It has been perfectly well proved by men, who have studied these things, that at this time there was an extraordinary phenomenon in the planetary system, caused by the juxtaposition of two of the largest sidereal bodies, Jupiter and Saturn, which at that moment, in the pursuance of their orbits, came close together. Their relative position on that occasion was such that men looking from the East would see what would appear to be a brilliant additional body in the heavens.

These wise men, doubtless, led by the hand of God, said, The moment has come — the star so long expected has arrived. As it happened, this conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn appeared in connection with the heavenly constellation, “the Fishes,” which had long been connected with the Jew (as a fish is the astrological symbol of Judea). Struck by this fact, the magi were directed to the land of the Jew, and they started off to that land with the query, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” But you see they lost the star. What had become of it? They saw the star first in the month of May. Six months after, in the months of October and November, Jupiter and Saturn approached each other again just at the time when we read they came, saying, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” When they came to Jerusalem, no one could tell them anything about the One they sought, but Scripture had predicted where Christ should be born, so at Herod’s command they go to Bethlehem. As they go to Bethlehem they again get guidance, for “lo, the star which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over the place where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” The two planets were once more in close apposition, and to the unassisted eye might appear to be one star. I do not say that this coincidence is what the magi saw, but it might be the case, since such was the state of matters in the heavenly bodies when these men came up.

But without doubt the magi are led by the finger of God, as they go seeking Jesus to worship Him. They are prepared with worship. What a striking thing! Gentiles traveling hundreds of miles to worship Him! And His own people, what of them? Not one solitary person in Jerusalem in the upper circles of religious observance — from Matthew’s record — seems to have heard or thought a bit about Him. And yet you remember that Anna, the prophetess, had spoken “of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38). There were a few godly people looking for the Messiah, and they recognized Him when He was born, but the king, the priests, the scribes, the elders, the heads of the nation, were not looking for Him; no one knew of Him, or His birth, and the first news they got of the birth of the King of the Jews was a year or so after His birth, and then from the lips of these eastern Gentiles, who had traveled this enormous distance to find Him.

The occasion when these men reach the spot where the Lord was, and present their offerings of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, was not that of which the second of Luke speaks. I feel certain about that. If you notice men’s pictures — and there are thousands of them representing the infant Christ in the manger — they paint the magi in a stable, among the cattle, presenting the Lord with their gifts. All these pictures are wrong. Never trust the pictures. You must go back to scripture, and it says, “When they were come into the house.” It was not a stable. Clearly many months had rolled by, after the birth of Jesus, ere the magi came up. There is no doubt about it. It is quite clear if you compare the Scriptures. When the parents of Jesus bring Him to the temple, and Simeon takes Him into his arms, and cries, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation,” then immediately after that the family go down to Nazareth (Luke 2:39). You may say to me, How came it that the Lord was again in Bethlehem? Well, you remember that a godly Jew was bound to appear before the Lord three times in the year — at the feast of the passover, at the feast of weeks — what we call Pentecost — and again at the feast of tabernacles (see Deut. 16:16). I have no doubt, therefore, that it was on one of these occasions — probably the passover (see Luke 2:39) — that He was again brought to Bethlehem, where Joseph’s natural links were.

It is very interesting to compare the scriptures. We live in a day when Scripture is very much doubted; but a little care will prove the accuracy and beauty of Scripture in all points. I do not know if you have ever searched out the history of Bethlehem — if not, I commend it to you. It was the spot where Rachel died. Where Rachel died, Jesus was born. The meaning of it, too, is interesting. It means “The House of Bread.” Bethlehem-Ephratah, it is called also, and that is very striking. Ephratah — fruitful, and Bethlehem — the House of Bread. It was indeed fruitful. As a matter of topography, Bethlehem was a little village pitched on the summit and sides of a mountain ridge, some five miles south of Jerusalem. The steep hill beneath the village was carefully terraced in graceful slopes from top to bottom of the ridge, while vines in festoons, and luxuriant olives, and fig-trees, with dense foliage, gave a fruitful appearance, in striking contrast with the barrenness of the neighboring desert. In the valleys below, and on a little plain to the eastward, are some cornfields, the luxuriant and beautiful crops of which doubtless gave to Bethlehem the name of “The House of Bread,” or, “a fruitful place.”

Immediately beyond these terraced vineyards and fields lies the wilderness of Judea, alluded to in the opening verses of the third of Matthew as the scene of the preaching of John the Baptist. That rigid, barren, arid desert lay right in front, as far as the eye could reach, in striking contrast to this peculiar place of great fertility and fruitfulness at the foot of the mountain, that gave it the name Ephratah. Its history looms largely in Scripture. It was there that Ruth first met with Boaz. It was the House of Bread she got to. My dear friend, have you ever touched Bethlehem — the House of Bread — this spot of blessing, where Jesus was born?

It was at Bethlehem likewise that David was born. Call to mind the history of David in connection with Bethlehem. Think of him as the poet, the warrior, and the king. His youthful surroundings told on his after-life. Bethlehem’s mountain ravines afforded solitude and opportunity for communion with God. There he fed his flock, and learned the lessons which the Spirit led him to indite in later days. There he learned to be the man of war, and to be alone with God — to have communion with God. David was not only born there, but there he was anointed. His

chief mighty men were Bethlehemites, and it was for the water of its well he sighed, and not in vain. All these things were but the forecasts and pictures of what was to come. In this same spot Jesus — the Son of David — the Son of God, was born. Bethlehem! thou art indeed the true House of Bread. What a wonderful thing — that in Thee the Savior, the Son of God, should be born! On Bethlehem's plains, where the shepherds kept watch, the gospel tidings were first proclaimed — "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord."

And now the Easterns come up, and they repair to this mountain village, to find and worship the Lord. Their visit must have been twelve or eighteen months later than the date of the birth of Christ. That is clear, for the time taken to prepare for, and carry out a caravan journey, traveling slowly from the East, would necessarily occupy a good many months. Consequently, when Herod makes his inquiries, he is most particular to find out the time at which the star appeared, and also, you observe when he sends out the terrible edict to slaughter the children, it is against those of two years and under. Many months had rolled by since the star first appeared, and when Herod got the information about the birth of his hated and unlooked — for Rival, he fixed a limit of two years so as to ensure destroying Him. What different effects are produced on souls by the presentation of Christ! "When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." What a remarkable statement! and what a revelation as to the state of man's heart. How different is the attitude of the magi. "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship Him." They come with a desire to own Him, and I like to think of them prostrating themselves before Him. Have you ever bowed to Him? If not, bow tonight. Times have altered since then in a certain sense. He is not now a young child. He has died, been raised, and as the exalted Man is on the Father's throne; but He is the same Jesus, and you must have to do with Him. You must have to say to Him. You must bow to His power, in the day of judgment, or bow to Him now in the day of His grace. It would be a good thing if you were to bow to Him just now.

If you have a desire for Him, be encouraged by the example of these men. Let their example cheer you. We read — "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." Why? Because they had this thought, We are nearing the object of our quest now. As they traveled over that desert, during the long weary weeks and months, I have no doubt the question rose often in their minds, Shall we find Him? And now that their search is about to be rewarded, they rejoice. "Arid when they were come into the house, they saw the young child, with Mary His mother, and fell down, and worshipped Him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." Look at that scene. They came into the house — not a stable evidently — but some house in which Joseph and the mother of the Lord were at this time. They came in, and they fell down before Him. Blessed moment in the history of their souls! They saw the young child, and they fell down and worshipped Him. They bow in adoration. A beautiful sight for God! A wonderful sight for heaven!

Look at these men. Why are they prostrate before Christ? Has heaven ever seen that sight in your soul's history? Has heaven ever been delighted to find you prostrate before Christ? — not now a young child, but the exalted Savior at God's right hand, because the work of redemption is accomplished. But the principle of truth is the same. It is Christ that is sought. The same Christ attracts you, and when you bow before Him what blessedness is yours. "They worshipped Him, and opened their treasures, and presented gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh." Whatever that may mean, it certainly means this, that the best they had was for Jesus. What have you had for Jesus yet? Unless you have learned His grace — unless you have learned the value of His precious blood, and unless you have learned that He is your Savior, you have nothing for Jesus. If you learn His grace, what will come then? Out of your heart will come the antitype of the gold, frankincense, and myrrh; you will present to Him the best of everything — the affection and worship of a loving heart.

You will be like the delivered little boy. A train was whirling along on its road, when all at once something gave way, and there was an awful railway accident. A great many people were killed, and the train was smashed. A gentleman, seeking to help the dying and the wounded, found a little boy beneath the wheels of a smashed-up carriage, and drew him out. He came out frightened a good deal, but in answer to the gentleman said he was not hurt. "Oh," said his deliverer, "I am glad of that," and was moving off. "Stop! stop!" said the little man, "do take this, it is all I have got," and he gave the gentleman a halfpenny. "I hope you will take it, it is all I have got." Ah! do you see? It was all he had got, but he must offer it to his deliverer. You have your heart, and will you not yield it to Jesus? Yield it to Him, my friend, not to another. "And they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."

Now mark! How much did they offer Mary? Not a grain. Oh no, it is reserved for the advanced nineteenth century, for the enlightened professing Christian of the present day to indulge in Mariolatry — the worship of Mary — and to offer incense to Mary. The magi knew better. Are you one with them? They were wise men. Perhaps you do not think they were wise, but they had divine wisdom, and they offered nothing to Mary. There was no worship of Mary then. Take up the latest hymn books now, some ancient, some modern, some new, others old, and note how much about Mary you will find. I sometimes wonder at the patience of God as His Son is insulted in this way.

But while on this point it is well to notice what significant silences Scripture has. Did you ever notice in the second of Luke, when Simeon came into the temple and took up the babe Jesus into his arms, the way he worships God? Of Joseph and Mary I read, "he blessed them." Simeon could bless them, but did he bless Jesus? Nay, he was divinely taught. If I went into a friend's house, where there was a recently born child, it would be the simplest thing in the world for me to put my hand on the child's head and say, "God bless the child." Simeon blesses the parents. He does not bless Christ. Ah! no! He knew he had God's Son in his arms. Here these wise men bring all their worship to the Son, and have none for the mother; and if you have been trapped into Mariolatry, God save you. Get down on your knees, own your sin, and make everything of Jesus henceforth.

You may be perfectly sure, if you are seeking

Christ, you will find Him. I hear someone say, Oh! I want Christ, but I do not know how to find Him. Do not give up your quest. Have you traveled all that distance, and gone months and months upon the road? then God will bring you to the true Bethlehem, and will bring you into living contact with Jesus. Where is He tonight? He is in the true Bethlehem, the true House of Bread, in the Father's house. If you are wanting Jesus this evening, you follow on, and you will find Him. I will tell you why? He wants to find you. just as we sang tonight—

"Jesus, my Savior, to Bethlehem came, Born in a manger, to sorrow and shame;Oh, it was wonderful — blest be His Name;Seeking for me, for me."

Thank God for that. Ah, "seeking for me." It is God that has His eye upon us. Jesus seeks us that He may save us; we seek Him that we may worship Him. The magi, I repeat, were "wise men." They sought, found, and worshipped Jesus. Have you been as wise?