Matthew - Commentaries by William Woldridge Fereday

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 9:27-34: The Blind and the Dumb

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THE cases of the two blind men and the dumb demoniac recorded in Matt. 9:27-34 are found only in the first Gospel. They apparently followed immediately upon the raising of Jairus' daughter. Taken together, these fresh incidents furnish us with a sadly complete picture of man in his natural condition. Toward God man is stone-blind. His eyes are open widely enough to the concerns of this life, its business, pleasures, etc., but to everything spiritual he is one who sees not. What though the goodness of God, the perfections of Christ, the cleansing efficacy of His blood, and the glories of heaven are portrayed before him, he sees nothing in them to attract his blinded eyes. They are the most uninteresting of all the matters that come before him. The natural man is also as dumb as he is blind. The tongue that is so ready of speech when temporal things are being discussed, collapses into utter silence when God and Christ are introduced. Concerning the highest and best of all topics he has absolutely nothing to say. His tongue is tied.

There is but One who can open blind eyes and set at liberty tongues that are dumb. The Gospel is sent to men "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 26:18). When the blind men were brought into the house of our Lord, He asked them, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" They replied, "Yea, Lord." Instantly the healing touch was given, and the inestimable boon of sight was granted to them. Men spiritually blind and dumb are equally welcome to the Saviour. One touch of His gracious hand, sought in faith, and everything becomes viewed in a new light, and the delivered soul feels as one introduced into a new world. Henceforward he cried with the ecstatic apostle, "We see Jesus" (Heb. 2:9). His eyes are enraptured with the glories of His Saviour and Lord; for the excellency of the knowledge of Him he counts everything else but loss. His tongue makes its boast in the Lord; it is continually filled with His praise. He testifies of Him burningly to all. This is surely a spiritual miracle.

We are commenting upon true cases of physical healing. In dealing with them our Lord was fulfilling what was long before predicted of Him in Isaiah 35:5-6. This kind of miracle has ceased for the present, to reappear when the Millennial kingdom is established. But meanwhile the spiritual wonder is being enacted before our eyes every day. The grace of God is revolutionizing men's lives continually; the dead are quickened, the blind are made to see, and the dumb are made both to speak and sing. Who but our God, and what but the Gospel, could accomplish such marvels as these?

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 9:20-22: The Issue of Blood

THE woman who touched the Saviour's garment has always been an object of peculiar interest to devout readers of Scripture. Her painful case, and the simplicity of her faith, never fail to arouse our spiritual sympathies. Her case was an interruption of our Lord's mission to raise Jairus' daughter. She is thus a type of those who are to-day seeking and receiving blessing while our Lord's relations with Israel are suspended. The fact that the woman's case is interwoven with that of Jairus' daughter serves to bring out clearly the parts that both God and man play in the blessing of the soul. The girl, like every unregenerate sinner, was dead; who can quicken the dead but God. The woman exercised her faith; this God looks for in all who would receive His favors. God's part is to quicken; man's part is to believe.

A vast multitude thronged the streets of the little port of Capernaum. They were following Jesus to the ruler's house. He who judged by appearances would have concluded that the whole country was in love with the Son of God. But as it was in Capernaum, so it is now in Christendom—many follow from mere curiosity, many go because others go; but only individuals here and there, like the woman of our story, seek Him because their hearts yearn for that which He alone can supply. The woman was now penniless. During twelve years she had been vainly seeking health at the hands of Jewish physicians. Why did she not earlier make her application to the great Healer of all? She reflects, only too sadly, those in our day who in their quest for salvation try everything and every one rather than the Son of God. Sacraments, teetotalism, benevolence, and a crowd of other remedies, are trusted in by various souls for that which He alone can give. When the woman came to the conclusion that her only hope lay in the Lord Jesus, she formed her resolution accordingly, "If I can touch but His clothes, I shall be whole" (Mark 5:28). Marvelous faith! She had acquired such confidence in Him that she believed one touch of His fringe with its blue ribbon attached (Num. 15:37-41) would suffice for her complete healing.

The Saviour was aware of what was passing, and to the astonishment of Peter and the others, He turned and inquired, "Who touched Me?" As then, so now, He carefully distinguishes between the thoughtless crowd of religious adherents and the earnest individual seeker after blessing. Calling the woman before Him, and eliciting her frank confession of what had taken place, He dismissed her home with the comforting assurance, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace" (Luke 8:48). It is good to have to do with One so gracious as He. The humble seeker after spiritual healing has but to claim an interest in His precious blood, and pardon, salvation, and peace become the heart's portion forever. "We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved" (Acts 15:11).

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 9:18-26: Jairus' Daughter

DURING the world's preparatory ages; i.e., the ages that preceded Christ's coming, the divine dealings were especially with the people of Israel. The result of all God's dealings with that nation was to make manifest the true condition of our race. The human heart having been proved to be incorrigibly evil in the most favored of the families of the earth, it goes without saying that it is irretrievably evil everywhere.

The case of Jairus' daughter (Matt. 9:18-26) illustrates these principles. Mark and Luke tell us that she was dying when her father first petitioned the Saviour on her behalf, and that he heard of her death from a messenger who was sent after him; Matthew shortens his report of the occurrence by commencing with her death. Her case was thus hopeless as far as man was concerned, even though her parent, as a ruler of the synagogue, was an authorized exponent of the law of Jehovah. The dead maid furnishes us with a picture of Israel dead—spiritually dead—in spite of ages of possession of God's law. It had not imparted life to Israel; it was impossible, therefore, that it could impart righteousness. If it could not supply man's first need, it certainly could not supply his second need. "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law" (Gal. 3:21). Yet in utter blindness as to their true condition, Israel has unceasingly sought righteousness by means of works of law. Gentiles have no more learned the lesson of human ruin than the chosen people; hence the painful fact that in this Gospel day the majority of persons in Christendom are striving after blessing on the principle of works in one form or another.

Jairus felt deeply the powerlessness of all ecclesiastical and legal machinery in the presence of death, and he therefore made his application to the Son of God. With His usual tenderness, the Saviour said to the distressed parent, "Be not afraid; only believe." Taking with Him Peter, James and John only, He entered into the death-chamber and forthwith overcame death by His quickening word. It sufficed for Him to say, "Damsel, arise," and immediately her spirit returned from the unseen world and became reunited with the body. Blessed earnest of what the same gracious One will accomplish in a spiritual way for her entire nation when He comes again!

Meanwhile, the principle is stamped indelibly on the page of Scripture that man is dead in the eyes of God. It is vain to preach good works and religious ordinances to the dead. Why should we Gentiles foolishly essay to reach blessing by means that have signally failed in the case of Israel? Not law-works but Christ can alone meet man's deep need. Hence His own gracious declaration: "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 9:2-7: The Palsied Man

THIS miracle of healing was wrought at Capernaum, the city adopted by the Saviour as His home after He gave up Nazareth.

It did not take place after His return from Gadara; this incident, though reserved for the opening verses of Matthew's ninth chapter, occurred immediately after the cleansing of the leper recorded in Matt. 8:2-5.

Every physical disease healed by the Saviour typifies in one way or another the moral disease of sin. Thus leprosy pictures the sinner in his uncleanness; fever shows him in his restlessness; while palsy is the expressive type of utter helplessness. Rom. 5:6 comes to mind here—"when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Most merciful provision for a palsied race!

Four friends brought the sufferer to Jesus. In their earnestness they refused to be thwarted by the crowds that barred the door, so they let down the couch through the roof at His feet. His first words to the palsied man were not words of healing but of pardon. "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." Unquestionably the soul is of greater importance than the body. The forgiveness of sins is a mightier boon than the most perfect physical health. Our Lord's words provoked some unuttered criticisms on the part of some of His audience. "This man blasphemeth." Omniscience in Him read their thoughts, and He rebuked them forthwith. "Who can forgive sins but God only?" The query was reasonable. What mortal man has ever had such authority granted to him by God? But He whom the scribes misjudged soon gave ample proof that He was God indeed by bidding the man take up his bed, and go to his house. "That ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins." Every Jewish student of Dan. 7. would know that the Son of man is identical with the Ancient of Days (vv. 9, 13, 22). If He be really the Son of man of prophecy, then is He most truly divine.

His less critical observers went home saying, "We have seen strange things to-day." Had their spiritual vision been undimmed they would have recognized that Psa. 103:3— "Who forgiveth all thy iniquities, Who healeth all thy diseases" —had been fulfilled before their eyes, and each tongue would have exclaimed, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." It was men's unbelief in these wonders so often repeated in favored Capernaum, which constrained Him to say at a later date, "Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee" (Matt. 11:23-24). Privileges unvalued entail severest judgment from God. How far does this principle apply to our favored land?

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 8:28-43: The Two Demoniacs

MAN'S subjection to the power of Satan is the fruit of the Fall, and is a terrible reality not to be underrated. On various occasions the Saviour, when here, was confronted by persons possessed with demons. This, while a special affliction in individual cases, is a picture of every unregenerate man's spiritual condition.

The prince of the power of the air regulates the present course of things here, working in all the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). Yielding themselves to His authority, men become his slaves (Rom. 6:16). One of the most blatant proofs of this awful condition of things is modern Spiritualism.

Matthew tells us of two demoniacs who met our Lord on the eastern side of the Lake of Galilee, as He stepped ashore from His stormy passage (Matt. 8:28-34). Remarkably, both Mark and Luke speak of one only. This probably is because one case was more desperate than the other, and the second and third Evangelists were led to concentrate their attention upon him; while Matthew who always wrote with Jewish readers before his mind, and who knew the weight two witnesses would have with such (Deut. 17:6; 19:15) was careful to record the fact that two men were blessed, even though he omits a crowd of other details.

However blind men might he to the personal glory of Jesus, demons always recognized Him as their Lord, and trembled and cringed before Him. Knowing Him to be the dread Judge Who will, at the opening of His reign, consign them and their leader to the abyss (Rev. 20:1), they implored Him not to dismiss them to that awful region before the time. In answer to their prayer, they were suffered to enter into a herd of swine, with the result that the whole two thousand rushed violently down a steep place into the sea and perished.

The whole countryside turned out at the tidings of what had occurred. They found the once-possessed men sitting peacefully at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in their right mind. All their devilish ferocity, which had made them the terror of the district, was gone forever. Yet not gratitude but aversion seized the minds of the people, and they forthwith besought the Saviour to depart out of their coasts. Two men had been delivered from the hold of Satan, but at the cost of two thousand swine! Were two souls worth two thousand swine? In their deplorable blindness, they judged not. If such was to be the result of the presence of the Son of God, they would prefer Satan for their neighbor. Such conduct would be incredible; did we not see men at the present hour sacrificing their own souls for trifles lighter than air. What matters it that the Saviour, by the shedding of His precious blood, has acquired the right to emancipate from Satan's power every soul that longs for deliverance? In the judgment of many, business, wealth, pleasure, are all to be preferred to any blessing He can bestow.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 8:23-27: The Storm on the Lake

IF men failed to recognize their Creator when He condescended to tabernacle here in flesh, creation acknowledged His presence and power. The storm described in Matt. 8:23-27 took place at the close of the day on which the seven parables of chs. 13. were delivered. Tired with His day's labor, the Saviour slept, a touching proof of the reality of the humanity which He had assumed. Presently one of Gennesaret's sudden storms burst upon the little boat, to the dismay of the disciples, who, though believers, but feebly realized Who it was that was voyaging with them. Had they considered that He was the Creator of the universe, would they have experienced a moment's alarm? Was it not He Who, ages before, shut up the sea with doors, and made clouds the garments thereof, and Who said, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?" (Job 38:8-11). Would, or could, the sea engulf its own Lord and God?

Alas for the poor human heart! Mark, with his customary observance of details, tells us the disciples roughly awoke their Lord, crying, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" It is painful to transcribe the words; how cruelly they must have wounded the tender susceptibilities of the Saviour! "Carest Thou not?" Had He not cared for the children of men, He would have remained in His own glory; the Bethlehem manger, the Galilean boat, and the cross of Calvary would never have been His lot. Yet, so gracious is He, no word of censure escaped His lips for the heartlessness of their speech; He merely said, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Well has it been said, "Never man spake like this Man." But how painful to Him to find such feebleness of faith amongst the special objects of His favor after His experience of the splendid faith of the Gentile centurion!

His voice sufficed for the stilling of the elements. "Peace, be still." Long before His incarnation the Psalmist wrote of Him, "Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, Thou stillest them" (Psa. 89:9). Not a single attribute of Deity did He lay aside in becoming man. Omnipotence and Omniscience shone forth in Him whenever occasion called for their display. Demons, disease, death, winds and waves all fled before His word. No human mind, however richly taught of God, can unravel the mystery of the union of the divine and the human natures in His person. Reason finds insoluble difficulties here; faith finds instead material for adoration and praise.

The miracle brought the disciples to His feet in wonder, not unmixed with dread. "What manner of Man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" The answer is simple and plain. He was God manifested in flesh, on His way to death for the eternal blessing of all who believe. But in His humiliation, as now in His glory, He had power to dispel every danger that could befall His people. Storms of various kinds may burst upon us during our passage through this world, but none can destroy us while Jesus lives. Our part is just to confide in Him.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 8:14-15: Peter's Wife's Mother

THOSE who reverence the Scriptures and believe in their divine inspiration will have no hesitation in believing that a spiritual reason accounts for Matthew's displacement of this incident in his Gospel narrative. For he records it after the cases of the leper and the centurion's servant, while comparison with Mark and Luke makes it certain that it occurred some time anterior to them both.

The dispensational character of Matthew's Gospel is the true explanation of this seeming disorder. The first seventeen verses of his eighth chapter furnish us with a group of incidents that are most interesting when viewed in the light of the dispensational ways of God. Thus the healing of the leper by the touch of Jesus is a picture characteristic of the time of our Lord's personal presence on earth. He was in close contact with Israel from day to day, prepared to bestow every blessing upon the nation, yet meeting with but feeble response in the way of faith. The healing of the centurion's servant by His word spoken at a distance shows what is happening at the present time. He is no longer personally amongst us, but His Word is with us, and multitudes of Gentiles are finding blessing through faith in its wonderful message. The restoration of Peter's wife's mother is a picture beforehand of what He will do when His present gracious work amongst the nations is concluded. He will turn once more in His goodness to Israel, of which people Peter's mother-in-law was a representative. She lay sick of a great fever when the Lord found her, but one touch of His hand sufficed for her complete recovery. In like manner He will find her nation on the verge of utter ruin in the day when His feet shall stand once more on the Mount of Olives, but His personal presence will be as efficacious for Israel's full deliverance as for the raising up of Peter's wife's mother so long ago. Neither Zionest Congresses nor the favor of European powers will succeed in terminating Israel's centuries of sorrow; that blessed consummation (so absolutely certain, if Scripture is to be believed) is dependent upon the appearing of the Son of Man. When the Redeemer comes to Zion he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob, and all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:26).

The apostle's mother-in-law being healed, the day closed with large blessing. Crowds of sufferers of every kind assembled round her door, and found healing and sympathy from the gracious One. Even so will it be at the close of the present age. When the twelve tribes of Israel are restored to their inheritance, and once more enjoy divine favor, universal peace and blessing will prevail. The world groans increasingly under

its intolerable burdens, and schemes not a few are ventilated from time to time for the mitigation of them, but all efforts in this direction will be futile until earth's rightful King returns. His order in that day will be as follows: first, Israel blessed; then, all nations by their means. Meanwhile, pardon and salvation are available for individuals, however numerous, who will put their trust in the Saviour's precious blood.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 8:5-13: The Centurion's Servant

MIRING our Lord's ministry in Israel only two persons were specially commended by Him for their faith, and they were both Gentiles—the Syrophœnician woman, and the Roman centurion of Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. Religious formalism had so checked the development of faith amongst the chosen people that it was scarcely to be found within their circle.

It was but a slave concerning whom the centurion appealed to the Saviour, but he was, for some reason, precious in his sight. In contrast with many in Israel, the Roman discerned God in the person of the lowly Carpenter Who was traversing the province. He at once made his supplication to Him, and was answered, "I will come and heal him." He instantly begged the Lord to take no such trouble, urging that it was not even necessary. "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." It was this that excited our Lord's commendation—his confidence in the efficacy of His word when personally absent. We have here a principle that is vital to us at the present hour. Christ is not here, having gone up to the Father's throne. But His Word is with us; in the Scriptures we may at all times hear His living voice. His Word declares the efficacy of His one sacrifice (Heb. 10:12); it proclaims the pardon and justification of all who believe in His name (Acts 13:38-39); and it gives to all such the sweet assurance that eternal life is already theirs, and that into judgment they can never come (John 5:24). On His Word we rest; it is our all, seeing that Himself is no longer with us. If His Word could be wrested from our hands, our darkness would be impenetrable.

There are striking differences between the two accounts of this miracle, as given to us by Matthew and Luke. They are due, not to any blundering on the part of the writers, but to the special guidance of the Holy Spirit, Who indicated to each what features should be introduced, and what should be omitted. Thus Matthew, on the one hand, who wrote with Israel specially in view, appends our Lord's solemn warning to that nation that many should come from afar, and be blessed with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, while the sons of the kingdom should be cast out. Such a word was most necessary for a people who were building their hopes on religious associations and privileges, to the neglect of personal faith. Luke, on the other hand, who was himself a Gentile, and wrote for Gentiles, omits the warning to Israel, and introduces instead, what is so instructive to Gentiles, the fact that the centurion in the first instance got the Jewish elders to plead for him with the Saviour. If the warning noted by Matthew was intended to humble Jewish pride, this feature added by Luke should suffice to depress Gentile conceit. Are we not apt to forget that, as a matter of fact, we owe everything to the Jew? The Scriptures, the Saviour, the first preachers of Christianity, all came to us from the bosom of Israel. Had this been remembered,. Abraham's children would not have to complain of centuries of oppression from "Christian" hands.

The slave was healed. Such faith as his master evinced could not be denied. Nor will faith in the Word of the absent Saviour ever fail to receive fullest acknowledgment from God.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 8:2-5: The Leper Cleansed

HE who believes in a God Almighty and Supreme can have no difficulty in crediting miracles, especially when they are vouched for in God-breathed Scriptures. The objection that miracles are inconsistent with natural laws is beside the mark, seeing that they have nothing to do with natural laws, being instead sovereign interpositions of God altogether apart from, and above, them. No greater miracles can be conceived than the momentous facts on which Christianity rests—the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He who bows in faith to these will necessarily regard all other marvels as small in comparison. He who turns away from the facts of Christ's miraculous incarnation, etc., has no claim whatever to be recognized as a Christian.

Our Lord's miracles were not mere works of power; nor were they simply expressions of love and sympathy toward those who benefited by them: they were truly all this; but they were also intended to teach spiritual truths. The cleansing of the leper is recorded by all the evangelists excepting John. Matthew gives it in the opening verses of his eighth chapter. Guided by the Spirit of God, Matthew disregards historical sequence in his presentation of it, placing the Miracle after the Sermon on the Mount, although it took place some time earlier. His object apparently was to put in strong contrast the low faith of the Jewish sufferer with the high faith of the Gentile centurion described in the verses immediately following.

Leprosy is a type of sin. Those under its terrible power were as unfit for God's earthly dwelling-place as unpurged sinners are for His heavenly abode. The only physician for leprosy was God Himself; the same gracious One can alone meet the need of those polluted by sin. In answer to the leper's appeal our Lord "put forth His hand and touched him." Contact with the diseased one conveyed no defilement to Him, but it conveyed healing to the sufferer. Beauteous picture of the grace which brought Him from above into man's circumstances; touching sin, so to speak, at every point, yet personally unstained from first to last. The leper's faltering "If Thou wilt, Thou canst" was at once answered by the Saviour's hearty "I will; be thou clean." To His ability and willingness to heal and to bless there is no limit; whatever limitations there be are in the trembling faith of the human heart.

The healed one was then bidden "show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them." A striking testimony indeed, seeing that this was the first Israelitish leper cleansed (so far as Scripture speaks) since the instructions of Leviticus 13, 14. were given nearly 1,500 years before. The presence of a cleansed leper at the altar with his two birds in his hands testified that God had come into the land, and was meeting men's need apart altogether from priestly ministrations and religious ordinances. A principle this of the greatest possible moment for our souls to-day. Cleansing for the soul is found, not in human doing of any kind, but in the fountain of the Saviour's blood. This, when divinely applied, makes the vilest sinner whiter than snow, a greater moral miracle than the physical wonder wrought upon the Jewish leper.

The Sheep and the Goats

OUR Lord’s Olivet prophecy, given to the disciples two days before His crucifixion in answer to the inquiries of some, has a very solemn finish in Matthew’s Gospel (25:31-46). The Lord describes in simple but graphic terms a sessional judgment which will take place at His return to earth. “When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations (or Gentiles).” He had already definitely told His disciples that the “Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels” (Matt. 16:27), and He had promised them that “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” (Matt. 19:28). The judgment of the sheep and the goats is the opening incident in that great administration.

Earlier in the Olivet prophecy the Lord had spoken of His coming in the clouds of heaven with angels attending. He followed this with a parenthetical series of six parables, three with a definite message to the Jewish people, and three with a message to religious professors in Christendom (ch. 24:32; 25:30). Then the Lord picked up the thread again and spoke of the tribunal before which shall be gathered all nations. We must carefully distinguish between this judgment and that of the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15). The contrasts are important. The one takes place before the Millennial Kingdom begins, the other at its close, when both heaven and earth flee away. The Great White Throne deals with the dead; at the throne of His glory death and resurrection are not mentioned. It is living men who stand before Him into whose hands the Father has committed all judgment (John 5:22).

The notion of a general judgment at the end of time finds no sanction in Matthew 25. nor in any other Scripture. The Great White Throne will indeed be set up at the end of time, but only the lost dead will be there, “the first resurrection” (of all the blessed and holy) will be completed a thousand years earlier. The judgment of Matthew 25. will take place at “the end of the age.” Please read “age,” not “world” in Matthew 24:3 and elsewhere in the first Gospel.

It is a Man who will sit upon the throne of glory, but mark His perfect discrimination between sheep and goats. That Man is “God manifested in flesh” (1 Tim. 3:15) who knows the secrets of all hearts. Note the quiet assertion of His dignity in “the Sermon on the Mount”: “Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord... then will I profess unto you, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:22-23). The Man who moved up and down amongst men so graciously and familiarly is the final Judge of all created beings.

What are we to understand by “all nations?” It is certain that there will be terrific slaughter of armed hosts at the Lord’s appearing (Rev. 19:17-21; Zech. 14:3; Isa. 63:1-6; Ezek. 38, 39. etc.); this being so, who will remain to be judged at “the throne of His glory”? The populations in general, after all their military forces have been destroyed. One point only appears to be discussed: how have these people treated those whom the King is pleased to call “My brethren?” This passage corresponds to Mic. 5:3, not to Rom. 8:29; i.e., the “brethren” referred to in Matt. 25:40 are not Christians but the believing remnant of Israel who will preach the Gospel of the Kingdom “for a witness to all nations” during the last dread crisis (Matt. 24:14). The treatment accorded to these witnesses is the index to the attitude of their hearts towards Him Who sends them forth. “What think ye of Christ?” is ever God’s test question. Those who appreciate Him will shelter and feed His messengers; those who hate Him will treat them with contempt. The graciousness of the Lord’s words, “inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of My brethren ye have done it unto Me” should appeal powerfully to our hearts to-day, and should make us lovers of hospitality to those who for the sake of His name go forth “taking nothing of the Gentiles” (3 John 7)

In the blessing promised to the sheep nothing is said about Heaven. Their portion will be the Kingdom prepared for them by the Father from the foundation of the world. Our portion is in the Heavens, and was settled for us in the Father’s love “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:3-4). It is the King who addresses the sheep in Matthew 25. Christians know the same blessed Person more intimately as Lord and Head. It will be good to be subjects of such a King; it will be better still to be in union with Him as Body and Bride.

The awful future of the ungodly could scarcely be expressed more clearly than in the Scripture before us: “These shall go away into everlasting (eternal) punishment.” For both “punishment” and “life” the same word is used; the duration of the one is the duration of the other. Yet eternal fire was not prepared for men, but for the Devil and his angels, but those who while on earth prefer the voice of the Devil to the voice of God must share his doom forever.

Let us not miss the sequel to the Lord’s revelation on the Mount of Olives. “It came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, He said unto His disciples: Ye know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified” (Matt. 26:1-2). With calm dignity He steps down, as it were, from “the throne of His glory” and proceeds to Gethsemane and Golgotha, there to finish the work which the Father had given Him at that time to do. Why was He willing to turn His back upon the glory and majesty described on the Mount of Olives, and accept instead anguish and shame? It was for you, beloved reader, and for me. “Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). “Hallelujah! What a Saviour!”

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 25:14-30: The Talents

THIS parable has a voice to all who hold the position of servants of Christ during His absence in heaven. He likens Himself to “a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered to them his goods” (Matt. 25:14-30). The only true motive for service to Christ is affection for His person. Salvation is by grace alone; it is the purchase of His blood, neither pious deeds nor service of any kind having aught to do with the matter. He who ventures to serve Christ in any capacity apart from the appreciation of His blood, and love to His person, only undertakes that which will bring down judgment upon his head in the great day.

The sovereignty of the Lord is seen in that to one was committed five talents, to another two, and to another one— "to each man according to his several ability.” Thus Apollos was not so richly endowed as Paul, but both were equally responsible to do their best with what they had.

This principle applies still. Let no true witness for Christ bemoan the smallness of His gifts, “for if there be first the willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not” (2 Cor. 8:12). Some of the servants of our parable, having received their talents, forthwith went and traded with them. What need for delay? In like manner, those who in our day have received qualifications from Christ are solemnly responsible to go forth and use them, asking permission from no man. The notion of official ordination has been the bane of Christian ministry for centuries. Romanists, Greeks, Anglicans, and Nonconformists agree in the fiction that ordination of some kind is necessary ere a man handle sacred things. The practical results of this is that many are installed as servants of Christ who have never known His salvation, and who are in consequence dead hindrances to the operation of the Spirit of God, while others of a more spiritual type are discredited as unauthorized and piratical. Scripture nowhere asserts the need of official appointment for preaching the Word of God, still less for “the due administration of the sacraments.” Elders and deacons were apostolically ordained, but these officers had nothing directly to do with public ministry. The work of the one was rule and visitation; and of the other, care for widows, etc. When John, in his second epistle, warned the elect lady against heretical teachers, he did not bid her examine their credentials, but to test their teaching. Paul gloried in the fact that he was an apostle, neither of men, nor by men (Gal. 1:1). No man had anything whatever to do with his call to service.

When the lord returned, he called his servants together, and reckoned with them. In like manner will the Lord Jesus, at His coming again, investigate the doings of all who have professed to serve Him during His absence. The man who had received five talents was called first, as the one most responsible. He had gained five talents more, and was rewarded with his master’s commendation. The man who had received the two had gained two more. His commendation was word for word the same as that of his more privileged brother. Each had done his best with his master’s goods, and each was therefore invited to enter into the joy of his lord. Bliss with Christ is the happy end of all true labor for His name. The man with the single talent was cast into the outer darkness. He represents Christendom’s unconverted preachers, whose hearts have never been warmed by the love of Christ, and who cannot therefore find delight in pleasing Him. Unworthy motives explain their public position, the duties of which they shirk as miserably as the man in our parable. Though such speak with the tongues of men and of angels, it is but as sounding brass in the divine ears. Unless God mercifully lead them to repentance, Balaam’s doom must be theirs forever.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 25:1-13: The Ten Virgins

Tins parable describes prophetically the conduct of professing Christians in relation to the hope of the Lord’s coming. It is most certain that when the Son of God went up into the Father’s house He left behind Him the promise to come again, and gather home to Himself all those for whom He died (John 14:3). For the fulfillment of this, all should have looked with fervent desire.

“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” (Matt. 25:1-13). Christianity is a heavenly order of things. When it really engages a man’s heart it sets him entirely outside of the present evil world, with his face towards the glory of God. The fact that his Saviour is no longer here has spoiled the world for the Christian. A stranger below, he waits for Christ’s coming from above. It is Satan’s unceasing aim to pervert the heavenly character of Christianity; hence the worldly employments with which religious leaders fill the minds of those who follow them—bazaars, concerts, and the like.

The virgins are divinely divided into two companies—the wise and the foolish; the essential difference being that the one had oil in their vessels with their lamps, and the other had not. Oil is the emblem of the Holy Spirit, who is God’s great gift to all who believe the Gospel (Eph. 1:13). He who has not God’s Spirit is no Christian, whatever his pretensions (Rom. 8:9). “While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept.” The hope of the Lord’s coming for His people, which so fired the souls of believers in the apostles’ day, became lost when the apostles were no more. Since that time men in Christendom have spoken only of the day of judgment at the end of all things. The “Te Deum,” with other ancient writings, acknowledges this solemn truth, but of the Saviour’s descent into the air to call up His saints not a trace can be found in the literary remains of centuries.

But the midnight cry has gone forth. The nineteenth century witnessed a revival of the hope. From one end of Christendom to the other the cry now resounds: “Behold the Bridegroom; go ye out to meet Him.” Under the mighty impulse of the midnight cry multitudes of true believers— “wise virgins” have aroused themselves, and have shaken themselves free of worldly associations, religious or otherwise, and have resumed the original waiting attitude of the Church of God. The foolish virgins are also full of activity, though in a wrong direction. Realizing that something is lacking, they are redoubling their religious zeal in the hope of fitting themselves thereby for the Bridegroom’s presence. Sacraments and formalities of every kind are their confidence and stay.

Our parable shows that when the bridegroom came, “they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut.” Readiness consists, not in attention to religious formalities, but in unfeigned faith in the Saviour’s name, and in His atoning blood. Only those of whom this is true will find themselves on the right side of the door when the critical moment arrives. Those outside appeal in vain: “Lord, Lord, open to us.” But one reply is possible: “Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.” Both true and nominal Christians, like the wise and foolish virgins are alike in their profession, but the return of the Lord from heaven will make clearly manifest how deep is the moral gulf which really separates the one class from the other.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 22:1-14: The Marriage of the King's Son

THIS parable, unlike that of the Husbandmen, is a similitude of the Kingdom of Heaven. The former parable gives the history of Israel under the law; the latter describes their conduct in the presence of divine grace. In the one, God is represented as presenting claims (as He was entitled to do); in the other, He invites to a feast. Taken together, the two parables show the utter failure of flesh in connection with both law and grace. Such is man that if God asks him for something he will not render it; and if God offers him something he will not accept it.

“A certain King made a marriage for his son” (Matt. 22:1-14). The King is God, the son is the Lord Jesus. Remarkably, the bride does not figure in the parable at all; everything is ordered for the pleasure of the son. This is the principle on which God is acting in His present dealings with

men. In sending salvation to us, with all its inestimable blessings for eternity, His prime object is to give joy and honor to His beloved Son, in whom all the divine councils are centered. But men have no regard for either God or His Son; hence our parable speaks of two invitations absolutely refused. There were two distinct missions to Israel; one before, and one after, the cross of Calvary. The second was rejected with violence to the messengers; they “entreated them spitefully and slew them.” The children of those who killed the Old Testament prophets treated in like manner the New Testament apostles. Peter, John, and Paul experienced their cruelty, while Stephen and James were murdered by them. Our Lord gave a further warning as to all this in Matthew 23:34. Judgment followed, as the parable foretold. The King’s armies (in this case the Romans, under Titus) destroyed the murderers and burnt up their city. Compare Luke 21:20-24.

But the King’s goodness was not quenched by the ingratitude and evil of the first-invited guests. Accordingly the servants were bidden to go into the highways and bring in all they could find, “both bad and good.” Thus the grace of God, so scornfully rejected by Israel, has been extended to the Gentiles. “Whosoever” is now the grand Gospel cry. Divine love to the world is now proclaimed on the basis of the atoning blood of Jesus. But all is not right with these Gentile called ones. “When the King came in to see the guests he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment.” A promiscuous gathering collected from the highways was not expected to possess raiment suitable for a royal banqueting house, wedding robes had therefore been provided. The individual upon whom the King’s eye rested dared to affront the King by appearing in raiment of his own. He either thought too highly of his own apparel to put it aside, or too lightly of what befitted the presence of the King to suffer himself to don the wedding garment. This man is the representative of a class. In his presumptuous ignoring of the wedding garment he is the prototype of religious men destitute of Christ. All these boast of their own righteousness instead of submitting themselves to the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:3). Unless God in His infinite mercy opens their eyes to their true position, the outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth must be their portion forever. The King’s inspection of those who profess to have accepted His call may be nearer than any of us suppose.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 21:33-40: The Wicked Husbandmen

THE Saviour was fully aware, during; His last visit to Jerusalem, that conspiracy was abroad, and that the leaders of Israel were planning His death. In this striking parable, recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, He exposes their design fully. This so exasperated His enemies that they would have laid violent hands upon Him forthwith, but they feared the people (Matt. 21:46).

The parable of the Husbandmen, though directed against the leaders, gives the whole history of Israel from the day that God began to bestow favors upon them. Their beautiful inheritance is likened to a vineyard, containing everything conducive to abundant fruit-bearing. In the East rent is paid, not in money altogether, but partly in kind. But God looked in vain for any return from Israel (Matt. 21:33-40.) Eight centuries before Christ’s coming He complained thus: “What could have been done more to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?” (Isa. 5:4). Nothing but the basest ingratitude and sin was ever rendered by Israel for all the favors wherewith God blessed them. Violence and murder were meted out to His messengers: “they beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.” Stephen challenged them thus severely: “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?”

(Acts 7:52). The climax of insult and iniquity was reached when the Son came, and they said among themselves: “This is the Heir; come, let us kill Him, and seize on His inheritance.” Within a week these words received their painful fulfillment—the Son of God lay dead in the tomb.

The history of Israel is the history of man everywhere. In their record we see our own hearts reflected. We shall miss all the moral value of the parable if we fail to perceive this. Fallen man is utterly unfruitful for God; and, what is worse, his heart is filled with antagonism to God and His Son. The apostle’s words as to this in Rom. 8:7-8 are very sweeping: “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” Nothing avails but a new creation by means of the Spirit and the Word.

In answer to the Lord’s demand as to what should be done to the lawless husbandmen, His hearers pronounced their own sentence. “He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.” They wanted the inheritance for themselves, apart altogether from divine interference and claim; they should have destruction instead. The Stone which the builders rejected was about to become the head of the corner; and the day will arrive when the Stone will descend with crushing violence upon all transgressors, and grind them to powder (Matt. 21:42-44). Even the forbearance of God has its limits.

The judgment of unfruitful Israel has already fallen; the judgment of unfaithful Christendom is rapidly approaching. From it there is no escape for any, but through faith in the Saviour’s name, and in His precious atoning blood.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 21:28-32: The Two Sons

No preacher was ever less disposed for controversy than the Son of God, yet none were ever so incisive in their handling of contentious critics as He. And no wonder: being the Searcher of all hearts He knew perfectly the motives which actuated those who assailed Him; and being Himself the truth He knew just what was required to meet every occasion.

During His last week in Jerusalem He was frequently assailed by the religious leaders of Israel. On one occasion, after He had exposed their spiritual incompetency for the sacred office, He gave utterance to the parable of the Two Sons, wherein is set forth the hopeless case of men who say and do not. “A certain man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not’; but afterward he repented and went. And he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, Sir’: and went not” (Matt. 21:28-32). The rebellious son, who at first refused to do his father’s will, represents the publicans and the harlots. Immersed in iniquity, these listened to the stern denunciations of John the Baptist, and bowed their hearts in true contrition before God. When the Saviour’s ministry of grace reached their ears they welcomed it, and thus became true heirs of the Kingdom. The son who promised obedience but did not render it represents the priests and Pharisees. These, steeped in religion, and profoundly contemptuous of “publicans and sinners,” were in fact the veriest hypocrites. Nothing could be more cutting than the Saviour’s words concerning them on another

occasion: “All therefore whatsoever they bid you, observe and do; but do not ye after their works; for they say and do not” (Matt. 23:3). For such men, no sentence could be more righteous than this: “Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you.”

This parable should raise the most serious thoughts in men’s minds to-day. All around us are those who “profess and call themselves Christians,” with leaders and shepherds not a few. From all these God demands reality. Deeds, not words, are His holy requirement. A pious “Lord, Lord,” can never deceive Him. True faith in the Saviour’s name and in the blood He shed produces holiness, separation from the world, and devotedness to the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Where these things are not seen, profession is the merest sham, which may pass muster with men in the present world, but will be fully exposed in another scene. However startling it may appear, it is nevertheless true that many a religious person will be lost forever. But it is equally true that multitudes of the earth’s vilest will be found in the blessedness of the Father’s house when the gathering moment comes. The very vileness of these latter disposes them to seek the Saviour’s face, and to avail themselves of His great salvation. Like the crucified thief who said, “Lord, remember me,” their cry of repentance has been heard, and divine forgiveness has been vouchsafed to them full and free. Salvation is altogether of grace, and it is the happy portion of every true believer, wherever found.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 21:19: The Accursed Fig-Tree

EVERY miracle performed by the Son of God when on earth was an act of goodness and mercy, with the single exception of the cursing of the fig-tree. This occurred during His last week of sorrow. His ministry during that week was exercised in Jerusalem, but each evening He went out of the city to lodge in Bethany, preferring the simple reality of Lazarus and his sisters to the dead religious formalism of which Jerusalem was full.

One morning, as He traversed the road between Bethany and the metropolis, feeling hungry, He paused at a wayside fig-tree intending to pluck some fruit. He found leaves in abundance, but of figs there was no sign. The gathering time not having come, the branches should have been laden (Mark 11:12,13). He forthwith pronounced His. anathema upon it: “Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever.” The tree presently withered up from the roots (Matt. 21:19).

The whole proceeding was so unique, and its severity so unusual for One so full of grace as the Lord Jesus, that we are arrested by it and constrained to inquire into its significance. Some time before He had likened the Jewish people to a fig-tree planted in a vineyard (Luke 13:6). This furnishes us with the key to this remarkable incident. He was Himself Jehovah Who had shown favor and care to Israel for ages, and Who was entitled therefore to look for some return. Alas! Israel’s history had been one of sin and rebellion from the beginning. Under every divine test they had produced nothing but thorns and briars. Now He had come from heaven in person to put them to the supreme test of His own presence. This was soon to end in blood. The air was full of conspiracy against Him; and in a few days, as He perfectly well knew, He would be lying dead in the tomb. His cursing of the fig-tree was therefore a symbolic action; for the tree represented Israel under the old covenant, soon to be utterly rejected as hopelessly unfruitful for God. When God does gather fruit from that people, it will be from a new generation under the new covenant of grace in the Millennial kingdom.

The cursing of the fig-tree has a voice for men in Christendom as well as for men in Israel. Israel’s history, rightly viewed, is a mirror in which men everywhere may see their own reflection.

The Christendom of to-day is as unreal and as unfruitful for God as the Israel of the past. Every thoughtful observer will admit that we are face to face with a profitless mass of hollow religious profession. In no sphere is there so much sham as in the religious sphere. Men commemorate with feasting the birth of the Saviour while spurning His salvation; they build costly temples in His name while refusing Him one inch of space in their hearts; they celebrate with pompous ritual His atoning death while despising it for their souls’ need. The Judge of guilty Israel will not forever spare far guiltier Christendom. In Romans 11:16-22 will be found its righteous doom.

Let us away with all unreality and sham. He Who has given His whole heart to us is surely worthy of all that our poor hearts can render in return.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 20:1-16: The Laborers in the Vineyard

THERE is absolutely nothing in this parable about the salvation of the soul. Salvation is altogether the fruit of sovereign grace, bestowed upon the unworthy on the basis of the blood of Jesus, the thought of wages or reward being utterly foreign to it. But every saved one is a servant, responsible in all things to his Lord. It is of this that our parable speaks.

Peter’s remark in Matt. 19:27 called it forth. “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?” In reply he was told that faithful service will in no wise go unrewarded, and that as regards the apostles, special honor is reserved for them in the golden era when the Son of man will sit upon His throne. But perceiving in Peter’s remarks a tendency to exalt human doings and sacrifices unduly, the Lord added the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16).

The penny (or denarius) for which the householder agreed with his first batch of workers was the usual laborer’s wage in that day. The agreement was thus equitable to all parties. At pay-time a difficulty arose concerning some whom the master found unemployed at the eleventh hour and sent into the vineyard. In their case no wage was fixed; they were simply told, “Whatsoever is right, ye shall receive.” They trusted to the master’s goodness—a safe principle where God is concerned. At pay-time these eleventh-hour laborers were recompensed first, and each received a penny. When those who were engaged in the morning came before the steward they supposed they would receive more, and they did not hesitate to complain to the master because no more than a penny was given to them. The master remonstrated with the ringleader thus: “Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst thou not agree with me for a penny?

Take up that which is thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do as I will with my own? Or is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (R.V.).

The point is the absolute right of the Lord of all to do as He pleases His own realm—a right which no reverent mind would contest for a moment. Human pettiness, even in true saints, is apt to appraise its own service and to magnify its own labors in the Lord's vineyard. But all such notions are rebuked by the recollection of what each soul owes to its Redeemer. At infinite cost, amidst circumstances of unparalleled grief and shame, He secured our salvation at the cross of Calvary. From the moment that this immense fact is apprehended, devoted service becomes the happy occupation of him who has received so inestimable a blessing. Love is the only true motive; every Scripture statement concerning ultimate reward being given as encouragement merely. When our noblest doings are compared with what Christ has done for us, we feel constrained to put our hand upon our mouth and cast ourselves adoringly at His feet. He will delight to commend and reward even a cup of cold water given for His sake, but far be it from us to utter one word about the best we have done. It is grace alone which has put us into the path of Christ, the same grace sustains us therein, and grace will not fail to crown it munificently when the end is reached.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 20:30-34: Blind Bartimæus

THE Saviour was journeying to Jerusalem for the last time. In less than a week all the sorrow of earth were over for Him. Death, with its agony and shame, was behind Him, and His body lay in the tomb. But though His sensitive spirit felt the weight of all that was impending, nothing was permitted to stay His beneficent hand. Human misery and need aroused all the tenderness of His heart.

He was just passing out of Jericho, after being a guest at the house of Zacchæus (Luke 19). The fact that this city had lain under a special curse for ages was no barrier with Him; divine grace in Him rose supreme over everything. Had it not been so, He would never have visited our earth, so long under God's displeasure because of sin. A blind beggar, hearing the tramp of a crowd and inquiring what it meant, learned that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. Mark tells us his name was Bartimæus; Matthew lets us know that he had a companion, this being the third instance in which the first Gospel notes two sufferers where the other Gospels speak only of one.

Bartimæus cried out lustily: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." He received no rebuff from the Saviour for addressing Him by this title. In using it he was as right as the Syrophœnician woman was wrong. As born of the stock of Israel, he was entitled to look for a king of David's line who should open the eyes of the blind, unstop the ears of the deaf, make the lame leap as a hart, and teach the tongue of the dumb to sing (Isa. 35:5-6). Bystanders sought to silence him, but to no purpose. "He cried out the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me" (Mark 10:48). Had he missed this opportunity, he would never have had another, for the Lord never visited Jericho again.

His cry reached the Saviour's ears. Learning that he might approach, the blind man "cast away his garment, sprang up, and came to Jesus" (R.V.)., This poor man reads us many lessons.

There is a garment of self-righteousness which multitudes are hugging to-day to their soul's harm. Oh, that they would cast it from them, and as sinners seek the Saviour's feet! (Rom. 10:3). Many among us would also do well to imitate Bartimæus' earnestness in appealing for the blessing, and the alacrity with which he hastened to receive it. One word from Jesus sufficed for his healing: "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole." Not only he, but also those who beheld the miracle, burst forth in praise to God (Luke 18:43). The Lord did not bid him be silent about his healing as when He healed two blind men some time before (Matt. 9:30). He was about to present Himself publicly in Jerusalem as Israel's long-expected King, and it was well that a testimony should be rendered at this juncture to His person and His power. But the clearest testimony avails nothing for men willingly blinded by Satan, hence no crown awaited Him in Jerusalem but a crown of thorns; no throne of glory was in preparation for Him, but instead a cross of shame. But this, in the wonderful ways of God, has secured our salvation from eternal woe.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 18:23-35: The Two Servants

ONE of the ugliest features of fallen human nature—insensibility to divine grace—is exposed in all its hideousness in the parable of the Two Servants (Matt. 18:23-35). It happened on this wise. Peter had just inquired of the Lord if seven times would suffice for the forgiveness of an erring brother, and had received the startling reply, "Until seventy times seven." The parable before us was added immediately, and in it the exceeding grace of God and the incorrigible evil of man stand clearly revealed.

The outline of the parable is as follows: A certain King, in taking account of his servants, found one who owed him ten thousand talents—about three millions sterling in English money. The defaulter being penniless, the King ordered himself, and his wife, children and goods to be sold. In his distress the debtor fell at his master's feet, crying: "Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." The King's heart being moved with compassion, the whole vast debt was immediately remitted. Presently the forgiven one met a fellow-servant who owed him a hundred pence—about three pounds in our currency; and instead of extending to him clemency after the pattern of that which had been so recently shown to himself, he seized him by the throat saying: "Pay me that thou owest." In his utter heartlessness, he gave no heed to the tears of his fellow, but cast him into prison until payment should be made.

This parable may be read both dispensationally and morally. Dispensationally it presents to us the history of the people of Israel. Centuries of law-breaking had made them serious defaulters before the Son of God came into the world, and to all this they added the enormous guilt of shedding His blood. In answer to Ills gracious prayer, "Father, forgive them," divine favor was shown to the nation after the Holy Ghost came down from heaven. To Israel first the Gospel of divine forgiveness was sent (Acts 3:26). This, instead of melting their hearts, only served to bring out their utter moral insensibility to God's goodness. Scorning the Gospel for themselves, in their hatred to the Gentiles they put every obstacle in the way of its being preached to them (1 Thess. 2:16). This has filled their cup of iniquity to the brim. They are now suffering divine chastisement until their term is accomplished, and they have received of Jehovah's hand double for all their sins (Isa. 40:2).

We must read this parable morally also. Viewed from this standpoint, it appeals loudly to us all. Every man is a defaulter in relation to God. Perfect obedience and love is His due from us, but who among us has ever rendered it? Yet the heart of God yearns over all His bankrupt debtors; and, on the basis of the atoning blood of Jesus, He proclaims full pardon to everyone. Myriads profess to have received His pardon. “I believe in the forgiveness of sins” is the language of multitudes in Christendom daily. But conduct alone proves whether or not the grace of God has really penetrated the soul. Where this is the case, the forgiven one gratefully walks in the spirit of grace towards all, meekly enduring wrong, and sincerely seeking every man’s eternal good. Those who content themselves with saying “Lord, Lord,” while not doing the things that He says, will find themselves ultimately in the place of the wicked servant of our parable, who was severely denounced by his lord for his hypocrisy and evil and was forthwith delivered to the tormenters. “He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy” (James 2:13). Our God will be satisfied with nothing less than reality in those who have to do with Him.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 17:24-27: The Tribute Money

IT was quite natural that the Capernaum collector should challenge Peter in regard to his Master’s payment of the half-shekel—a tax levied upon all males in Israel for the upkeep of the temple (Matt. 17:24-27). In his eyes He was only an itinerant preacher, perhaps a prophet, and therefore liable for the impost as all others. But Peter erred egregiously in answering the inquiry in the affirmative. Only a little while before he had confessed Him as “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” and had received the Saviour’s benediction for it (Matt. 16:16-17); now he acknowledges His liability for a petty tax as though He were a mere son of Jacob. When he entered the house the Lord anticipated what he had to say, showing thus His perfect omniscience. “What thinkest thou, Simon? Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? Of their own sons or of strangers?” To this the blundering apostle returned the only answer that was possible— “of strangers.” Jesus saith unto him: “Then are the sons free.”

A simple statement, yet how full! Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of Him Who dwelt in the temple. From Him the great Sovereign of the universe never could or would demand anything. But observe the plural — “sons.” He put Peter alongside of Himself as sharing His position and relationship. The grace of this is astounding. Yet Scripture is most explicit in its address to every Christian: “Thou art no longer a servant, but a son.... Ye are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:6; 4:7). We owe this to the Saviour’s atoning blood, which has put away all our sins, and furnished God with a righteous ground for the display of all His love and grace. The blood of Christ entitles every believer to share His relationship of Son to the Father, and to be with Him in His heavenly glory forever.

But these wonders are not yet acknowledged by the world. Neither Christ nor Christians are yet recognized in their true position of exaltation as sons to the Father. Consequently the tax must be paid without demur. Neither clamor, nor resistance—passive or otherwise—could proceed from the meek and lowly One. Had the half-shekel been required at census-time as atonement-money (Ex. 30:11-16) the case would have presented grave difficulties; but the collection was of a different nature, a mere charge for the maintenance of the temple (a Chron. 24:6). Mark the tender consideration of our Lord: “Notwithstanding, lest we should stumble them —” He would rather pay any figure, however unjust or objectionable, than endanger the testimony of God by provoking invidious comments from the unregenerate. How little has His example been heeded by Christians when smarting under a sense of wrong!

Small though the amount was—is 3rd. per head—the Saviour did not possess it. Creation must, therefore, supply it at His command. “Go thou to the sea, cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for Me and thee.” Everything and every one—wind, waves, fishes, demons, etc.—discerned Who He was but poor benighted man. Painful thought! The most favored of all God’s creatures, the blindest of all through sin! Yet His infinite grace picks up multitudes of the wretched sons of men and puts them in the company of His own beloved Son, so that He can link them with Himself and say, “Me and thee.”

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 17:14-21: The Demoniac Boy

It is a terrible fact that this world is under the power of Satan as its prince. The Saviour was reminded of it in a peculiarly painful manner as He descended from the holy mount after His transfiguration. He found a crowd assembled, with scribes among them, and a poor demon-possessed lad wallowing and foaming in their midst. His disciples were there, but through lack of faith they were impotent in the presence of the enemy’s power. Divinely commissioned and endowed though they were (Matt. 10:1), they were unable to meet the emergency.

The Lord learned upon inquiry that the lad had suffered thus from his childhood. A picture, only too correct, of our race, which fell into the hands of Satan in its very infancy, i.e., in the days of the garden of Eden. The poor child was both dumb and deaf (Mark 9:25), reflecting thus the spiritual condition of every representative of fallen Adam. The unregenerate man has nothing to say for God, and he has no ear for the commandments of God. God is to him as though He were not. The afflicted child was in constant peril of his life. His father said of the unclean spirit within him: “Oft-times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters to destroy him.” In like manner every undelivered sinner is in jeopardy, not of temporal disaster merely, but of eternal destruction. Man’s chosen leader is truly a cruel deceiver; would that all eyes were open to the fact!

Disappointed in the disciples, who should have been able to make potent use of the Saviour’s name, the despairing father turned to the Lord Himself. With no great amount of faith, however. “If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us” (Mark 9:22). What words to address to the Lord of all! He Who created the universe, and all that is therein, could surely overthrow the power of Satan, a mere creature of His hand, albeit the most mighty! Demons always recognized Who and what He was; men, alas, but rarely.

It is the privilege of Christ’s heralds now to proclaim not what He is able to do merely, but what He has done. Having bowed His head in death as an atonement for sin, He is righteously able “to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bound” (Luke 4:18). None need remain under the galling yoke of Satan for a single hour; one simple appeal to the victorious

Lord in heaven’s glory sets the soul at large forever. “If Thou canst!” said the Saviour to the parent; “all things are possible to him that believeth” (R.V.). Here we have the secret of blessing and deliverance at all times. It is not human effort, whether resolutions, prayers, or religiousness, but simple faith in the Son of God. The Gospel was intended to open men’s eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance amongst all who are sanctified by faith in Christ (Acts 26:18).

With tears the father exclaimed: “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.” At once the blessing came and the child was set free forever. Each of the Synoptists records this touching incident; Mark, as usual, with greatest fullness of detail.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 15:29-39: The Four Thousand

THE bold faith of the Syrophœnician woman was truly refreshing to the Spirit of the Saviour, so often distressed by the unbelief of long-favored Israel. In like manner He finds pleasure to-day in the faith of Gentile believers while Israel continues estranged and scattered. Yet nothing will ever be allowed to alienate Him from the seed of Abraham. He loves them with an everlasting love, and the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. He speedily returned, therefore, from the neighborhood of Tyre and Sidon, and busied Himself once more in the midst of Israel.

Needy multitudes gathered around Him (Matt. 15:29-39). His touch sufficed for the healing of every kind of disease, and delivered ones were constrained to glorify the God of Israel. These things took place on a mountain-side in Galilee. After three days of such occupation the Saviour became concerned for the feeding of the people, far removed as they were from the ordinary sources of supply. He put no testing questions to His disciples, as when the five thousand were before Him, but simply declared His compassion for the people’s need, and His intention of supplying it. So forgetful is the human heart in everything where God is concerned, that the disciples, overlooking the previous miracle, expressed their doubt as to finding sufficient bread in the wilderness to feed so great a multitude. This elicited the fact that seven loaves and a few little fishes were available. This handful became mighty in the hand that once destroyed the empire of Pharaoh by means of a humble shepherd’s rod.

In simple-hearted dependence upon God (for the Son had become truly human), He offered public thanks for the temporal mercies that soon supplied the need of the vast throng before Him. Four thousand men were fed on this occasion, besides women and children. At the conclusion of the meal the fragments were gathered up, for with the absolutely perfect One waste could not accompany wealth and benevolence. Seven large baskets full remained, as compared with twelve hand-baskets full after the earlier feast. Scripture numerals are significative of spiritual truths. Seven (twice repeated in this narrative) is the number of perfection; four is the world-number. We thus learn symbolically that when He opens His hand to remedy the woes of men there will be perfection of blessing; and this, not merely for Israel’s tribes, but for the whole world. This happy condition of things, however, cannot be until His return from heaven. His appearing in majesty will be the bright opening of a day fraught with peace and blessing such as the world has never yet known.

Meanwhile, from a heart fully charged with grace and goodness, divine mercy flows freely to individuals everywhere who feel their need of these things. Though the groan of the world, as such, cannot be hushed while the Saviour remains seated at the right hand of God, no individual need go unblessed for a single hour. On the perfectly righteous basis of His death and resurrection, every yearning soul may have spiritual healing and pardon, and may find in the exalted Saviour Himself full satisfaction of that heart-hunger which the things of this world can never allay.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 15:22-28: The Syrophœnician

IN Matthew 15. we have two hearts revealed to us—the heart of man and the heart of God. In reply to the Pharisees’ criticism of His disciples for eating with unwashed hands, our Lord laid down that a man is not defiled by that which goes into his mouth, but by that which comes out, the words being the expression of what is in the heart. He proceeded to draw an appalling picture of the human heart. According to His judgment, which cannot err, it is a pestilent sink of iniquity.

Turning away from His hypocritical opponents, the Saviour went into the neighborhood of Tyre and Sidon. He had but a short time before held up these places as specially hardened (Matt. 11); what could He hope to find there to refresh His distressed spirit? He was soon appealed to by a Canaanitish woman to cast a demon out of her daughter: “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon.” How terribly she erred! As one of a cursed race, of which remnants existed in the land merely because of the dilatoriness of God’s people in Joshua’s day, what could she claim from David’s Son but judgment? At first the Saviour gave her no answer, but being urged by His disciples to dismiss her He said: “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of Israel.” This was indeed His mission at that time. He “was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the fathers” (Rom. 15:8). In this character Gentiles could have no claim upon Him whatever. The earnestness of the woman, however, was such that she would take no denial. Accordingly she pressed her suit further, saying: “Lord, help me.” She dropped the Jewish title of “Son of David,” and craved mercy simply. But she had not gone low enough, so our Lord replied: “It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.” This was indeed a testing word. Yet she did not fire at it and turn away, like Naaman, in a rage. She meekly retorted: “Yea, Lord, for even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.” (See Revised Version.) Her argument was perfect, and it prevailed. Though she was truly but a Gentile, outside the elect family of Israel, she had confidence that such was the goodness of the divine heart that there was blessing in it for even the meanest of His creatures. Certainly He whose eternal home is the Father’s bosom would not contradict her in this. His strange bearing was intended to elicit this fine expression of faith from her. The Saviour’s stern demeanor covered a heart of tenderness that yearned to bless her the moment she took true ground before Him. He appears to have visited the locality for her sake; for, having healed her daughter with His word, He forthwith returned to the place from whence He came. His eye had discerned the woman’s sorrow from afar, though she knew it not.

The secret of blessing is to take a low place at the divine feet.

As born of a ruined stock, and individually guilty of sin, we have no claim on God save for judgment. But he who will humbly acknowledge himself ungodly and undone will speedily learn that such is the heart of God towards him that He sacrificed His Only-Begotten Son for his blessing, and that in virtue of His atoning death, sins and iniquities are remembered no more.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 14:24-33: Walking on the Sea

“How can these things be?” is a very natural question when the human mind contemplates the works and ways of God. It is, however, the query of unbelief, not of faith. Whether it be the collapse of Jericho’s walls, Jonah’s three days’ abode in the fish’s belly, our Lord’s walking on the sea, or any other wonder—nothing staggers the heart that has learned to trust God and believe His word.

When the Saviour refused to be made king after the feeding of the five thousand, He went up into a mountain to pray, bidding his disciples cross to the other side of the Sea of Gennesaret. It is a picture of what was soon to take place—His going up to God to enter upon His present ministry of intercession, leaving His disciples to face the billows of this stormy world during His absence. The twelve found their passage rough and trying, as followers of a rejected and crucified Lord have ever found life and testimony here. Many a storm has Satan raised in the hope of destroying all witness to the Name he hates. In the fourth watch of the night the Lord went to the disciples walking on the water. Thinking it was an apparition, they cried out in fear, but were soon calmed by His cheery call: “It is I; (or “I am,”) be not afraid.” He has never failed to draw near to His own in their hours of distress and need. He is the “I am” of Exodus 3:14. The possibilities involved in such a name forbid the smallest questioning of unbelief. “Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains he carried into the midst of the sea” (Psa. 46:2).

The boat is the emblem of the old system of things in which our Lord left His disciples at His glorification. The Book of Acts shows how tenaciously they clung to the old order, with its earthly sanctuary, its successional priesthood, etc., and how very slow they were in learning that Christianity is essentially a heavenly and spiritual system. Instead of being a graft upon Judaism, Christianity is its total opposite in character and spirit. Judaism, with its gorgeous ritual, appealed to the senses; he who understood Christianity better than any says, “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Satan’s aim has always been to corrupt the work of God; hence when the old boat of Judaism was destroyed by Titus he set to work to prepare another boat under Christ’s name. Earthly sanctuaries, priests claiming successional rights, etc., soon appeared, to the complete falsification of the testimony of God.

Matthew, Mark and John all tell us of our Lord’s walk on the water; Matthew adds another feature (Matt. 14:24-33). Peter, when he learned that it was the Lord who was approaching, begged for permission to go to Him. This being granted, he leaped into the sea and went to Jesus. For a moment he faltered as he saw the wind and waves, but a cry from his lips and a touch from the Master’s Hand made his feet secure. In like manner the individual believer of to-day who turns his back on Christendom’s religious boats in obedience to the call in Hebrews 13:13, must look to the Lord alone for sustainment in his walk of faith. But the first act of faith, without which nothing else is possible, is the soul’s humble obedience to Him for pardon and salvation.

The storm ceased when the Lord and Peter stepped aboard the boat. Similarly the world’s raging will be hushed when Christ and His saints show themselves once more in the midst of Israel.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 14:15-21: The Five Thousand

A BLOODY deed had just been committed in the land. John the Baptist, the honored forerunner of the Messiah, had been beheaded. Our Lord, feeling the pressure of the circumstances (for it was the shadow beforehand of His own death in the following year), retired into a desert place privately with the twelve. But He was not suffered to be quiet. Eager multitudes found Him out even in the wilderness. He did not resent it. Though men showed but little consideration to Him, in His perfect grace He was prepared to show the fullest consideration to them. Though Israel had acquiesced in the murder of His herald, He loved Israel still.

His disciples would have dismissed the people but He refused to send the hungry away. As a test of faith, He questioned Philip as to where bread was to be found wherewith to feed so many. He replied that two hundred denarii—a laborer’s earnings for about eight months—would only suffice to give each a little. Andrew thereupon remarked that a lad was present with five barley loaves and two small fishes, “but what are they among so many?” (John 6:5-9). Neither of them realized that they were addressing the Creator of the universe, “Who calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:7). In their heartlessness they would have driven the needy away; and in their unbelief they would have starved them if they must needs remain. Such is the human heart, even in Christ’s true servants!

The Lord Jesus soon showed to all that He was the God who gave the manna (Ex.16), and also the Jehovah of Psalms 132:15, Who said: “I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread.” Accordingly He bade the multitudes sit down upon the grass in hundreds and in fifties (Mark 6:40). Order is stamped upon all His ways, whether in creation or in grace. “God is not the author of confusion.” But before He performed what was really a stupendous miracle, He gave public thanks for the food He was about to administer (Matt. 14:9). Wonderful combination of human dependence and divine omnipotence in One person! In His hands the five loaves sufficed for five thousand men besides women and children, with twelve baskets full of fragments remaining. Little wonder that in an outburst of enthusiasm the people at once desired to make Him king (John 6:5). A ruler who is a giver would be indeed a boon to long-taxed men.

The Lord refused the kingdom. It will yet be His, but He will accept it at God’s hand, not at the hand of man. When the due time arrives He will establish a visible government in Jerusalem and will inaugurate an order of things that will fill the earth with peace and blessing. As in the day of the five thousand, so in the Millennial age, He will associate His own with Himself in the administration of the blessing. Never more will men complain of tyranny and wrong; never again will they know want. The social problems which baffle the keenest intellects of the present hour will find their perfect solution then, but not before. The Cross of Calvary is the basis of future kingdom-glory and blessing, as well as the sure

foundation of present pardon and peace for individuals who believe. If the world did but know it, the Redeemer-King is its only hope.

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded by all four evangelists.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 13:47-48: The Drag-Net

Tills is the last of the series of parables that were uttered by our Lord on the memorable day of Matthew 13. “The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away” (vv. 47-48). Here we have the final results of the operations of God, man, and Satan during the period called Christianity. As a net cast into the sea, the Gospel has gone forth into all the world, with its touching appeal to men of every nation. It has achieved results which are manifest to the eyes of all. Both good and bad have been gathered in: the good fish representing those who, having humbly acknowledged their guilt and ruin, have been cleansed from their sins by the Saviour’s precious blood; the bad being those (alas how many) who “profess and call themselves Christians,” with no love for the Saviour’s person, and no living faith in the Gospel. It is vain to urge that we must not judge. How is it possible for the Christian to obey the injunction to “love the brethren” if he cannot distinguish between “the brethren” and all others? (1 John 3:14). Flow refuse fellowship to an unbeliever if it is impossible to define such? (2 Cor. 6:15). Or how avoid false teachers who bring in damnable heresies, if none can tell who are false? (2 Peter 2:1). Although mistakes in discernment are only too possible, all those to whom Christ is something more than a mere name are solemnly responsible to distinguish, in godly fear, between those who are good and those who are bad, companying with the one, and eschewing the other.

When the gospel net is full it will be drawn to shore. How soon this will take place is known to none but God, though everything around us is suggestive that the end of the age is drawing near. Then will ensue the great separation, which will sever the ungodly from even the outward communion of the godly forever. According to the teaching of the parable, the fisherman’s duty was to care for the good fish. This is the present responsibility of those who in this day profess to serve the absent Christ. The bad fish the fishermen merely cast out of the net, as not being those for whom they were in search. The judgment of God upon false professors will be meted out, not by human hands, but by angelic power. “So shall it be at the end of the age (not ‘world’): the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 13:49-50). Such is the end of Christendom, as described by God Himself; not the whole world subdued to Christ by the operation of religious agencies, but eternal ruin for many who have passed current amongst their fellows as Christians indeed. The Saviour will undoubtedly have His own, though the final discrimination by His unerring hand will reveal an appalling amount of unreality and hypocrisy in the circle of those who, in one way or another, bear His holy name.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 13:45-46: The Pearl

IT is such a common notion that the pearl of great price is the Saviour Himself that it seems almost irreverent to challenge it. Yet the popular interpretation is open to serious objection for two reasons: (1) it would put this parable entirely out of harmony with the teaching of its context; (2) it represents the sinner as sacrificing something—all, indeed—in order to acquire Christ. But Christ cannot be purchased. He is God’s unspeakable gift to man, and all the blessings which are the fruit of His atonement—eternal life, etc.—are gifts also. Peter severely denounced the man who thought the gift of God might be purchased with money. Moreover, the sinner is represented in Scripture as having “nothing to pay” (Luke 7:42). He who cannot meet his just obligations is surely in no position to buy costly pearls. And it should be remembered that it is the Saviour who seeks the sinner, rather than the sinner the Saviour.

The parable runs thus: — “The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matt. 13:45-46). As in the case of the hidden treasure the purchaser is Christ. The pearl is the Church, which, in Scripture, is the aggregate of all believing persons from the descent of the Holy Ghost until the coming of the Saviour into the air (Acts 2; 1 Thess. 4:15-18). The hidden treasure may have consisted of hundreds of pieces of gold and silver, and thus suitably represents believers in all ages, who have been, and will yet be, saved out of the wreck of Adam’s world by the infinite grace of God. But the pearl represents the saved of the Christian period specifically. The Church holds a very special place in the ways of God. The divine purposes concerning it were retained as a secret in the divine bosom until Paul was raised up as a chosen vessel to communicate them to men (Eph. 3:3-4). He was in a peculiar sense the minister of the Church, and from him we learn that the Church is Christ’s body now, and will be His bride throughout eternity. In these special relationships the saved of the preceding and following ages have no part, though the everlasting home of all God’s saints is one— “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22).

The single pearl shows the unity and beauty of the Church as Christ sees and estimates it. The joyful finder of the earlier parable is the toilsome Seeker in the parable before us. To have the pearl for His own He sacrificed His all. He left heaven’s glory, and accepted in lieu thereof the lowly circumstances of earth. His earthly throne, as David’s Son and Heir, He also surrendered, and accepted instead the cross and the tomb. All this was in order that He might possess Himself of the pearl upon which He had set His heart. As the Spirit elsewhere puts it: “Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). Surely the affections of all the objects of His favor should be set upon such a Saviour forever.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 13:44: The Hidden Treasure

HAVING spoken four parables in the hearing of the multitudes on the seashore, the Saviour retired into the house with His disciples. He had other matters to communicate which only men born of the Spirit could be expected to understand. In His public utterances He had shown the Kingdom of heaven, i.e., Christian profession in its outward aspect — what any eye could see and any mind comprehend. He had graphically described the rise, development, and doom of Christianity, viewed as an external system. But if He had said no more it might have been inferred that Satan was destined to be completely triumphant over all the work of God. For it is beyond controversy that the parables of the

tares, mustard tree, and leaven portend disaster, viewed from a spiritual standpoint.

In the privacy of the house the Lord presented another aspect of things to His disciples, others besides the twelve being included in His audience (Mark 4:10). Three additional parables were given, the first of these being that of the hidden treasure. “The Kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found it, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth the field” (Matt. 13:44). The field is the world, according to the Lord’s own interpretation; the treasure represents the saints who are in it. By the saints we mean all who truly believe in the Saviour’s name and who have been washed from their sins in His precious blood. He purchased the world for the sake of the hidden treasure, as a man to-day might purchase a quantity of old books for the sake of one volume on which his heart is set. The world is thus Christ’s, not only by right of creation, but also by right of purchase. Nothing can hinder it ultimately coming into his possession, with every person therein, however rebellious. The Father has given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him (John 17:2). When the age is completed Christ will be seen surrounded by all His own (not one missing), even though the outer framework of Christendom he utterly wrecked. His enemies will then be constrained to bow to Him, in acknowledgment of His title and rights, and will forever justify the righteous sentence which He will pass upon them for their contumacy and unbelief.

Every believing heart is overwhelmed with wonder and adoration at the thought of the purchase price. He “selleth all that He hath.” Our blessing required the surrender of His heavenly glory, the degradation of the Bethlehem manger, and the shame of the cross of Calvary. Sin could only be atoned for by death and blood-shedding. But even from this the Saviour did not shrink, for the joy of being able to surround Himself eternally with happy myriads picked up by sovereign grace out of the ruin of everything below. If His own will experience joy in finding themselves in His heavenly presence, His heart will find deepest joy in having them there.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 13:33: The Leaven

OF all our Lord’s parables probably none have been so seriously misunderstood as that of the leaven hidden in the meal (Matt. 13:33). It is affirmed most confidently by many that this parable shows the whole world converted by the blessed influences of Christianity. Unfortunately for this interpretation, every Scripture passage which deals with the close of the present era speaks not of conversion and blessing, but of apostasy’ and wickedness as its characteristic features.

Exodus 12:15 and Leviticus 2:11 will suffice to show how the Saviour’s Jewish audience must have understood the simile of leaven. For fifteen centuries they had been under divine command to exclude leaven from their houses during their religious festivals, and they were forbidden to blend it with any of their offerings made by fire. It is thus the emblem of what is evil, and in this way it was frequently used by the Saviour in His teaching. The leaven of the Pharisees, the leaven of the Sadducees, and the leaven of Herod, representing respectively Ritualism, Rationalism, and Worldliness, all came from time to time under His lash.

How then should we read the parable? Something of a corrupt character is shown as subduing everything by which it is surrounded within a certain area. It is Christian doctrine in the vitiated form in which “the Church” has presented it to the world since apostolic energy ceased. Whole nations have become Christianized, hence the familiar word “Christendom,”

Not all the nations of the earth certainly, for Heathenism, Buddhism and Mohammedanism hold sway between them over the greater part of mankind. But what has the Christianizing of nations effected? It would be folly to suppose that when historians tell us that such and such nations embraced Christianity long ago that necessarily all the persons composing those nations became savingly converted to God. Nothing of the kind is meant, but simply that, as a result of certain influences that were brought to bear upon them, they were induced to change their religion. But an unfaithful Church, in order to make Christianity palatable to the masses, compromised God’s truth most pitifully. Thus, as the heathen had been accustomed for ages to hold carousals at certain seasons of the year in honor of their gods, they were suffered to continue them in the name of Christ. This is the unholy origin of Christmastide, Wakes, etc.

Christianity is essentially a spiritual and heavenly order of things. Therein is the heart of God revealed to men in pardoning grace, blotting out all the trespasses of all who unfeignedly believe in the Saviour’s atoning blood. All these are accorded a new standing in divine favor in the risen One who is now in the glory of God. They belong to heaven, not merely as a place of repose when this world can be held no longer, but as a scene where they should even now live by faith. All this, and much more that is of infinite importance and blessedness, has become utterly beclouded by the invention of a sacerdotal system, which substitutes the visible for the invisible, and the priest for Christ. This is the form, alas in which the world best knows Christianity. It is leaven, corrupt and corrupting until divine forbearance comes to an end, when it will be swept out of the way in unsparing judgment.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 13:31-32: The Mustard Tree

THE Saviour next likened the Kingdom of heaven “to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (Matt. 13:31-32). This is ominous, when we remember that the birds, according to the teaching of the parable of the Sower, represent the agents of the devil (10:4,19). The mustard tree is the profession of Christianity, which began in the humblest possible way, but which in time so completely changed its character as to become a great political force in the earth. Here, as elsewhere in Scripture, the tree is the symbol of worldly power (Ezek. 17:3; Dan. 4:22).

Christianity is essentially a heavenly system. The Church of God belongs not to the present evil world, but to the scene of glory where Christ dwells. When Christians walked in separation from the course of things here, and with heart-devotedness to their Lord, their testimony was unequivocal, and such as God could bless to the salvation of souls. When the Christian community became influential in the earth, its spiritual usefulness declined, and it became a powerful engine in the hands of Satan. A great and imposing thing in the earth, with all the arts—music, architecture, etc.—pressed into its service, is the very opposite of all that Christ was. The sensuous worship of the cathedral and the abbey is

as offensive to God as the simple worship of “the upper room” was His delight.

Let no reader misunderstand. It is not meant that the blessings of Christianity should have been confined within narrow limits. Far from it. The Gospel was intended to be spread abroad; for God loved the world, and Christ gave Himself a ransom for all. But Christian profession should have continued humble and unworldly, seeking nothing in the shape of power and honor where the Saviour only found a cross and a tomb. Instead of this, that which is called “the Church,” whether viewed in its Roman, Anglican, or Nonconformist aspects, has been insatiable in its lust for worldly power. It has frequently been a terror to Governments, and it is at this hour a power in the earth which the civil authorities dare not ignore. This, instead of being matter for congratulation on the part of true Christians, is cause for deepest humiliation before God, that men bearing the Lord’s name should have so blindly become the dupes of Satan in the falsifying of their own calling and testimony.

In the branches of the mustard tree the birds found a congenial home. The Scriptures speak of Christendom in its last phase as “the habitation of demons, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird” (Rev. 18:2). This is true in a large measure at the present time. Had Christianity continued humble and unpretentious, its ministry would never have been sought as a “profession,” and it certainly would never have filled its offices with sportsmen, drunkards, and the like. Alas, for the centuries of dishonor to the name of the Holy and the True which have been occasioned by the unclean birds who have found a lodging in the branches, even the topmost branches of the great mustard tree!

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 13:24-30: The Wheat and the Tares

Six of the seven parables found in Matthew 13. are divinely described as similitudes of the Kingdom of heaven. The parable of the Wheat and the Tares is the first of the six, and with it is given the Saviour’s interpretation thereof to His disciples. The Kingdom of heaven in its present form covers the whole profession of Christianity, whether true or false. In the coming age it will cover the whole earth, as predicted in Old Testament prophecy. Let us not confound the kingdom of heaven with heaven itself. This is one of the blunders of Popery, and the blunder is most serious in its results. Many are to-day in the Kingdom of heaven who will have no place in heaven; their profession of allegiance to the absent Christ being merely formal and unreal.

The Son of Man has sown good seed in His field. Christianity thus began with a number of persons who were true sons of the Kingdom. Satan soon set to work to corrupt the new testimony. He effected his purpose by introducing false brethren amongst the true. This happened “while men slept,” i.e., when Christ’s servants became so negligent of their Master’s interests, and so dull in their spiritual perception, that they admitted to the outward communion of Christianity men whom they should never have countenanced—unregenerate persons, sons of the wicked one (Jude 4). These are called, not “tares,” but “darnel” —a worthless weed very like wheat in its early growth.

When it became manifest that the crop was mixed and spoiled, the servants inquired of the householder if they should gather up the tares. He replied: “Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them.” To gather out weeds is to kill them. In like manner the wheat field of Christendom can only be weeded by putting to death every false professor of Christ’s name. This is expressly forbidden, and for the grave reason that true wheat would be in danger of being mistakenly rooted up by erratic servants. Our Lord’s prohibition has not been heeded in Christendom. Zealous ecclesiastics, Papist and Protestant, have from time to time sought to eradicate from the earth those whom they have judged as weeds, only to fall into the very blunder deprecated by the Saviour. Some of God’s best wheat has been destroyed in the process; many of His truest saints have been burnt at the stake or otherwise martyred. Both wheat and tares are to grow together until the harvest. This means that they are to live side by side in the world (for “the field is the world”), neither molesting the other. To have fellowship together in the Church is quite another matter. So evil a blend was never contemplated in the parable.

Harvest-time is at the end of the age, at least a thousand years before the end of the world. The Saviour will gather every true believer into His barn at His coming again, and the angels will deal with the residue in unsparing judgment. Christ’s heavenly glory, with all its blessedness, is the destiny of every blood-washed confessor; the lake of fire, with all its unutterable woe, is the eternal portion of every empty professor of His name. When the final separation has taken place, the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. From their exalted position of heavenly bliss the redeemed will dispense the blessing of God throughout the coming ages, to the countless myriads who will be placed beneath their sway in the earth below. The final result will demonstrate that God’s purposes of grace have not failed, whatever the seeming success of the great adversary during the present time.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 13:3-8: The Sower

THIS the first of our Lord’s parables, was uttered under very painful circumstances. The Jewish leaders, after much previous evil behavior, had just gone the length of attributing His power to Beelzebub. Further than this they could not well go in wickedness. Leaders and people were in such a condition of alienation from God that the blessings promised to Israel could not possibly be brought in at that time. From that point the Saviour commenced to use the enigmatical form of speech, which was intelligible enough to the pious minority, while utterly obscure to the profane mass. Like the cloud in Moses’ day, which stood between Israel and the Egyptians, the parables were light to the one and darkness to the other.

The Saviour likened Himself to a sower of seed (Matt. 13:3-8). This marks a new departure in the ways of God with man. During the earlier ages of the world’s history God had been seeking fruit from man (from Israel especially), as He was well entitled to do. But He sought in vain, flesh being incorrigibly evil. Every succeeding dispensation only served to bring this out the more vividly. Man violated his conscience, set at naught the testimony of God’s works, trampled under foot His law, and slew the prophets who remonstrated with him concerning his evil. It only remained to murder the Father’s well-beloved Son in order to fill the cup of human iniquity to the full. God no longer looks for fruit from man; His present action is to sow the good seed of the Gospel, and so produce His own fruit. This work has been proceeding ever since the Son of God came to earth.

But the human heart is not always responsive to the good seed of God’s Word. The Lord shows in His parable that on this account the greater part of that which is sown becomes wasted.

Men hear, but do not profit by what they hear. Four classes of hearers are indicated; the Saviour’s own interpretation making the meaning clear beyond dispute. There are first the wayside hearers. Here we have the careless folk, who listen but heed not, their minds being too indifferent to permit of their becoming interested. As the birds catch up seed sown by the wayside, so Satan removes from these even the remembrance of the things to which they have hearkened. The preacher may be admired, but his message passes away. Then there are the rocky-ground hearers. They are perhaps the most disappointing of all. They respond immediately to the Word preached, and so cause much rejoicing to those who seek their good; but having no depth, as soon as difficulties arise, they throw their confession of Christ to the winds. These arc tile impressionable folk. They readily weep when the Saviour is presented to them; but it is mere sentiment, both conscience and heart being unaffected. The third class are the thorny-ground hearers. Good seed has no chance in a bed of thorns. These are the encumbered folk, and they include both rich and poor. The rich man is too full of his estates and horses and dogs to give deep attention to spiritual concerns, and the poor man is too burdened with the anxieties of life. In both cases, earthly affairs being put first, the soul is lost. The last class are the good-ground hearers. These, having experienced the action of God’s harrow in their conscience, have learned their guilt and wretchedness, and have put their whole trust in the Saviour Who died for their sins and rose again. In these only is there permanence, though even amongst the true-hearted ones the fruit varies in measure, some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundredfold.

Jonah and Balaam, Jonah and His Experiences

“The prophet Jonah.” This is our Lord's own description of him in Matthew 12:39; but the cursory reader of the book may be disposed to ask, “Where are the prophecies?” Certainly Jonah's book differs in character from those of Isaiah and other prophets. Their rich and full unfoldings of glories yet to come are lacking in Jonah's chapters; but prophecy is there nevertheless: the fact is that the man himself, and Jehovah's remarkable dealings with him constitute a prophecy, and that of a deeply interesting character. In this unfaithful witness God gives us an illustration of His ways with the unfaithful nation to which he belonged. Thus there is a prophetic as well as moral instruction in the book of Jonah. It is a prophecy in picture.

“The word of Jehovah came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me.” Jonah had already been entrusted with messages from Jehovah to Israel (2 Kings 14:25); now he has the unique distinction of being sent “far hence unto the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21). It is an unspeakable honor to be a messenger for God at any time. Have we all learned this? Are we all in the spirit of Isaiah's words, “Here am I, send me”?

Jonah, alas, was not well pleased to be sent to preach to Gentiles. He had been God's willing mouthpiece to proclaim good things to his own nation; but a foreign nation—a Power withal dangerously hostile to Israel—that was a different matter! Even after the Holy Spirit came from heaven consequent upon the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, Peter had scruples about carrying the Gospel to the Roman garrison in Caesarea! (Acts 10). These lines are written while many Powers are engaged in the most terrible war the world has yet known. National feelings are running high; and even Christians, although divinely separated by grace from the world and united to Christ in heaven, are sometimes influenced by what is being said and done around them. How slow are we to learn the blessed meaning of God's “whosoever”! The heart of God most assuredly goes out equally to men of every country and color, and He desires that they may “be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Do we desire also?

Jonah, on hearing the word of Jehovah, made a dash for the port of Joppa. He would flee from His presence! Vain effort! Psalm 139 stresses this very definitely. But why did Jonah refuse the divine commission to preach to the men of Nineveh? Chapter 4:2 tells us. The known goodness of God was his difficulty. He was sure that if the Ninevites repented of their wickedness God would show mercy. In that case Jonah felt that his dignity would be affected—to proclaim a judgment which was not executed! Rather let a whole vast city perish than that his credit should suffer! It seems almost incredible that a man born of the Spirit could be so self-important and behave so contemptibly! This story, so simply told, is written as a warning to us all. If we get out of communion with God, His tender compassion become foreign to us; harsh feelings develop; and we behave abominably. We shall doubtless meet Jonah in the glory of God before long (like ourselves, a sinner saved by grace); but meantime let us seek to be as unlike him as possible in our service and testimony for God.

It seemed quite providential that a ship was about to sail for Tarshish when the wayward prophet reached Joppa, but circumstances are not always a safe guide for God's saints. Let us never forget this. It does not follow that because circumstances fit in nicely with our wishes that God has ordered things so for us, Jonah, tired with his journey like Elijah after his flight from Jezebel, went below, and was soon in a sound sleep. “But Jehovah sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken.” At a later date, Paul was exposed to a great storm in the same Mediterranean Sea, but the contrast between Paul and Jonah when danger arose is very striking (Acts 27). The Apostle was traveling towards Rome in accordance with the Lord's words in Acts 23:11: “Be of good cheer, for as thou halt testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou also bear witness of Me at Rome.” With these words ringing in his ears, Paul moved confidently. His moral dignity throughout the storm was wonderful. He almost took command of the ship, even though both owner and “skipper” were on board. “Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me.” Yet Paul was no ordinary passenger, he was a prisoner in custody! By contrast, Jonah was a mean figure amongst the ship's company, and fully merited the rebuke of the master (ch. 1:6).

Let us not miss the lesson of this contrast. A Christian walking in communion with God is on a high level, but a Christian out of communion is a degraded spectacle. Men respect the one, but they despise the other. The one will be a blessing to men; but the other may be a stumbling-block, and even a curse.

Our Lord's Miracles and Parables, Matthew 12:10-13: The Withered Hand

IT was the Sabbath day; and, as His custom was, our Lord repaired to the synagogue. Synagogues were not places of worship (there was but one such place in Israel—God's temple in Jerusalem): they were merely buildings in which copies of the Scriptures were kept under the charge of an official; whose duty it was to allow the people to read them and to expound them to one another. The Saviour descried a man in the synagogue with a withered hand. His whole heart of compassion went forth at once toward him. He had but recently been criticized by the Pharisees for permitting His disciples to relieve their hunger in the cornfield on the Sabbath day; this afflicted man became a fresh ground of objection with them. According to Mark and Luke He put this question to them: "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day, or to do evil?" Matthew adds the query, "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep?" (Matt. 12:9-14).

The natural heart loves forms. Religious ordinances appeal powerfully to it. For the due observance of them according to their own thoughts, religionists have ever been ready to contend fiercely, even at the risk of hindering God's work of grace. What cared the Pharisees of our Lord's day that the land was full of misery if only Sabbath forms were carried out punctiliously? Many in this day, inheriting their spirit, would rather souls go unshepherded and perish than that established customs should be touched. Nothing so deceives the heart as religion without heart-conversion to God; nothing so betrays men into the most egregious inconsistency. The men who quibbled about our Lord healing on the Sabbath day saw no wrong in plotting on that day to murder Him. At a later date the priests abstained from crossing Pilate's threshold lest such close contact with a Gentile should defile them and unfit them to eat the Passover; yet it never occurred to their seared consciences that it was infinitely more defiling to shed an innocent man's blood! Oh, religion without God, how dark has been thy record of inconsistency and sin!

The Saviour suffered nothing to hinder the outflow of His goodness. Forms could not bind Him. Accordingly, the afflicted one was bidden to stretch forth his hand, and it was made whole as the other. Many of us suffer from withered hands at this hour. Sin has so paralyzed us that we can do nothing for God. No good works can we accomplish, however deeply we may feel the necessity of them. But there is salvation in what Christ has done. His precious atoning sacrifice suffices for all our need. The man who confides in Him is blessed apart altogether from meritorious works of every kind. One result of His blessing is that the hand, once withered, becomes empowered to do somewhat for Him in the midst of a burdened and suffering creation.

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