Matthew - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

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Matthew 9; Mark 2; Luke 5

God was showing His rich and various mercy in the old times; but this was done after a peculiar manner. He forgave sin, He healed disease, He fed His people. But all this was done after a peculiar manner. There was a certain distance and reserve, as it were, a remaining still in His own sanctuary—still in the heavens, though He was thus gracious. He met the need of a sinner; but He was in the temple, withdrawn to the holiest place, and the sinner had to come through a consecrated path to get the virtue of the mercy-seat. He met the need of His camp in the desert; but it was by remaining still in heaven, and sending from thence the angels' food, the mighty's meat, and giving them water, after His mystic rod had opened the rock. He met the disease of a pool leper; but it was after such a leper had been separated outside the camp, every eye and hand—all interference and inspection of man—withdrawn and removed. There He was God, acting in His own due love and power; but there was a style in the action that bespoke distance from the object of His love and goodness. Whether He pardoned, fed, or healed, this manner was preserved.

The Lord Jesus, God manifest in the flesh, is seen doing the same works of divine love and power. He pardons, feeds, and heals; and He does so in full assertion of His divine right or glory, thinking it no robbery—to be equal with God. But there is altogether another style in those same actions when in His hand. The reserve, the distance, is gone. It is God we see, not withdrawn into the holiest, but abroad in the prisons, the hospitals, and the poorhouses, of this ruined world. He pardons; but He stands beside the sinner to do this, saying, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or Neither do I condemn thee. He feeds; but He is at the very table with the fed. He heals; but He puts forth His hands in the crowd on as many as were diseased, or stands at their sick beds. He thus comes down to the needy ones—with pardon, food, and healing. He goes among them, letting them know and see that He is supplied with various virtue to be used by them without reserve. And there is in this a glory that excelleth; so that the former has no glory by reason of it.

How should, we bless Him for this display of Himself! It is the same God of love and power in both; but He has increased in the brightness of His manifestations.

The religious rulers found this way of Jesus to interfere with them. Their interest was to keep God and the people separate; for then they had hopes of being used themselves. Thus they were angry when the Lord said to the man, Thy sins be forgiven thee. It was a great interference with them. It trespassed on their places. “Who can forgive sins but God only?” —and God was in heaven. The Son of man forgiving sins on earth was a sad disturbance of that by which they lived in credit and plenty in the world. But whether they received it or not, this was the way of the Son on earth. He dwelt with our necessities in such wise as encouraged the happy, near, and confident approach of all needy ones to Him. He did all to show that He was a cheerful giver—nay more—that He gave Himself with His gift. For with His own hand, we have seen, He brought the blessing home to every man's door.

It was therefore only the happy confidence of faith which fully met and refreshed His spirit—that faith which knew the title of a needy one to come right up to Him, the faith of a Bartimaeus which was not to be silenced by the mistaken scrupulousness even of disciples. And little children are to be in His arms, though the same mistake would forbid them.

This was His mind: He came into the world to be used by sick and needy sinners; and the faith that understood and used Him accordingly was its due answer. Such answers we see recorded by the Evangelists here in the action of the faithful little band, who, breaking up the roof, let down the bed whereon the sick of the palsy lay “into the midst before Jesus.” There was no ceremoniousness in this, nothing of the ancient reserve of the temple, no waiting for introduction. This little company felt their necessity, knew the virtues of the Son of God, and believed that these suited each other—nay, that the Lord carried the one, because necessitous sinners were bearing the other. It was a strong expression of faith, and I believe the strength of it was according to the mind of Jesus; so that, on seeing their faith, as we read, without further to do or more words, His heart and the grace that it carried uttered itself in an expression as full and strong: “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

Here was sympathy. Jesus was rending all veils between God and sinners; and so was the faith of this happy little company. His blood was soon to rend from top to bottom the veil of the temple, which kept God from poor sinners; and now their faith was rending that which kept them from Jesus. This surely was meeting and entertaining the Son of God in character; and His spirit deeply owns it: “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

Happy faith which can thus break down partition walls! O this faith which takes knowledge of Jesus, the Savior of the world, as the mighty render of all veils! “Join thou, my soul, for thou canst tell” &c. In the lively happy impression of this truth through the Spirit the soul tastes something of heaven. What blessedness to know that this is the way of God our Savior! Grace and glory are both brought to us: we have not to ascend to heaven to seek them there, nor descend to the depths to search after them there. “Behold I come: and my reward is with me,” will Jesus say when He brings the glory; as we have already seen Him with His grace standing at the door, or by the bedside, or in the crowd of needy sinners.

This is of God indeed. It is only divine love that can account for it. But the rulers did not like it. Their interest and credit in the world would keep the forgiveness of sins still in the hand of Him who was in heaven; for then, as the consecrated path, they hoped and judged that they themselves would still be used.

And so it is to this day. Forgiveness is brought near and sure to the soul—the word of faith to the heart and to the mouth. This shortens the path; but it does not suit those who transact (as themselves and others judge) the interests of the soul.

Nothing appears more simple than all this on the principles of nature. The Pharisees, in the Lord's time, represented it. They were the religious rulers; and the more God was kept in the distance, reserve being thus maintained between Him and the people, the more they were likely to be venerated, used, and enriched. Jesus, God in flesh, the Son of man forgiving sins on the earth, was a sad trespasser on their place and plan of action. How, alas! is this principle still alive, still dominant, and the “people love to have it so;” it suits the religiousness of man's nature too well to be lightly refused. The simplicity that is in Christ is sadly thus “corrupted;” and our souls, beloved, should be grieved, deeply grieved, because of it.

But we may also say that much occasion, in our day, has been given for this principle to live and act as vigorously as it seems to be doing. For there has not been the meeting of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, this pardoning, feeding, healing, love and power of Him who has come down to walk amid our ruins, in the spirit which alone was clue to it. There has been the assertion of grace, and the denial that God in this dispensation is to be sought for as at a distance, under the hiding of ceremonies or within the cloisters of temples. There has been the producing of the blessed Savior, and giving Him to walk abroad among our necessities according to the place He has Himself taken in the Gospels. There has been the presenting of the marvelous condescending grace of the dispensation; but those who have asserted it have not carried themselves towards it, and in the presence of it, with that reverence, that holiness of confidence, which alone became them. And this has given man's religiousness (which would keep God still in heaven) occasion to revive, and be listened to, and learned again.

But is this religiousness the due corrective of abused grace? Is this the divine remedy?—is this God's way of rectifying evil?—or is it not simple human reaction? Many are doing what they can to withdraw the Lord to that place which He has most advisedly and forever abandoned. They are making Him appear to build again the things which He had destroyed. They are putting Him back into the holiest place, there to be sought unto by, the old aisles and vistas of the “worldly sanctuary” —to cover Him with veils and cast up the long consecrated path by which of old the sinner came to Him. It were well to be righteously angry at Jesus and His grace being treated with so indelicate and untender a hand; but these correct the error by a worse. While they would protect the holiness of Christ, they obscure His grace. They are seeking to do a service for Him that grieves Him the most deeply. They are teaching man that He is an austere Master; they withdraw Him to the place where it is felt to be a fearful thing to plant one's foot.

Indeed this is a service He did not ask for. “Who hath required this at your hands,” is, I am assured in my son], the voice of the Son of God to those who withdraw Him from the nearest and most assured approach of the poor sinner. They have been doing what they could to change HIS place and attitudes, instead of MAN'S. Correction was needed surely. It is ever needed. Man will be spoiling or abusing everything. There has been an intellectual arrogance and carnal freedom with Christ and His truth, which may well have grieved the righteous. But it was man that ought to have been challenged to change his place and bearing, and not the Lord. He has not repented of having come on earth to forgive sins, of having visited the poor Samaritan at the well or Levi or Zacchaeus in their houses, or Peter's wife's mother on her bed of sickness. He is still the same Lord, and He purposes to be so. He has not retired within the veil again, nor bound up that which was rent from top to bottom. He has not built again that which He had destroyed. It is not a worldly sanctuary that He fills and furnishes again, nor ceremonies and observances, and rites and practices, under which He is again concealing Himself. He has descended front heaven to earth; He is abroad among men, in the ministry of His precious gospel and by His Spirit, beseeching sinners to be reconciled.

What then alas! is the character of that effort that would force Him back to the thick darkness? (2 Chron 6:43). It is an attempt made in the strength and with the subtlety of the devil upon the Son of God, as of old. It is a taking Him, as it were, to the pinnacle of the temple, to some withdrawn and proud elevation, where the multitude may gaze at Him. But His purpose is, blessed be His name, to stand in the midst of them, that they may use Him.

We should change our place; that is equally true. We should learn to pass and repass with the unshod foot before this gracious, blessed, Son of man. It is for us to change our attitude, and not to seek to make Him change His.

We have still to see Him in all the grace of this dispensation; we have to read “the gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim. 1), as they read it of old who knew and felt that the Son of man had power on earth to forgive sins. But we have to read all this more in their spirit also. We are to wonder at the strange sight, as they did—to tell Jesus, with the centurion, that we are not worthy that He should come under our roof, while we still use His immediate presence and grace—to stand before Him like Zacchaeus, and call Him “Lord,” though, like Him, receiving Him to our house; and to follow Him in the way with adoring thankful gaze, though having refused, as Bartimaeus, to be put at a distance by the vain religious scruples of even His own disciples.

Ah! this is what should have been done. This would have been the divine corrective of the mischief that has come in. But this was not so easy; for this would have been spiritual: the thing that has been done is carnal. Elements of the world are revived and multiplied. Jesus has been forced back at a distance from the sinner. He has been put into the thick darkness,” under cover of fleshly observances and rites, and at the end of a long path through the aisles of a sanctuary, where He waits to receive the homage of a fearing and bondaged people. This is the place and attitude which many teachers (who are daily rising in the esteem of the people) make the blessed Savior to fill and take.

The Lord Jesus is kept at a distance; religious observances are brought near; and the people (for they have ever been so minded) like the feelings that come from all that which is acted before them. Their eye and ear are engaged, a certain sacred sense of God is awakened; but the precious immediate confidence of the heart and conscience is refused. Ah! shall any one who loves the Lord thus sink down again into wan, when the Spirit would have him up with Christ?

“O foolish Galatians; who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?... Are ye so foolish? Raving begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?.... Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.” (Gal. 3, 4)

Thus speaks the aggrieved Spirit in the apostle over those who once had been eminently his joy but were now his sorrow, because they were turning again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto) they were desiring again to be in bondage. Indeed they were deserting faith for religiousness, “the simplicity that is in Christ” and in which the “virgin” or “uncorrupted “mind ever walks, for the ceremonies and observances of “a worldly sanctuary.”

But religiousness is neither faith nor righteousness. With the Pharisees it was adopted as a relief for a bad conscience, or a cover for evil; in them it was, therefore, opposed to faith. The Galatians cannot properly be said to have been Pharisees, it is true; but the Spirit of God had a serious question with both.

And I may just further observe, that in our passages (Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:2; Luke 5:24) the Lord seeks to lead man away from His own reasonings and calculations to Himself and His works. He perceived that the Scribes were “reasoning among themselves,” and then proposed to them what He was doing— “that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins (He said unto the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.”

How simple, how precious! And on this hangs the grand distinction between faith and religiousness of which I have just been speaking. Religiousness, or man's religion, gives the soul many a serious thought about itself, and many a devout thought about God. But faith, or God's religion, gives the soul Jesus, and the works and words of Jesus.

And yet it is faith, and faith only, secures the end which is valued of God. Faith “worketh by love “; faith “overcometh the world;” faith “purifies the heart.” By faith “the elders obtained a good report.” Religiousness does not this. It ever “works” by fear, not by love. It does not “overcome the world,” but oftentimes takes it within to some recess or hiding place. It does not “purify the heart” by giving it an object to detach it from self, but keeps self in a religious attire ever before it, and leaves the conscience unpurged. And in God's record it gets no “good report.” From the beginning to the end of that record, it is the people of religion, the devout observers of carnal ceremonies, those who would not “defile themselves” with a judgment-hall, that have stood most cruel in the resistance of the truth. But it is the men of faith, the lovers of the truth, the poor broken-hearted believers who have found their relief in Jesus “forgiving sins,” who have stood and labored and conquered.; and they have their happy memorial with Him and in the records of Him whom they trusted, in whom by faith they found eternal life and their sure and full salvation.

J. G. B.

Short Meditations, Journeys to Jerusalem

THE journey of the wise men of the East, as we read it in Matt. 2, and the journey of the queen of the South, as we have it in 2 Chron. 9, shine with something of kindred beauty and significance before us. They all of them go to Jerusalem-but the wise men of the East began their journey under the sign or preaching of the star; the queen of the South began hers simply on the ground of a report which had reached her in the distant land. For, at times the Lord has visited and guided His elect by signs, visible tokens, dreams, voices, angelic visits, and the like-at times He has simply caused them to hear a report, as in the case of this illustrious lady. But let Him address us as He may, faith is cognizant of His voice, as in these cases. " My sheep hear my voice... and they follow me."

The wise men went to worship, and took offerings with them: the queen of the South went to inquire at wisdom's gate, and to learn lessons of God; and trafficking for that which was more precious than gold or rubies, she took with her of the choicest treasures of her kingdom.

The journey of the wise men is rich in illustrations of the life of faith. But Jerusalem did not satisfy them. They had to go on to Bethlehem to reach the object of their faith. In the earlier journey of the queen of the South, Jerusalem answered all expectations. In it we may find some striking moral characteristics, which carry several healthful and significant admonitions to our own souls.

In the first place, I observe, that the report which had reached her touching the king in Jerusalem, at once makes her dissatisfied with her present condition, wealthy though it was, and honorable in no common measure. For she sets out immediately-leaving behind her, her own royal estate, with all its advantages in the flesh and in the world. The fact of her journey bespeaks the uneasiness and dissatisfaction which tidings about Solomon and Jerusalem had awakened.

This speaks in our ears. It tells us of the operation upon our hearts, which the report that has gone abroad about a greater than Solomon, should produce. In like spirit, to this day, the quickened soul, under the report it has received about Jesus, is convicted, and made restless in that condition in which nature has left us, and this report has found us. We have been upset by it-turned out of all the ease and satisfaction which we before may have taken in ourselves and our circumstances or our character.

But again. As soon as this elect lady reached Jerusalem, she set herself to survey all the estate of the king there. She came on that business, and she does it. She is not idle. She acquaints herself with everything. She put her hard questions to the king, listened to his wisdom, and surveyed his glories. The very sitting and apparel of his servants did not escape her-and surely not, the ascent by which he went up to the house of God.

This again speaks in our ears. When we reach Jesus, our souls make Him their object. We learn Him, we talk of Him, we search the secrets of His grace and glory. We carry the sense of this one thing, that our business is with Him. He is our object.

But thirdly. After this stranger-queen had acquainted herself with all that belonged to the king in Zion, she was satisfied. Her soul was satiated as with marrow and fatness. She knew not what to make of herself. She did not under-. stand her new condition. The joy was overwhelming. The half had not been told her, she says; and Solomon exceeded the fame that reached her about him. There was no more spirit in her. She returns to her land and to her people, filled. She left him, as the woman of Sychar left Jesus; emptied of all beside, but filled and satisfied with her new-found treasure.

Such had been her wondrous path. Her

journey had begun in the restless, uneasy sense of need; all her former fair service of flattering Circumstances being broken up. She had acquainted herself with the vast, mysterious treasures of the place where her journey had led her; she had done this carefully, with a heart only the more engaged and interested as she went onward in her search. She ended her journey, or returned to her own land, as one filled to the very brim of all her expectations and desires.

The journey from the south to Jerusalem, recorded in the New Testament, has much the same characters. I mean that of the eunuch of Ethiopia, in Acts 8

He begins his journey as with an unsettled conscience. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship -but he left that city of solemnities, that city of the temple and service of God, with its priesthood and ordinances, still unsettled; and we see him an anxious inquirer on his way from Jerusalem to the southern Gaza. Nothing in that center of religious provisions and observances had given rest to the soul. He was dissatisfied with the worship he had been rendering there. His conscience was not purged. He had as yet no answer for God. There was no rest in his spirit. Jerusalem, I may say, had disappointed him, as it had the wise men.

But if, like the queen of Sheba, he were at first, on starting on his way, uneasy and dissatisfied, like her he was deeply engaged with what God was providing for him, through His witnesses and representatives. The word of God was addressing his soul. The prophet Isaiah was taking him out of himself. He started not at the surprise of the stranger's voice in that desert place. All he cared for, all he thought of, was the secret of the book. He was inspecting the witness of God's grace, as the queen had once inspected Solomon's estate, the witness of glory. And Philip let him into the secret that he was searching.

And then, he is satisfied. His heart, like hers, is filled with what has now been discovered to him. He pursues the second stage of his journey, from Gaza to Ethiopia, "rejoicing." Philip may leave him, but he can do without him. The woman of Sychar may again leave her water-pot, and find Jesus everything to her. With a soul satisfied as with marrow and fatness, he can go on his way. Another returns to the South, to Sheba or Ethiopia, with a heart rich in the discoveries he had made on this his visit to Jerusalem.

These kindred characteristics are easily traced in these narratives. But it was rather conscience that set the eunuch on his journey; it was desire that moved the queen. And she came in contact with glory, in the court and estate of Solomon; he with grace, in the words of the prophet Isaiah. But whether God address us with a revelation of His grace or of His glory; whether He addresses the conscience or the heart, it is His high and divine prerogative, to satisfy us-as He does these two distinguished individuals. He satiates the soul with a manifestation of Himself, let that manifestation take what form it may, or adapt itself to whatever exigency or demand of the soul it please. And such satisfaction we get differently, but very blessedly, exemplified in these two cases.

And let me add one other feature that is common to both. Their spirit was free of all grudging. The queen surveyed the glories of Solomon, and she could look on his higher, more eminent and excellent estate, without the stir of one single jealous, envious movement. She was too happy for that. She could congratulate the king in Zion, and his servants that waited on him, and his people who heard his wisdom, and return home as one that was privileged only to visit him; but she begrudged them not the richer portion they were enjoying. Her own share of blessing filled her, though her vessel was comparatively small. And so the eunuch, I am full sure. He was willing to be a debtor to Philip-to know that it is the less that is blessed of the better: Be it so, his spirit would say. He was happy, he was filled; and if there was no void in his spirit, so we may assure ourselves, there was no grudging there.

What joy there ought to be as we look at such samples of divine workmanship! The soul disturbed by reason of its own condition-fixed in earnest searching after Christ-satisfied by the discovery of Him-and then, too happy to dwell amid the tumults and jarrings of that nature that lusteth to envy! And how noiselessly the process is conducted! It goes on in the spirit of a man by the power that works after the pattern of the wind that blows where it lists, but whence it comes and whither it goes we know not.

I have, however, another thought upon this subject of the journeys to Jerusalem.

At times we find, as in the case of the queen of Sheba, that that great city answered all the -expectations that had been formed by the heart respecting it. What was there deeply and fully satisfied her, as we have seen. But Jerusalem has at times grievously disappointed the heart. It did, as I may say again, the wise men of the East, who went there looking for the king of the Jews. They had to pass it, and put themselves on another journey, down to Bethlehem in the south. It disappointed the eunuch also, as I have also observed. He had gone there to worship-but he left it. unsatisfied in spirit, and searching for that rest which, as we saw, all the religious provisions of that city of the temple and the priesthood did not, could not, give him. And I may add, it disappointed the Lord Jesus likewise. Instead of finding His welcome and His place there, He had to weep over it and to pronounce its doom, and meet there in His own Person what we may here rather remember than mention.

It will, however, in the last days, as it were, revive, and take again the character that it fulfilled in the first days. It will answer all the richest expectations of those multitudes who will then, like the queen of the South, go up there to see the King in His beauty. The highways will then be thronged with joyous visitors, and the hearts of the thousands of the nations will repeat again what they have found in the holy city. " All nations shall flow unto it," as we read; "and many people shall go and say, Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob: and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths, for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." And again we read: " It shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year, to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles." And again: " I was glad when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the Lord: our feet shall stand within thy gates, 0 Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together, whither the tribes go up; the tribes of the Lord unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." These are among the divine, inspired witnesses of the satisfying virtue of these journeys to the city of the great King in the day of the kingdom, when the pledge which the journey of the queen of Sheba has given us shall be blessedly redeemed in the joy of the hearts of the thousands of the nations who, in the coming day of Zion's restoration, shall wait there to do willing service to the Lord of the earth.

The sequel, then, is simply weighed. Journeys to Jerusalem either satisfy or disappoint; and it is the Lord Himself that has to determine which. His glory was at that time displayed or reflected there, and therefore her visit satisfied the queen of Sheba; His grace was not then ministered or testified there, and therefore his visit disappointed the eunuch of Ethiopia. And thus the value of that city of solemnities was to be measured by the presence of Christ there.

And so, let me say, of all ordinances and services. Jerusalem is but " a city of the Jebusites," if Jesus be not the life and glory of it: it is " the joy of the whole earth," if He be. Like Mount Sinai or Horeb. It is but " Mount Sinai in Arabia," or it takes the dignity of "the mount of God," according as the Lord adopts it or not. The ordinances of the law were " shadows of good things to come," the furniture of God's " beautiful house," or mere " beggarly elements," as Christ used them or disowned them.

I admire much her (Mary of Bethany) isolated path, because her affection for Him carried her outside and apart from every one here, and, as far as I can see it, it is in this connection she should be spoken of in the gospel. As the Lord says, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." It is the memorial that our blessed Lord not only so loved a sinner, but could make a sinner love Him so much.

The Transfiguration, Transfiguration, The: 3

Now the single purpose of the Lord in giving Peter, James, and John this vision in the holy mount, was, as I have thus been endeavoring to show, to give His church a sight or sample of that heavenly glory which is their inheritance, and which is quite beside and above all previously expected glories, quite of another character from all the promises of glory made by Jehovah to Israel. The secret of God was here in vision disclosed to these favored disciples; the heavenly Jerusalem stood with her opened gates before them for a little passing moment; and though the disciples were then but “eye witnesses” standing on the earth, still in flesh and blood, and separated from that which they were beholding, they were afterward, through the Holy Ghost, taught to know that their portion was to be in that glory, that they were to take the better place of Moses and Elias with the Lord (2 Peter 1). And thus they might have seen, reflected in Moses and Elias glorified with the royal Son of Man, the inheritance of the saints in light, the hope of the calling of the Father of glory, the glory given to the Son, and imparted by the Son to the church, that they might be one with Him in it forever (Eph. 1:17, John 17:22).

Peter's joy in the presence of this glory, and his desire to continue there (such was the satisfying delight which his soul was taking in the scene), may give us to know something of the character of the blessedness of Israel and the nations continuing in natural bodies, “of the earth earthly,” in the kingdom of the Son of Man when this His glory shall appear. But all this was merely incidental. The single purpose of the vision was to show the church her portion in the glory, and not to let Israel know their joy merely in the presence of it. The church's high calling of God in Christ Jesus was that which was to be established by this vision. The God of all grace has called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus; and this was then exhibited. Accordingly the transfiguration passed on the Lord, on Moses and Elias—they all appeared in the same glory. Moses and Elias were no more, as they were once on earth, than was the Lord Himself: their vile bodies had been fashioned like unto His glorious body; and He, then appearing for a little time, they also appeared in glory with Him.

But what a mystery was this, that they should be fellow-heirs and of the same body! 1In other ages it was not made known to the sons of men, but now was manifested, visibly manifested; so that, as we may say, we have seen it with our eyes and have looked upon it. But truly it was so strangely excellent, so far surpassing the thoughts even of these chosen ones of Israel, that it was worthy of this solemn pledge and assurance, in order that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God, and have strong consolation who have fled to this hope set before us. And oh that this was more and more our consolation! Oh that we abounded in the hope of this!—that our anchors were more firmly cast within the veil, and that we were more with desire wishing for the day! And not only were the saints in their glorified bodies exhibited in that holy mount, but the enfolding of the church with her blessed Head in the cloud of the excellent glory was seen there also. The promised “glory of the Father,” of which the Lord had spoken (xvi. 27), and in which He is to come when He brings His reward with Him, now descends on that holy hill. Surely this was none other than the house of God—the house where mansions are preparing for the saints in the Father's presence.

In that presence are the saints to be presented without spot; and then will they know the blessing which ear hath not heard nor the heart conceived. There will be the presence that refreshes, and the happy service of the redeemed day and night before the throne, while He that sitteth thereon is dwelling among them. There shall they see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. But “the blood of the Lamb” will have washed them and made them meet for this their inheritance in light. And therefore do we find that when Moses and Elias spake with the Lord in the Mount, they spake of “His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). And how suited was this also to rebuke Peter, who had so lately rebuked his Master for speaking in this manner of His decease! In glory they speak of it, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.” Oh what has made entrance for the glory, but the sufferings of Christ which it follows! The way to it has been opened by the nails and the spear, and the precious blood tracks it out for us all.

And here too we learn the secret of the disciples' fears in the presence of this excellent glory. “They feared as they i.e. the Lord and Moses and Elias (see Luke 9:34) entered into the cloud.” For nothing will strengthen us to stand assured in the presence of the glory, but the knowledge of the humiliation of Christ; and this Peter and they who were with him knew not then. His humiliation is the only but the sure (most blessed) ground of fellowship with even the excellent glory; for it assures us that all that which this glory would have otherwise found in us to judge and to consume has been already judged and put away in Him Who bore all our shame. And this was most graciously assured to the disciples on this very occasion. For Jesus came to them, amazed and confounded as they were, and with a voice and touch of Son of Man restored them. And these were the signs of His humiliation: the voice and the touch could tell them that He, who was in the form of God, was found in fashion as a man like themselves, and that they need not fear. As in a like ease, the glory of God being found in the person of the Son of Man, the conscious patriarch could say, “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” The majesty of the God of heaven was not therefore his destruction (Gen. 32:30). So the prophet's comeliness was turned into corruption, and he retained no strength in the presence of the same majesty; but he knew in himself that he was strengthened when the hand of one, in the appearance of a man, had touched him (Dan. 10:18). And thus it is ever; the divine terror shall not make us afraid, nor the hand of the Almighty be heavy upon us (though of old it meted out heaven and measured the waters, and gathered the winds,) if we know Him, Who has been formed out of the clay like ourselves, and is according to our wish in God's stead” (Job 33:6, 7).

And it was with this humiliated One that the disciples again (it might be too soon) found themselves alone, “when they lifted up their eyes,” —not knowing but that they should still behold the excellent glory. “But they saw no man save Jesus only.” Jesus! the title of all which men despised and rejected, the sign of the carpenter's son, of Him who belonged to Galilee, the Nazarene. With such an One did they now find themselves alone. The vision was yet to be for an appointed time; the glory had been folded up and was departed; and they were still to know

only fellowship with Him Whom man was despising and the nation abhorring.

And with Him should we be walking still. And oh! for more and more power, through the holy Ghost, to know this blest companionship—companionship in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. For though we know not how short, yet still the vision is for an appointed time; but then in the end it shall speak and not lie. The glory is within the vail, but will surely come forth and not tarry; and all who have waited for it, and are in the power of the secret of it, shall find it to be their salvation, while it is consuming all things beside. Gideon and the host of Israel stood, for they were in the secret of the Lord, when the glory shone forth from the broken pitchers; but the host of Midian—the army of the aliens—cried and fled, and were discomfited. J. G. B.

(Concluded from page 117.)

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Herod's birth-day was kept: the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine were in the feast, and the blood of the righteous was mingled with it all. The just was condemned and killed, but there was to be no resistance—no present redress. The sin of Babylon was found in Jerusalem, and more than the sin of Babylon. It was a feast full of more horrid rites than that which drew forth the hand-writing of death upon the wall, to seal the fate of Belshazzar and his kingdom. The vessels of the temple were profaned there, but in Jerusalem the blood of the righteous was shed. But there was no second hand-writing: the Lord came not to break the bruised reed, nor to quench the smoking flax; He came not to visit Israel's sin upon them. And so we read, that when He had heard of this deed which so stained their land, “He departed into a desert place apart,” His spirit thus leading Him away from the view of the nation's sin (which was not as yet to call forth His right hand from His bosom) to pursue, as we find, His patient labors of mercy through their land, though they were thus rewarding Him evil for good, and hatred for His love.

In tracing further the ministry of the Lord, we find Him in Matthew (chap. 15.) brought into view again of other evidence of Jewish apostasy, such as showed that all their worship had been now turned to vanity; that, loving the praise of men rather than the praise of God, they were honoring man in his traditions, and, for the sake of this, forsaking God and His commandments. And thus were they forsaking their own mercy, and, traveling on in the darkness of this world, they knew not whither they were going, and would speedily stumble, and be snared, and taken.

Thus witnessing all the way the deepening of Jewish unbelief, and the settling of the purpose of their revolted heart not to receive Him, we are at length conducted to that scene in the Lord's ministry which prepares for His ascent without further delay up the holy mount. On His again being challenged to show the sign from heaven (15:1), after upbraiding them with their hypocrisy, we read that He “left them and departed.” Another action of the Lord, big with judgment, had this voice, that the time was at hand when they should be judicially deserted of God. We find that He pursued this solemn journey of separation from them, till He reached the coast of Caesarea Philippi, the most distant corner of the land. Here we must pause with Him, and meditate on this most interesting moment of His ministry, when He, having taken up this lonely and remote position, judicially separating Himself as far as He could from all Jewish associations and recollections, breaks open both to the eye and ear of His disciples the secret that had been hid from ages and from generations, that is, the special and distinctive glory which in the purpose of God had been of old ordained for His church.

Here in the solitudes of Caesarea Philippi, the Lord, as we read, “asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?” By this He designed (closing His controversy with them) to draw forth the full and formal proof of the nation's unbelief, of their having failed or refused to discover in Him the light that was to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of His people Israel. And such was now drawn forth; for the disciples, who had been more than their Lord mixed with the multitudes, and had known their present ways, could only say, “Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias; or one of the prophets.” But they had no tidings to bring Him that any had echoed the joy of the prophet, “To us a Child is born, to us a Son is given;” that they had ever heard, through their towns and villages, one saying, “I am the Lord's; and another calling himself by the name of Jacob; and another subscribing with his hand to the Lord, and surnaming himself by the name of Israel” (Isa. 44:5). His hand was as strong now for them, as when He rode with His chariots of salvation through the sea, and covered the Egyptian heavens with sackcloth; but there was none (Isa. 1:1, 2). Israel did not know, the people did not consider, that the Heir of the vineyard was refused and disallowed by the husbandman.

Thus was the earth shut upon Him; for His earthly throne, by His own ancient decree, was set in Zion (Psa. 2:6). The people of the earth had rejected Him. “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not; He came to His own, and His own received Him not.” And now was the time for His unveiling another and hitherto hidden region. The heavens must open if earth be shut to Him and His people. If the key of the house of David laid upon His shoulder cannot as yet be used to give Him entrance to His inheritance of the fullness of the earth, the keys of the kingdom of heaven must open the glories and joys of heaven to Him and His church. And therefore, as we read, the Lord, designing to draw this forth of His elect, and to bring it into direct contrast with the unbelief of Israel, said to the disciples, “But whom say ye that I am?” And so He did draw this forth; for Peter, as confessing the faith of the body of Christ, the faith of the family that belongs to the Father in heaven, “answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” For this is just the knowledge by which the heavenly family have their very being: “he that hath the Son hath life.” And the body of Christ is fashioned by the power of the Holy Ghost imparting this faith, and will have its full edification when all the elect have by the same Spirit been brought into this faith; as it is written, “till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God onto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

And the Lord therefore at once acknowledged this confession to be the confession of the church; the proper faith of all those who have had the Son revealed to them by the Father in heaven, and are thus made one with Christ in the present love wherewith He is loved and in the coming glory wherewith He is to be revealed. “And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I also say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build

my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it: and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (ver. 17-19).1

Here then, for the first time, the Son and the church—the destined Bridegroom and Bride are manifested in the presence of each other; here do they for the first time salute each other, and enter into that fellowship of knowledge and those blessed embraces of love which shall endure forever. Then did the church in Spiritising, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine;" and the Son could rejoice in opening to His brethren the very heavens themselves, and giving them seats with Himself in the Father's house. In His esteem, as it were, the earth was too low for them, and the heavens must open to them. His members should be fashioned here, but the body in its perfectness should find its place forever on high. The throne and not the footstool should be theirs.

I do believe there was no moment like this in the ministry of our blessed Master. This was the great moment of transition from earth to heaven: the one was refusing its increase to God, and would now cast out the Heir of all its fullness; the other was preparing a throne for Him, and for all who would love and adhere to Him in this scornful and rejecting world.

Thus can we discern, during the ministry of our Lord, the unfoldings of that character and unbelief in Israel which carried His prospects, if I may so speak, from earth to heaven; and so are we able to trace that way which conducted His steps to the distant coasts of Caesarea Philippi; and from thence, as we shall presently see, up the heavenly ascent of the Mount of Transfiguration.

The earth being thus, as He now saw, closed upon Him, the Lord begins, as we read, from that time to reveal the wonder of His death; which was the finishing of the earth's sin, and its rejection of God. It was a circumstance in the history of their Messiah that lay quite beyond all Jewish calculations, that was beside His character as Son of David in which Israel knew Him. This was the time, therefore (the Son of David being thus disowned by Israel), for the Lord to speak fully and openly to His disciples of His death. "From that time forth began Jesus to show onto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (ver. 21).

But here, alas, how far below the power of His own blessed confession so lately made, does the apostle come! Like Abram of old, he had just come out, as it were, from his home and kindred on earth, in the energy of the faith of the Son of God, which was really separating him unto the heavenly glory; but, like Abram, how soon the world and the god of this world has him under the power of his own spirit (see Gen. 12). "Then Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall not be unto Thee. But He turned and said onto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan, thou art an offense unto Me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (vers. 22,. 23).

Could Peter promise himself that his Master would be anything but a sufferer in a world which had thus been manifesting its rejection of God? And should Peter, or those whom Peter's confession represents, look for any portion for themselves in a world which has now rejected the Son, and is still saying that they will not have Him to reign over them? It is only of Satan that the love of it can savor, and thus it cannot abide in the same heart with the love of the Father. The saints through the Holy Ghost have met the Father in affection, in the person of the Son; and the world by the spirit of the wicked one is at enmity with the Father, by still refusing to kiss the Son, counting that there is no beauty that they should desire Him.

In accordance with this reprobate character of the world, the Lord shows His disciples, drawn to Him in spirit out of it, what their suffering condition must also needs be while in it. "Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me; for whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it." But at the same time He graciously sustains them thus called to be His suffering followers, with a promise of reward in the glory of His kingdom; a glory too, which He at the same time intimates to be far above all Jewish measures or expectations of glory, being "of the Father." "For," says the Lord to them, "what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? for the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works." And so great, so wondrous, so exceeding all previous calculations, was this "glory of the Father," which He now speaks of, that He gives His disciples a very solemn pledge of it, promising them (in terms most strikingly expressive of the deep and interesting value of it) a sight of this glory. Thus by the two witnesses, as it were, His prophecy and their vision of it, the thing must be adjudged to be no "cunningly devised fable," but be established in their faith, and ever live in the remembrance of His church, till the day itself dawned, and till the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the majesty of His kingdom, should rest no longer in vision or in promise, but be manifested to the everlasting satisfaction of all who wait for it. "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Accordingly this gracious pledge He quickly redeems. As we read, "And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them; and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light. And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Him Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Then wilt, let us make here three tabernacles, one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid: and Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid: and when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only" (Matt. 17:1-8).

(Continued from page 100.)

(To be continued.)

The Transfiguration, Transfiguration, The: 1

It must have been familiar with us all to have observed, that the certainty of our view of an object has depended very principally on the light in which it was set; and that our enjoyment of a prospect has been greatly determined by the way by which we approached it.

I venture thus to introduce my observation upon the transfiguration of our blessed Lord on the Holy Mount, because, as I judge, the way by which He was led there has not with sufficient care been traced out and preserved by those who since, in faith, followed Him there. The road was much longer to Him than we generally. suspect; and yet, to be on the mount with Him, so as to enter rightly through the Spirit into the design of His being there at all, we must be patient in marking the way which conducted Him to that secret place of His heavenly glory. We will then, trusting His guidance, track this way after Him somewhat more carefully.

It was apostasy in Israel that prepared “the place that is called Calvary;” and, under the determining hand and counsel of God, there erected the cross: so that the Lord Himself said to the Jews, “when YE have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He” (John 8:28). For the Son had been sent forth to preserve and reign over the house of Israel forever; but Israel would none of Him. Of course in all this the purpose of the counsels of God was only effected; but still the cross is the witness of Jewish unbelief; as is said, “For of a truth against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:27-28).

The cross therefore directly led to the casting off of Israel as God's people on earth; and to the consequent present call of the church out from among the Gentiles. Accordingly, in the progress of the Lord's ministry, as the Jews were at times betraying their unbelief, so was the Lord ever following this with the intimation (either to themselves, or in secret to His disciples) of the judgment for which this unbelief was preparing them; or of its further results in the call and edification of His body the church.

And if we but carefully trace His ministry, we shall at once discover this as one of its characters, and be led in this way: and I will say only in this way, justly to apprehend the purpose (most gracious in Him and blessed to them, and to the whole church with them, as it was) for which He ever took His favored disciples up to that heavenly hill with Him.

The Gospel of Matthew (as confessedly the completest narrative of our Lord's history) is that through which we will trace Him until He reach the mount of transfiguration in chapter 17; for I am assured that there is to be discovered, through all this part of His ministry and the circumstances attending it, that which was opening His way to that mount.

Everything previous to the imprisonment of John will be found to be only introductory to our Lord's ministry—i. e. all that is recorded by our evangelist, down to chap. iv. ver. 12. But the tidings “that John was cast into prison” drew Him forth; and we read, that “from that time, Jesus began to preach.” Then did light spring up to them, which sat in the region and shadow of death; then did the Shepherd of Israel begin to feed the flock; and, unlike those who had come before Him, to strengthen the diseased, to heal the sick, to bind up the broken, and to seek the lost (Matt. 4:23-25, Ezek. 34:4).

In the three following chapters we have the sermon on the mount; the purpose of which I judge to be this—to reveal the Father in heaven (from whose glory the Son had come down) in connection with Israel; to exhibit the necessary characters of a people brought into this blessed connection; but at the same time, on the ground of the corruptions and hypocrisy of their present accredited fathers, to disclose, though as yet but darkly, the mystery of Israel's full apostacy and rejection, and the consequent call of an election from among them, and the opening of a new scene of blessing to them.

In chapter viii. the Lord pursues His ministry of mercy, and as yet He pursues it unhindered. Every step in His bright path of blessing, leaving behind it the traces of One who had come as “the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in.” Chapter 9 however presents to us, for the first time, the enmity of the blind guides of Israel, “because their deeds were evil” against the light of Israel. The occasion for this first manifestation of their enmity and unbelief is very specially worthy of our notice. It is the case of the man sick of the palsy, who had been let down through the roof in order to meet the eye and compassion of the blessed Jesus; (see 9:1; Mark 2:1-4) “and Jesus,” as we read, “seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.” Here then the Lord, witnessing the faith of this little band of His people, at once proclaims remission of sins in Israel, and consequent healing—power on earth to forgive sins now manifested.1 The Jehovah of Israel now appeared among them, “forgiving all their iniquities, and healing all their diseases.” Every sickness and every plague had through disobedience been brought upon them (Deut. 28:61); but He who had once led them out of Egypt, was saying to them again, “I am the Lord that healeth thee.” (Ex. 15:26).

He was, as it were, renewing His covenant with them, His covenant of health and salvation; He was taking away from them all sickness and dispensing healing through the land (Deut. 7:15). Faith would have rejoiced and begun that song of praise prepared of old for repentant and believing Israel, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name; bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; Who forgiveth all thine iniquities and healeth all thy diseases” (Psa. 103). But Israel's guides and rulers, now thinking evil in their hearts, whispered, “This man blasphemeth."2 The enmity of the rulers thus, once awakened, worked more and more as the gracious Shepherd went on to gather “the poor of the flock.” Thus we find Him immediately afterward calling Matthew the publican, and sitting at meat in company with sinners, and the rulers rebuking Him for this grace that was in Him. But it was that grace of the divine physician which they all equally needed: yet, ignorant of this, they were vainly and fatally to themselves making sin the occasion of judging, and comparing as among themselves, instead of knowing and confessing that “the whole head was sick and the whole heart faint.” They had now been smitten according to the curse on disobedience (Deut. 28:28) with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart, as every city and village of theirs, through which Jehovah their healer was now passing, witnessed, but knew it not. The Lord their God was even now showing them that He would not contend forever; for though He had seen their ways and the frowardness of their hearts, yet that He had come to heal them (Isa. 57:18). He was now showing that for the hurt of the daughter of His people He was hurt, and that balm was now to be found in Gilead, and a physician there; but the daughter of His people was refusing health (Jer. 8:21, 22). The enmity still working, the fairest and most favored portion of Israel next came forward with their challenge, “the disciples of John;” they who had been under the ministry of him, than whom, among those born of woman, there had not risen a greater—the burning and the shining light of Israel in his day. In answer to them the Lord darkly intimates the mystery hid from ages and from generations, and for the full disclosure of which the unbelief of Israel was thus gradually making way. He speaks to them of the strange act of the bridegroom's removal (Israel having heard out of the law only of Christ's “abiding forever"); and with this gives them notice, as by a parable of Israel's apostasy and consequent rejection as an old garment, and as a vessel in which there was soon to be no pleasure; and the Lord's consequent election of another witness of His grace and blessing (Matt. 9:14-17).

Chapter 11 begins by telling us that when the Lord had thus given them this commission, He Himself in like manner departed “to teach and to preach in their cities.” But that chapter does not close until we listen to Him, in all the grace of ill-requited and as it were disappointed love, upbraiding those cities “because they repented not.” “Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tire and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (ver. 21). But sad to His soul as this view of the unbelief of Israel must have been, He finds His relief in the consciousness of the stability of the Father's purpose; in this, as Paul did afterward, that the foundation of God still stood sure, and that therefore there would be still a gathering to Him of all those whom the Father foreknew, and who should hear His voice as the good Shepherd, saying, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden.”

In the next chapter we see the Jews still further manifesting their unbelief, by the Pharisees holding a council against Him how they might destroy Him; (ver. 14); and again by saying of Him, the gracious physician who was forgiving all their sins and healing all their diseases, spending His love and His strength upon them throughout all their coasts, “This fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils:” (ver. 24); and again, by desiring to see a sign from Him (ver. 38). In the course of His reply to this last expression of unbelief, our Lord gives them solemn and full warning of the judgment they were hastening upon themselves, shutting them up under the condemnation of the sign of the prophet Jonah.

Jonah is, generally, the witness of burial and resurrection. Thus does He set forth the mysterious history of the blessed Son of Man Himself—“For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (ver. 40). But the sign of Jonah equally sets forth the history of Israel; inasmuch as that nation is now doomed to the judgment of death and the grave: but in the purpose of the love of God, it is destined to be called forth from under the power of death, and to rise again into the life and liberty of God's people (see Ezek. 37:1-14). But for the present they are in the grave; that unrepentant generation which was thus challenging the Lord for a sign was laid there; for there the Lord solemnly consigned them when He thus gave them the sign of the prophet Jonah. And when He had thus delivered them over to the judgment of death and the grave, He discloses to them, in the parable of the unclean spirit, that fullness of iniquity which they were to accomplish, and which would mature them for the full judgment of God. “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation” (vers. 43-45).

Israel had been once possessed with an unclean spirit. Before the Babylonish captivity, the idols had defiled that land where Jehovah had set His own name and the witness of His presence; but this unclean spirit had now gone out of Israel: the house was swept, and emptied, and garnished; the altars, and the groves, and the images were no more. But this was all. God had not been restored to His place there: idolatry had now yielded to the spirit of scorning and unbelief. The Lord came, but there was no man; “He came to His own, but His own received Him not” (John 1:11). And thus into this empty house the full, or sevenfold, energy of Satan had entered—the unclean spirit had taken with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and was preparing to dwell there;; and so has he since dwelt. The god of this world has blinded the nation to the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; and they continue to this day to deny the Son of Man, and to leave their last state worse than the first.3

The next chapter begins to present our Lord as a teacher with a new style and manner; He opens His mouth in parables and utters dark sayings of old, and on being questioned by His disciples, why was it thus? He answered and said unto them, “Because it is given unto you to know the mystery of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given; for whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away, even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables, because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand; and in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias which saith, By hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see and not perceive; for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” This change of manner in the ministry of this blessed and perfect master in Israel was thus awfully judicial: He had spoken to them plainly, and spoken no proverb; but when He had thus called, there was none to answer, and now, as the Lord in judgment, He began to pour out on them the spirit of deep sleep and to close their eyes, that the scripture might be fulfilled which saith, “And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I cannot, for it is sealed: and the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, read this I pray thee, and he saith, I am not learned” (Isa. 29:11, 12).

We are too careless in marking all the actions of the blessed Jesus: Among ourselves the eye and ear of a friend will discover in little things the heart of him with whom friendship has made us familiar; and how does the Holy Ghost trace for the saints the less discovered paths of the Spirit of Jesus when oil earth, so that when once let into the secret of communion with Him, we may see Him where the sharpest eye of this world's wisdom would never have discovered His path! “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him” (Psa. 25:14). Now we read after this (chap. xiv. 13), that when Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist, “He departed thence by ship into a desert place apart.” This action of the Lord is full of meaning. The murder of that righteous man was a chief matter in filling up the measure of the nation's sin; it was the sure witness of their deep revolt from God. They had done with God's servant “whatsoever they listed,” served the last of their own evil hearts upon him, instead of receiving him as the messenger of the Lord of Hosts to them. And what ripeness for judgment was just then exhibited among them! Only mark the scene in Herod's palace at that time, what a living in pleasure was there and being wanton! what a nourishing of the heart as in a day of slaughter, did the court of Israel's king then present!

(To be continued.)

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"It is I; be not afraid." The realization of Christ's presence is the antidote to every possible fear, and the way to comfort people is the ministry of Christ in the power of the Spirit, to so present Him that they shall apprehend His presence.

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"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Untold sorrows characterize the human race, and this invitation is not confined to those who are laden with sin. Jesus addresses any one who is bowed with any possible sorrow, any possible bereavement. Whatever the burden upon you, the Lord speaks to you.

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