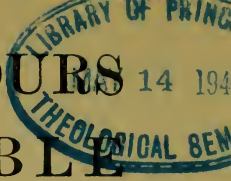


DEVOTIONAL HOURS  
WITH THE BIBLE



THE GOSPEL BY MATTHEW

BY

J. R. MILLER, D.D.

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## GENERAL PREFACE

THERE are two methods of studying the Bible. One is, verse by verse, giving close thought to every word, even looking into etymology and grammatical construction, so that the exact sense of the text may be learned. Such study is important. Many rich shades of meaning are often revealed by intelligent and scholarly exegesis. Commentaries that take us over the Bible in this microscopical way are valuable. We need every particle of light on the Scriptures we can get.

Then another way of studying the Bible is in order to get from it practical lessons for our own daily common life. What does the passage teach us? What Divine instruction have we in it for ourselves? It is the latter purpose that is in mind in this book. It is not a commentary in the usual sense. It is not an exegetical study of the Scriptures that is proposed. No textual criticism is given. There is no discussion of questions of dates, of localities, of authorships, or archæological researches. Its single aim is to suggest some of the

spiritual and practical lessons which may be gathered from great passages.

The book does not attempt to cover every chapter; to do this would make it altogether too long—it deals only with what appear to be leading and representative portions of the Bible.

It is a book for use in the inner chamber where life receives its impulses for conduct, for duty, for service, and for devotion. The Bible is a very ancient book, but it is also a book for to-day. It brings us face to face with God, and its teachings are meant to guide us in all our ways.

J. R. M.

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

	PAGE
THE WISE MEN AND THE CHILD . . . . .	1
MATTHEW I., II.	

## CHAPTER II

JOHN, THE FORERUNNER OF JESUS . . . . .	6
MATTHEW III. 1-12	

## CHAPTER III

THE BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION OF JESUS . . . . .	12
MATTHEW III. 13-17; IV. 1-11	

## CHAPTER IV

THE BEGINNING OF THE GALILEAN MINISTRY . . . . .	20
MATTHEW IV. 12-25	

## CHAPTER V

TRUE BLESSEDNESS . . . . .	28
MATTHEW V. 1-15	

## CHAPTER VI

SOME LAWS OF THE KINGDOM . . . . .	36
MATTHEW V. 17-48	

## CHAPTER VII

	PAGE
ALMSGIVING AND PRAYER . . . . .	44
MATTHEW VI. 1-15	

## CHAPTER VIII

WORLDLINESS AND TRUST . . . . .	52
MATTHEW VI. 19-34	

## CHAPTER IX

THE GOLDEN RULE . . . . .	59
MATTHEW VII. 1-12	

## CHAPTER X

FALSE AND TRUE DISCIPLESHIP . . . . .	65
MATTHEW VII. 13-29	

## CHAPTER XI

JESUS THE HEALER . . . . .	71
MATTHEW VIII. 2-17	

## CHAPTER XII

TWO MIGHTY WORKS . . . . .	78
MATTHEW VIII. 23-34	

## CHAPTER XIII

A PARALYTIC FORGIVEN AND HEALED . . . . .	86
MATTHEW IX. 1-13	



# CONTENTS

ix

## CHAPTER XIV

	PAGE
THE POWER OF FAITH . . . . .	93
MATTHEW IX. 18-34	

## CHAPTER XV

THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE . . . . .	101
MATTHEW IX. 35; X. 15, 40-42	

## CHAPTER XVI

THE QUESTION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST . . . . .	107
MATTHEW XI. 1-19	

## CHAPTER XVII

WARNING AND INVITATION . . . . .	114
MATTHEW XI. 20-30	

## CHAPTER XVIII

TWO SABBATH INCIDENTS . . . . .	122
MATTHEW XII. 1-14	

## CHAPTER XIX

GROWING HATRED TO JESUS . . . . .	129
MATTHEW XII. 22-32, 38-42	

## CHAPTER XX

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER . . . . .	137
MATTHEW XIII. 1-19, 18-23	

## CHAPTER XXI

	PAGE
THE PARABLE OF THE TARES . . . . .	143
MATTHEW XIII. 24-30, 36-43	

## CHAPTER XXII

PICTURES OF THE KINGDOM . . . . .	149
MATTHEW XIII. 31-33, 44-52	

## CHAPTER XXIII

THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST . . . . .	156
MATTHEW XIV. 1-12	

## CHAPTER XXIV

THE MULTITUDE FED . . . . .	163
MATTHEW XIV. 13-21; XV. 29-39	

## CHAPTER XXV

JESUS WALKS ON THE SEA . . . . .	170
MATTHEW XIV. 22-36	

## CHAPTER XXVI

THE CANAANITISH WOMAN . . . . .	175
MATTHEW XV. 21-28	

## CHAPTER XXVII

PETER'S CONFESSION . . . . .	181
MATTHEW XVI. 13-28	

# CONTENTS

xi

## CHAPTER XXVIII

	PAGE
THE TRANSFIGURATION . . . . .	187
MATTHEW XVII. 1-8, 14-20	

## CHAPTER XXIX

A LESSON ON FORGIVENESS . . . . .	194
MATTHEW XVIII. 21-35	

## CHAPTER XXX

JESUS ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM . . . . .	200
MATTHEW XIX. 1-2, 13-26	

## CHAPTER XXXI

THE LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD . . . . .	208
MATTHEW XX. 1-16	

## CHAPTER XXXII

JESUS NEARING JERUSALEM . . . . .	215
MATTHEW XX. 17-34	

## CHAPTER XXXIII

JESUS ENTERING JERUSALEM . . . . .	221
MATTHEW XXI. 1-17	

## CHAPTER XXXIV

TWO PARABLES OF JUDGMENT . . . . .	228
MATTHEW XXI. 33-45	

## CHAPTER XXXV

	PAGE
THE KING'S MARRIAGE FEAST . . . . .	235
MATTHEW XXII. 1-14	

## CHAPTER XXXVI

THREE QUESTIONS . . . . .	241
MATTHEW XXII. 15-22, 34-46	

## CHAPTER XXXVII

THE LESSON OF WATCHFULNESS . . . . .	247
MATTHEW XXIV. 32-51	

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS . . . . .	254
MATTHEW XXV. 1-13	

## CHAPTER XXXIX

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS . . . . .	260
MATTHEW XXV. 14-30	

## CHAPTER XL

THE LAST JUDGMENT . . . . .	267
MATTHEW XXV. 31-46	

## CHAPTER XLI

	PAGE
THE ANOINTING OF JESUS . . . . .	274
MATTHEW XXVI. 1-16	

## CHAPTER XLII

THE LAST SUPPER . . . . .	280
MATTHEW XXVI. 17-30	

## CHAPTER XLIII

PETER'S DENIAL . . . . .	287
MATTHEW XXVI. 31-35, 69-75	

## CHAPTER XLIV

JESUS IN GETHSEMANE . . . . .	295
MATTHEW XXVI. 36-56	

## CHAPTER XLV

THE TRIAL OF JESUS . . . . .	302
MATTHEW XXVI. 57-68	

## CHAPTER XLVI

THE CRUCIFIXION . . . . .	308
MATTHEW XXVII. 15-50	

## CHAPTER XLVII

THE RESURRECTION . . . . .	314
MATTHEW XXVIII. 1-20	

## CHAPTER I

### THE WISE MEN AND THE CHILD

*Read Matthew I., II.*

THE Gospel of Matthew begins with a genealogy. Then comes the story of the birth and infancy. Jesus was born at Bethlehem. This was the most wonderful event of human history—the coming of the Son of God in human flesh into this world. Love was born that night. True, there was love in the world before. Mothers loved their children. Friend loved friend. Natural affection was common. But the love which we know as Christian love had its beginning in the birth of Jesus Christ. It is well for us to note, however, that the historical event of Christ's birth is not that which saves us. He must be born again in us.

“Though Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born,  
If He's not born in thee, thy soul is all forlorn.”

This greatest event in history made little stir in the world. Usually when heirs to a throne are born whole realms ring with joy. But when the

Messiah was born there was no earthly rejoicing. A few humble shepherds came and looked with wonder on the new-born Babe that lay in the young mother's arms—but that was all. The Jews had been looking for their Messiah, but did not recognise Him when He came. His advent was quiet. There was no blare of trumpets. Noise and show are not necessary accompaniments of power. The mightiest energies in this world are oftentimes the quietest. The grace of God always comes quietly. Angels minister noiselessly. The most useful Christians are not those who make the most ado at their work, but those who in humility and simplicity, unconscious of any splendour in their faces, go daily about their work for their Master.

We cannot understand just how the wise men were led to Jerusalem. They said they saw the King's star in the East and were led by it. There has been a great deal of speculation as to the character of this star, whether it was a natural or a supernatural appearance. But no matter—whatever it was, it led these men to the feet of Christ. Even the faintest glimmerings of spiritual light should be welcomed by us and their guidance accepted. We should not wait to know all about Christ, and to see Him in all His glory, before we set out to seek Him. We should follow the first faint gleams, and then as we go on the light will brighten, and we shall see more and more of Him, until at length we behold Him in all His blessed beauty, face to face.

Certainly there is no one in Christian lands in these days who does not have a great deal more light to guide him to the Christ than these wise men had.

The Herods have an unenviable record in New Testament history. When this Herod, Herod the Great, heard the inquiries of the wise men, he was greatly troubled. Hearing of Christ does not always bring joy. It brought gladness to the humble shepherds and to the wise men, but to Herod it brought great distress. Christ's name makes bad men think of their sins and then of the judgment. It is only when we see Christ and want to have Him for our Friend that the thought of Him is sweet and pleasant. "For you therefore that believe is the preciousness." Those whose faith is fixed upon Him are never terrified by thoughts of Him.

Herod, unable himself to answer the question of the wise men, turned to the scribes and asked them where the Messiah should be born. It did not take them long to give the answer. They could even give chapter and verse, and could tell the very name of the town in which the Messiah was to be born. These facts were all down in their books. Yet we do not see that they made any use of their knowledge. They could tell the wise men where the Christ was to be born, but they did not themselves take one step toward Bethlehem to search for Him, when they learned of His birth there. Most of us know our Bible well, and can tell others glibly enough where and how to find the Christ. But have



we ourselves gone to the place where He is, to search for Him and to worship Him?

The scene when the wise men found the Child-king was very beautiful. They saw only a little baby lying in a young mother's arms. There was no crown on His head. No glory gleamed from His face. His surroundings were most unkingly, without pomp or brilliance. The child did nothing before them to show His royalty—spoke no word, wrought no kingly act of power. Yet the wise men believed and worshipped Him. Think how much more we know about the Christ than they did. It is easy for us to find kingly marks in Him. Shall we be behind the wise men in our adoration?

The wise men did more than adore—they opened their treasures and offered gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh which they had brought all the way from their own home. The sincerity of their worship was thus attested by the costliness of their gifts. The treasures they had brought were of great value—the most costly things they could find, the best they had to give. It is not enough to give Christ a homage that costs nothing. He asks for our gifts, the offerings of our love, our service, the consecration of our lives. Giving is the test of loving—the measure of our loving is what we are willing to give and sacrifice.

There are many ways of laying our offerings at the feet of Jesus Christ. He Himself does not need our money, but His cause needs it. The extension of His kingdom in this world at home and abroad

requires money, and this must be brought by His followers. Those who have no interest in the saving of others, in the sending of the Gospel to those who have it not, have not themselves really tasted of the love of Christ.

## CHAPTER II

### JOHN, THE FORERUNNER OF JESUS

*Read Matthew III., 1-12*

THE time of John's coming was not accidental. It was "in those days,"—that is, when Jesus was still living in Nazareth. Jesus was now about to begin His public ministry and John was ready to go before Him to prepare the way for Him. Every man is made for his own time and work. John would not have fitted in at any other date in the world's history.

John is not a very attractive person to our modern Christian eyes. He appears harsh, rugged and stern, and we think of gentleness and kindness as ideal traits in a beautiful life. But there is need for stern, rugged men in Christ's kingdom as well as for kindly, tender-hearted men. The storm has its ministry as well as the sunshine, winter its mission as well as summer, John the Baptist his work as well as John the beloved disciple.

John came "a man, sent from God," a man with a message. He preached in the wilderness—not in the temple courts, nor in the synagogues, but away

from the common haunts of men—and the people flocked to hear him. The burden of John's preaching was in one word—"Repent." This is not the Gospel, but it is a call which goes before the Gospel. We must repent before we can receive forgiveness. We are in danger of making religion too easy a matter, and of being altogether too patient and tolerant with ourselves. Christ does not come to an unrepentant heart. We must make sure, too, that we do thorough work in our repenting. Repentance is not merely a little twinge of remorse over something wrong. It is not simply a burst of tears at the recollection of some wickedness. Nor is it shame in being found out in some meanness, uncleanness, or dishonesty. Confess and turn from your sins, is the meaning of the call. Repentance is the revolution of the whole life. Sins wept over must be forsaken and given up. Repentance is a change of heart, a turning the face the other way. It is well for us to make diligent quest and be sure that we abandon the wrongdoing we deplore, that we quit the course we regret, that we turn away from the sin we confess. He who bewails a sin and confesses it, secretly intending to return to it again, has no good ground to hope that he is forgiven.

The kingdom of heaven was at hand, John declared. What did he mean? He did not mean heaven, but a life on the earth in which heaven's kingdom ruled. The preacher meant that the King had come and was about to declare Himself. They were to repent to be ready to receive Him. When

we pray, "Thy kingdom come," we ask that heaven's rule and heaven's life may come into our hearts, our homes, our lives, our community.

John was not as anxious to have his name blazoned before men as some people are. He was spoken of and speaks of himself as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." The Bible does not trouble to attach men's names to every little piece of work they do. It matters little whether we are mentioned or not in connection with the things we do for the Master. It is just as well to be an anonymous "voice," speaking well for Christ, as to be known as some famous doctor. At least the Christian worker who always strives to keep his name before people lacks somewhat at least of the mind that was in Christ.

Part of John's commission was to make straight paths for Christ's feet, paths to reach men's homes and hearts. He will never go in any crooked paths, and if we wish Him to walk with us we must see that the paths are straight. All sin's ways are crooked. That is what iniquity means, inequities, unequal ways. The only straight ways are those which run along the lines of God's commandments. The great railroads are continually getting the curves out of their tracks, to make them straight, that trains may run more rapidly. They spend millions in straightening their tracks. Are there any crooked ways in our lives? If so, they should be made straight, that the feet of Christ may run easily and swiftly in them.

John was a sensationalist. He did not wear the dress of other men. He was like Elijah in his garb. The old prophet was girt with a girdle of leather about his loins; the new prophet, too, had his raiment of camel's hair and wore a leathern girdle. His food was that of the very poor—locusts, roasted, boiled or baked, and wild honey. His poverty was not affected but was real, a symbol of his sincere unworldliness. He was sent from God, God's messenger, not man's.

John did not spare the people to whom he preached. Among his hearers were the great men of the nation, but as he looked into their faces he knew that their hearts were full of sin, and he called upon them to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. They must prove by putting away their sins that their confession was genuine. It will not be enough to tell people we are Christians—they will wait to see the evidence of it in our lives. If a man, hitherto living an evil life, unites with the church on Sunday and goes back Monday morning to his worldly ways, will his neighbours credit his Sunday's profession? The heart is the important member in all spiritual life, but the heart makes the life; and if the life be evil, the heart has not been changed. The way to prove that we have really repented is really to repent, and then the fact will speak for itself.

Throngs flocked to hear the great preacher of the wilderness—"Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about the Jordan." Confession of sin

was the gate of admission to baptism. Baptism meant cleanness—its necessity implied uncleanness, but the after life was white.

But John saw some coming for baptism whose sincerity he had reason to doubt. Some of them thought they could get into the kingdom of heaven on their genealogy. They belonged to the family of Abraham, and thought this was sufficient. But John assured them that they must have more than good ancestry to commend them. God, he told them, could not be mocked. The ax was lying at the root of the trees to cut down every one on which fruit was not found. The picture is very striking. An ax leaning against a tree implies warning and also patience—delay to see if the tree will yet prove fruitful. But the delay is not to be forever. The ax at the tree's root suggests, also, thorough work—not pruning, merely, to make the tree more fruitful—the time for that is past—but judgment. We are the trees. If we are fruitless and useless, not living up to our privileges and opportunities, not filling well our place in the world, the ax is lying beside us, warning us that only God's patience spares us, and the time for cutting down will soon be at hand.

The humility of John appears in all the story of his life. He claimed no greatness. The coming of throngs to his preaching did not turn his head. He knew the secondary importance of his part in the work—he baptised only with water and water could cleanse only the outside. The real work would be

done by one who could baptise the heart. Washing the body is a good thing, but it does not make one morally better, does not improve one's character. The change which will make a life like Christ's must take place in the heart, and can be produced only by the Spirit. Water baptism is right as an ordinance and as an emblem of the inner cleansing; but if we depend upon it for salvation, without submitting ourselves to the Divine Spirit, we shall find our trust in vain.

John foretold the work of the Messiah as one of separation. He would gather the wheat into his garner, the chaff he would burn up with unquenchable fire. There is a great difference between wheat and chaff. Wheat has life in it. Wheat grains drop into the earth, grow, and yield a harvest. Wheat is food; it makes bread and satisfies hunger. Wheat is valuable; it is highly prized in the market. But chaff has no life in it; it does not grow, and only rots in the ground. It is not food; it satisfies no hunger. It is of no value; nobody buys chaff, and it is good only to throw away or to burn. What sadder thing is there in this world than a human life made to be golden wheat, to feed men's hunger, yet proving only worthless chaff?



## CHAPTER III

### THE BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION OF JESUS

*Read Matthew III., 13 to IV., 11*

THE beginning of Christ's ministry was marked by two important events—His baptism and His temptation. There were thirty silent years, without any manifestation of Divine power save the beautiful, sinless life which Jesus lived. We must think of those years, however, as part of the Incarnation. The Divine character was revealed not only in miracles and heavenly teachings, but in sweet, beautiful living.

John said that he was not worthy to unloose the shoes of the Coming One. Now when he recognises this glorious One waiting before him to be baptised, he shrinks from the performance of the rite. He would have refused. "I have need to be baptised of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" But Jesus insisted on receiving baptism from John. "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." The words are full of meaning. The event was of great importance in the life of Jesus.

For one thing, it was the identifying of Himself

with humanity. He stood for us men and our redemption. He had no sin, but His people were sinful and He died for them. It was also the acceptance by Jesus of His Messianic work. The years of preparation were ended, and the time had come for Him to begin His public ministry. The call came, bidding Him turn away from His quiet life and manifest Himself to His people. We can think of Him shutting up the carpenter's shop and leaving it forever. Then He stood before the Baptist at the Jordan and was baptised. He had a glimpse that hour of all that lay before Him in His Messianic ministry. The shadow of the cross fell upon the green banks and on the flowing water, fell also upon the gentle and lowly soul of Jesus as He stood there. He knew for what He was being baptised—the mission of redemption. We do not know to what we are devoting ourselves, what our consecration may mean, when we stand up and give ourselves to God. In a certain sense we go forth in the dark. Yet we may trust God with the guidance of our lives and should devote ourselves to the will of God without question or condition.

John obeyed the wish of Jesus and baptised Him. The baptism of Jesus became the occasion of a Divine testimony to His Sonship. Luke tells us that as He was being baptised He prayed, and as He prayed the heavens were opened unto Him. Prayer brought down upon Jesus the Holy Spirit. This was Heaven's answer to Christ's consecration. This was the Divine anointing for His public ministry.

## 14 BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION OF JESUS

Instead of a horn of oil poured upon His head, the mere emblem of grace, He received all the fulness of the Spirit. The Spirit came in the form of a dove. It is usual to think of the dove as in its nature in some way a symbol of the character and disposition of the Spirit. Dr. Horton quotes an old commentator: "The bird (the dove) is a lover of men and bears ills patiently; for, robbed of its young, it endures and lets the robbers approach it just the same; it is the purest of creatures and delights in sweet odour." The first mention of the dove in the Bible is as a messenger of good news, bearing an olive leaf. An old legend relates that when Jesus was dying a dove sat on the cross above His head, and the legend has been interpreted to mean that even after the blood of the Lamb of God was given to redeem the world, it is needful that the Spirit shall come to soften men's hearts and incline them to yield to God.

There was another manifestation at the baptism—first, the open heavens, second, the descending of the Spirit, then a voice. The voice was the testimony of the Father to His Son. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." From Matthew's account it would seem that the voice spoke to the people, declaring to them that Jesus was the Messiah. From Luke's Gospel it would appear that the words were spoken to Jesus Himself, assuring Him of His mission and of the Father's pleasure in Him. This was the real, the inner

meaning of the baptism of Jesus. From this time His consciousness of Messianic authority was clear.

After this came the temptation. It was necessary that Christ should be tempted before He offered Himself as the Redeemer of the world. The first Adam was tried in Eden and failed. The second Adam must also be put to the test before he could go forth as Lord of men. Several reasons may be suggested why He must be tempted. One was because He was human and must meet every human experience. His temptations were real—He “suffered being tempted.” Another reason was that until He had met and overcome the tempter He was not ready to offer Himself to men as a strong and victorious Saviour. The Spirit is not the tempter, but it is said expressly that Jesus was led by the Spirit, driven, Marks says, to be tempted. He must be tried, tested, proved, before He went forth to His Messianic work. We know now that Christ is able to deliver us out of the hands of Satan and to defend us against his fiercest assaults. But if He had not Himself been put to the test, in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, we could not have had this perfect confidence. Another reason why Jesus was tempted was that He might understand from personal experience the nature and power of His people’s temptations and thus be able to sympathise with them in their struggles. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told that because of His earthly experience of tempta-

## 16 BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION OF JESUS

tion He can now in heaven be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

There are practical lessons we may learn from this narrative of our Lord's temptation. One is that Satan times his temptations to our hours of weakness or our periods of special stress. He does not tempt us with something we do not want, but with something that appeals to our cravings at the time. Jacob could not have bought Esau's birth-right for a thousand messes, of pottage if Esau had not been hungry that day. Satan watches, and when he finds us exhausted and weary, he takes advantage of our condition. He comes to the boy when he is lonesome and homesick, tempting him to seek companions that will ruin him.

Jesus was hungry after His long praying and fasting, and Satan tempted Him to use His Divine power to turn stones into bread. Many temptations come to people who are hungry. They are tempted to be dishonest, to take employment that is sinful, or in some other way to sell themselves to get bread. We need to be watchful against the tempter always, but especially in the times of our weakness and craving.

Why would it have been wrong for Jesus to exert His Divine power to provide bread for His hunger? Is it wrong to feed one's hunger? Jesus afterwards made bread by miracle to feed the hunger of thousands. Why would it have been a sin for Him to supply bread in this supernatural way for Himself when He was hungry? For one thing, it would

have been receiving direction from the Evil One instead of from His Father. Another reason was that He was in this world to live as men live. If He had used His Divine power to help Himself over the hard points of human experience, He would not have understood our life, for we cannot do this. Therefore, He never wrought a miracle for Himself. He met life just as we must meet it, enduring hunger, thirst, weariness, pain, wrong, without having recourse to supernatural power. Still further, it would have been distrusting His Father for Him to make bread of the stones. He was under the Divine care, and God had given Him no command to turn stones into bread. He must wait till His Father provided for His hunger.

The answer of Christ to Satan's temptation is very suggestive. He said that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. Our physical wants are not our only wants. Sometimes men excuse their sin by saying, "Well, I must live," as if hunger excused theft or fraud. But it is not true that we must continue to live, or that living is in itself the best thing for us. It is true, however, that we must obey God's commandments and do His will. We would better any day starve than commit even the smallest sin to get food. Getting bread should not be our first object in living,—indeed, it is not our business at all. Life's first duty is to obey every word of God, and then God will provide for our wants.

The second temptation was to presumption. The

## 18 BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION OF JESUS

tempter asked Christ to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, quoting a word from an old Psalm to prove that He would not be hurt, but that God would take care of Him. Thus, the tempter whispered, He would prove to the people that He was their Messiah. What would have been wrong in this? Jesus said it would have been tempting God. If the Father for any reason had commanded Him to leap from the pinnacle into the street, then He could have claimed the promise of protection. But if He had thus accepted the suggestion of the tempter, the promise would have been void. We cannot claim protection in danger which we enter without the Divine bidding. Only when God sends us and guides us do we have the Divine shelter about us.

The third temptation was the boldest of all. Christ had just entered upon His public ministry, and at the end of it He saw the cross. Satan suggested to Him the worldly way of honour and power instead of the lowly way of suffering, sacrifice and shameful death. This temptation Satan uses continually with men. He shows them visions of wealth, of worldly success, and says: "Now this all may be yours—I will give it all to you. True, you must give up some of your old notions. You must get over some of your scruples. But throw these away and this door is open to you, and see where the path leads—to all yon splendour and brilliance. You will be a millionaire. You will go to Parliament. You will have all the pleasure you want."

Too many people yield to this temptation. The old ways of prayer, obedience, simple honesty and faithfulness, seem dull in contrast with the flowery paths which the vision shows. Yes, but we must look on to the end, beyond the glamour of the tempter's vision, before we can conclude that what Satan promises will be a good thing for us.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE BEGINNING OF THE GALILEAN MINISTRY

*Read Matthew IV., 12-25*

IN Matthew's Gospel the story of the first months of our Lord's public ministry is omitted. Several chapters of John's Gospel come in between verses 11 and 12 of Matthew's fourth chapter. The mission of John the Baptist was to go before Christ and prepare His way. When he had done this, introducing Him to the people, John's work was really ended. But he continued to preach for some months until he was arrested by Herod and cast into prison. Then it was that Jesus went into Galilee. Why He did this we are not told. Some suppose it was to avoid John's fate, but this scarcely seems a sufficient reason. Indeed, in Galilee he would be nearer to Herod than in Jerusalem. Is it not more likely that it was just because John was now shut up in prison and his voice silenced that Jesus went to Galilee? John had spoken of Jesus coming after him, and He came at once and began to speak.

He dwelt in Capernaum. At that time Caper-

naum was an important city on the Sea of Galilee. Now nobody knows certainly what its site was. It was a city of wonderful privilege. For a long time Jesus made His home there. It was exalted to heaven in thus having the Son of God walk on its streets, speak His blessed words to its people, and do His works of mercy and love in its homes of suffering and sorrow. But in spite of all this honour and favour shown to Capernaum, Jesus was rejected there.

Matthew tells us that it was in fulfillment of prophecy that Jesus went to Capernaum. He was needed there. It was a region of moral and spiritual darkness. It is such places that always draw Jesus. Human need in every form appeals to His compassion. When men travel over the world they usually visit regions in which they will see scenes of beauty, of grandeur, of wonder. But Jesus was in this world to do good, to save the lost, to change wildernesses into gardens of roses, and He went where there was the greatest need, the deepest darkness. Churches sometimes move away from sections of cities which have been emptied of prosperous homes and the attractions of fashion. Whatever may be said of the expediency of following the drift of population with our churches, we need to beware of abandoning decaying communities, of taking away from the people who remain the blessings of the Gospel. Jesus did not go into Galilee as a sightseer, but as a missionary. He was a teacher come from God to tell the people of the love

of God for them. The same words were used of John the Baptist in describing His ministry. Yet there was a great difference in the two men and in their preaching. John spoke sternly and severely. He spoke of the fire, the fan, the ax of the punishment of sin. Jesus came with gentle and winning words.

Yet His first call, like John's, was to repentance. All men need to repent. We never can reach the gates of heaven unless we repent. The prodigal son had to rise and leave the far country, and walk back all the painful way to his father's house, before he could be restored to favour and be at home again. That is what every impenitent man must do. The first step in coming to Christ is repentance.

We must be sure that we know just what this word means. Some persons imagine that if they are sorry for doing wrong they have repented. But sorrow for a wrong way does not take us out of that way. Tears of penitence will not blot out sin; we must turn about and walk in holy paths. Repentance is ceasing to make blots on the record, and beginning to live a fair, clean, white life.

It was a familiar and homely scene which Jesus saw one day as He was walking beside the sea. "He saw two brethren . . . casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers." It is interesting to notice the kind of persons Jesus sought for His disciples. He did not look for great and famous men. He did not go up to the temple and gather about

Him rabbis and priests. He wanted men who were openhearted, ready to listen to the truth and believe it, men who could be influenced by Him for good, whom He could train in the ways of His kingdom.

Jesus is always looking for men who will become His disciples. He has a great work in hand, and needs and calls for helpers. He wants those who will believe His message. He does not take prejudiced men, men whose opinions are so obstinately held that they will not listen to His words nor accept His teachings; He wants teachable men. He does not choose those who are wise in this world's wisdom, for they might not readily accept the wisdom of God which He teaches. Nor does He seek idlers. He goes among those who are busy in the duty of the day. He found a king for Israel in a boy who was keeping sheep. He found a prophet to succeed Elijah in a young man who was plowing in the field. He found a missionary for India in a humble shoemaker, busy at his bench, ready for the Divine call, unable ever to say No to God. If we would be chosen to take a part in Christ's great work we must seek to be ready for it, with heart warm, mind open to receive truth, and ready for any service to which God may call us.

First of all, they must go with Christ. This meant, in their case, leaving their business and attaching themselves to His household. It may not mean that to us—ordinarily we are to continue in the calling in which we are when we give ourselves to Him. But always it means joining ourselves to

Him in heart and life. It means the complete surrendering of the mastership of our lives. No longer are we our own; we belong to Him. We are to go where He bids us to go and do what He bids us to do. We are to think of His interests, not of our own. There can be no serving of Christ, no doing of His work, without first being with Him. "Apart from Me," he said, "ye can do nothing." But with Him, we are ready for any service, any duty, any work, and nothing is impossible to us.

First, they were to be with Him and then He would make them fishers of men. They had been fishers of fish; they were to give up their old calling and take a higher one. The lessons of patience, quiet waiting and persistence which they had learned in their daily and nightly work on the sea would be of use to them in their new duties. They were to fish in the dark waters of sin for perishing men and save them, take them alive. Christ would teach them their new calling—"I will make you fishers of men." It was holy service to which He called them, and calls us. He does not want us to follow Him just for the joy of His salvation and the comfort of His friendship—He wants us to be His that we may win others also to be His.

Instantly these fishermen dropped their tackle and their nets, left everything and went away with their new Master. They were not a moment in deciding. They loved Him, and they were most glad to go with Him. "They straightway left the nets and followed Him." Sometimes the sneer is heard,

“They had little to leave!” True, it was not much in money value. Yet these nets and this fishing business were all they had. It was by these that they got their living. Now at the call of their new Master they gave up all, cut themselves off from means of support, burnt their bridges behind them, and in simple obedience and faith went with Him. That is what we should do when we hear the call of Christ. We should obey instantly, without questioning. No matter how great the sacrifice involved, we should make it cheerfully for His sake. Though to obey cuts us off from our ordinary means of livelihood and leaves us without provision even for to-morrow, we should not hesitate. Christ will take care of His servants when they are faithfully doing His will. The “straightway” is also an important word in the sentence. A great many people are forever postponing duties. When Christ calls, they say, “Yes, to-morrow.” But every call should be answered instantly. Get this “straightway” into all your obedience.

The charge never could be made against Jesus, that He thought only of men’s spiritual needs and neglected their bodily wants. Continually we see Him doing good in common ways and helping people in their common needs. Here He is “teaching,” “preaching,” “healing.” He did not give good advice, exhort people to be true and honest, and then be indifferent to their sufferings. He fed them when they were hungry, opened the eyes of their blind, cured their sick children, healed their diseases.

Always this is the law of Christ's ministry. He cares for our whole being. Every trouble of ours whatsoever, whether of body, mind, or soul, moves Him with compassion.

It is a great comfort to us to know that our Lord is not indifferent to our diseases, that He would use them for our spiritual benefit, that He is ready to give us the grace we need if we endure them patiently and submissively, and that He will heal us when His wise purpose in our affliction has been accomplished. Jesus is the great Healer—He is continually healing all manner of sickness and disease among the people. Wherever the Christian missionary goes, the hospital is set up alongside the chapel. In our church work we should think of men's bodies as well as of their souls, if we would wholly fulfil Christ's mission and purpose.

This picture of Jesus ought also to be a great comfort to all those who are suffering. He is going about everywhere healing. Is He any less strong now than He was then? Does He love us less than He loved the sick people in Galilee? Will He not heal us, too, in the way that is best? In the sick-room of every Christian, Jesus sits, to give cheer. The sufferer may know, as he prays for healing, that his prayer will be heard and answered. Sickness has a mission—it sets lessons for us to learn. It is very unfortunate if one who is sick recovers and is not better in heart and life afterward. We should pray that the sickness may fulfil

its mission in us and for us, and then that we get well.

“The report of Him went forth into all Syria.” No wonder. Such blessed news could not be suppressed. When Jesus healed all the sick people in one town, it could not be otherwise than that the report would fly abroad, reaching other towns. It is not to be wondered at that every one who had a sick friend, hearing about the great Healer, would then want to bring that friend at once to Him. Thousands of people poured out to find Him who had this marvelous power. Whenever Jesus saves a sinner, the news should go out, and others who have unsaved friends should bring them at once to Him. We who know about Christ’s power to heal and save should go everywhere telling the news that those who are in their sins may be roused up to seek Him as their Saviour.



## CHAPTER V.

### TRUE BLESSEDNESS

#### *Matthew V., 1-16*

EMERSON'S advice to Lincoln about hitching his wagon to a star is the lesson Jesus sets for us in the Beatitudes. These blessed shine like stars far above us in their brightness and heavenliness. We may say that we never can reach them and that therefore there is no use in our trying to reach them. But the Master would have us strive after the highest attainments.

It has been noted that if the world would make a set of beatitudes they would be just the reverse of those that Jesus spoke. None of the classes pronounced blessed by Him would be called happy by the world. The poor in spirit, the meek, those who hunger for goodness and holiness, are not the world's favourites. These are not the qualities natural men consider most worthy of quest.

The first beatitude is for the lowly ones. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." This beatitude is not for the poor in an earthly sense, for one may be very poor and yet proud; and one may be rich in worldly

goods and yet be lowly in spirit, in disposition. The Bible everywhere praises humility. God dwells with the humble. Christ refers only once in the Gospels to His own heart, and through the window He opens then it is this picture that we see—"I am meek and lowly in heart." To be poor in spirit is to be rich toward God, while pride of heart is spiritual poverty. Humility is the key that opens the gate of prayer, while to the loud knocking of pride there comes no answer. The kingdom of heaven belongs to the lowly. They may wear no earthly crown, but a crown of glory, unseen by men, rests upon their heads even here.

The second beatitude is for those who mourn. We do not usually regard mourners as blessed. We pity them and think their condition unenviable. Christ, however, has a special beatitude for those who are sorrowful. Probably He means particularly penitent mourners, those who are sorrowful on account of their sins. In all this world there is nothing so precious in the sight of God as the tear of contrition. No diamonds or pearls shine with such brilliance in His sight. It was Jesus Himself who said there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. Truly blessed, therefore, are those who mourn over their sins. They are comforted with the comfort of God's pardon and peace.

But the beatitude refers also to those who are in sorrow. Blessing never is nearer to us than when we are in affliction, if we submit ourselves to God

in love and trust. Some day we shall understand that we have received our best things from Heaven, not in the days of our joy and gladness, but in the time of trial and affliction. Tears are lenses through which our eyes see more deeply into heaven and look more clearly upon God's face than in any other way. Sorrow cleanses our hearts of earthliness and fertilizes our lives. We grow the best when clouds hang over us, because clouds bear rain and rain refreshes. Then God's comfort is such a rich and blessed experience that it is well worth while to endure any sorrow in order to receive it.

The third beatitude is for the meek. Meekness is not a popular quality. The world calls it a craven spirit that leads a man to remain quiet under insult, to endure wrong without resentment, to be treated unkindly and then to give kindness in return. Men of the world say that the disposition of meekness is unmanly, that it shows weakness, cowardice, a lack of spirit. So it might be if we looked to the world for our ideal of manhood. But we have a truer, a Diviner example for our model of manliness than any that this world has set up. Jesus Christ is the only perfect man who ever lived in this world, and when we turn to His life we see that meekness was one of the most marked qualities of His character. He was gentle of disposition, never provoked, patient under wrong, silent under reproach. When He was reviled, He reviled not again. When He suffered, He threatened not. Possessing all power, He never lifted a finger to avenge

a personal injury. He answered with tender love all men's wrath, and on His cross, when the blood was flowing from His wounds, He prayed for His murderers. Meekness is then no craven spirit, since in Christ it shone so luminously. Then it is not an impoverishing, but an enriching, grace. The meek shall inherit the earth.

The fourth beatitude is for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. This, strangely, is a beatitude for dissatisfaction. We know that peace is promised to the Christian, and peace is calm repose and satisfied restfulness. The words hunger and thirst appear to suggest experiences incompatible with rest and peace. But when we think more deeply, we see that spiritual hunger must form a part of all true Christian experience. Hunger is a mark of health. It is so in physical life; the loss of appetite indicates disease. So a healthy mind is a hungry one; when one becomes satisfied with one's attainments, one ceases to learn. In spiritual life, too, hunger is health. If we become satisfied with our condition of faith, love, obedience and consecration, we are in an unhappy condition. There is no growth after that. Ofttimes invalids die amid plenty, die of starvation, not because they can get no food, but because they have no appetite. There are many professing Christians who are starving their souls in the midst of spiritual provision, because they have no hunger. There is nothing for which we should pray more earnestly than for spiritual longing and desire.

The fifth beatitude is for the merciful. Cruelty is opposed to everything Divine and heavenly. All that is unloving is condemned in the Scriptures. Blessing cannot come to the resentful, the unfor-giving, the vindictive, to those who have no sym-pathy with distress, no hand to help human need. In our Lord's picture of the last judgment, in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, those on the right hand are those who have been kind, gentle, patient, thoughtful, ministering to suffering and want. Jesus Himself set an example of mercifulness. His miracles were for the relief of those who were suf-fering.

We must note in this beatitude also that we re-ceive in life what we give—the merciful shall ob-tain mercy. The unmerciful shall find the gates closed upon them when they cry for help. A boy stood before a perpendicular crag, and when he be-gan to shout he heard the echo of his own voice. When he spoke gently, a gentle voice responded. When he spoke angrily, he was answered back in angry tones. It is so in life. Those who show kindness to others receive kindness in return. Those who are bitter, selfish and cruel find this a loveless world to live in.

The sixth beatitude is for the pure in heart. There is no beatitude for anything unclean. There is no room with God for anything that defileth. If we would enter heaven we must prepare for heaven here. To a child who expressed a wonder how he could ever get up to heaven, it was so far away, a

wise mother's reply was, "Heaven must first come down to you; heaven must first come into your heart." Heaven must really be in us before we can enter heaven. Just as we become pure in heart are we made ready for the heavenly life.

But what is heart purity? It is not sinlessness, for none are sinless. A pure heart must be a penitent heart, one that has been forgiven by Christ, cleansed by His grace. It is one also that is kept pure by obedient living and close communion with Christ. An essential part of true religion before God is, to keep one's self unspotted from the world. It is an evil world in which we live, but if we carefully follow our Master, doing His will, keeping our hearts ever open to the influences of the Divine Spirit, we shall be kept, Divinely kept, from the corruption about us. As the lily grows up pure and unstained amid the soiled waters of the bog, so does the lowly, loving, patient heart of a Christian remain pure in the midst of all this world's evil.

The seventh beatitude is for the peacemakers. Too many people are not peacemakers. Some people seem to delight in finding differences between neighbours or friends which they try not to heal, but to widen. Christ's beatitude is for those who seek always to make peace. When we find two persons in danger of being estranged by some misunderstanding, we should seek to get them together and prevent their falling apart. If we would be true peacemakers, we must never be quarrelsome or easily offended. St. Paul says that love is not pro-

voked, that is, it does not take account of little or great hurts, but is patient and forbearing. It is a great thing to be a peacemaker. Of the peacemakers it is said, "They shall be called sons of God."

The eighth beatitude is for those who are "persecuted for righteousness' sake." Some people avoid persecution by conforming to the world, by being very careful never to offend the world. But Christ wants us to be loyal and true to Him whatever the cost may be. Blessing comes upon those who suffer persecution for Christ's sake. St. Paul spoke of the wounds and scars he had received in persecution as marks of Jesus, honourable decorations. We must notice, however, that it is when we are persecuted for righteousness' sake that we get this beatitude. Sometimes people suffer for doing wrong, but the blessing cannot be claimed in this case. It is when we do the will of God and suffer for it that we can claim the Divine blessing.

We are commanded to rejoice and be exceeding glad when called to suffer reproach and injury for Christ's sake. It is not easy to do this, although many Christians have actually rejoiced in pain and trial, so strong was their faith. Ignatius, on his way to Rome to be thrown to wild beasts, wrote exultantly, "Now I am beginning to be a disciple . . . now am I made the fine flour, ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, to be the bread of God."

In two striking figures Jesus showed His disciples what they were to be in the world, how they

were to bless it by the influence of their lives. "Ye are the salt of the earth." You are, by living your new life in the world, to keep it from rotting. This seemed a strange thing to say that day to a little handful of fishermen, but these men and their successors have done just that for the world through the centuries. We know what salt is and what its influence is. We are to be the salt of the earth, not merely in the words we speak, but especially in the influence of our lives. We must take heed therefore that the salt we are does not lose its savour, its power to bless. We must make sure that the world is purified, sweetened and made better in every way by our living in it.

"Ye are the light of the world." We are lamps which Christ lights and which are to shine upon the world's darkness for its enlightening. We must remember that the light of heaven can reach other lives and brighten the world only through us. We must see to it, therefore, that the light in us never fails. We must never allow it to be covered up by any bushel. The object of the shining is not to glorify the lamp, but to honour God. We are not to parade our virtues, but to brighten the world and lead men to love our heavenly Father.



## CHAPTER VI

### SOME LAWS OF THE KINGDOM

*Read Matthew V., 17-26; 38-48*

WE are not to think of Christianity as a new religion, distinct from that of the Old Testament. Rather, the one is a development from the other. Jesus was careful to say, "I came not to destroy, but to fulfil." Then He added, "Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished."

This is the law of all life. No particle of matter is ever destroyed. Its form may be changed, but nothing of it passes out of existence. A log of wood may be burned in the fire, but it is not destroyed. Some of it lies in ashes and some of it escapes into the air in the form of smoke and steam and chemical elements, but not a jot or a tittle of the wood has been destroyed. All the wisdom of the ages still exists in the world. The songs men have sung, the words they have spoken, are living in the hearts and lives of our race. Our age is the inheritor of all past ages. Christianity holds all that was good

and true and beautiful in Judaism. Jesus destroyed nothing of the religion of Moses. He was the fulfillment of all the prophecies. What went before Him was blossom; in Him the fruit appeared. The blossom was not destroyed—it only fell off because it had fulfilled its purpose.

The Old Testament is not antiquated and outgrown. It, too, is the word of God. Wherever we find Divine truth we are to accept it. Of course, there is a difference in the relative importance of Scripture words—there are least and there are greatest commandments, but he who breaks the least has grieved God and sinned against Him. He who obeys every word of God, however small it may seem, has lifted himself up in the rank of God's children.

The Sermon on the Mount teaches the spirituality of all true obedience. The scribes and Pharisees were great sticklers for the letter of the law, but they went little farther. They missed its spirit. They interpreted "Thou shalt not kill" literally as condemning murder, but they did not think of applying it to murderous thoughts. Jesus spoke startlingly, "But I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment." That is, anger is murder. So serious is this interpretation of the law that Jesus says we cannot truly worship God while we have bitterness dwelling in our heart. Hatred must give place to love when we stand before God. If we have wronged another, and the hour of prayer comes with the

wrong yet unrighted, we must stop before the altar, interrupting our worship until we have gone to the one we have wronged and confessed and been forgiven. Perhaps we do not always think how serious an offense to God an unforgiving spirit is. Quarreling is not only ethically unlovely; it is also wickedly and spiritually evil.

Acts are bad, but thoughts are taken note of in the presence of God. There is sin in a lustful look as well as in an unchaste act. Our thoughts have moral quality. Jesus enters into particulars and names certain sins which His disciples should carefully avoid. The Christian life should be without spot or blemish. One lesson He taught was reverence in speech. "I say unto you, Swear not at all." He does not refer to oaths taken in the courts of law, but to profanity in speech. Men were in the habit of swearing by heaven, by the earth, by Jerusalem, or by their own head, by something, always. There is much irreverence in the conversation of many people in our day. Those who indulge in it often do it almost unconsciously. Some people—far too many—are recklessly profane. The profanity one hears in many places, even from the mouths of boys, is shocking. But there are many who think they never use profanity whose speech is full of such forms of oaths as Jesus here refers to. We need to guard against every form of profanity in our speech, however veiled it may be. "Hallowed by Thy name," we say in the Lord's prayer; we should be careful that God's name is always hal-

lowed in our thought and in our conversation also, that it is never used lightly or irreverently.

Jesus made a plea also for simplicity of speech. "Let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one." There is a common tendency to exaggeration and over-emphasis in speech. Many persons always try to say things in a strong and emphatic way. They are not content to say yes or no and stop with that. They rarely tell anything precisely according to the bare facts, but colour even the commonest happenings. It would be a great deal better if we would learn to use simple words without exaggeration of any kind. Some one says, "The more swearing, the more lying." It would be well if we would remember that in speaking we are always overheard by One to whom the least shade of untruth is repulsive, and who is grieved by any profanity.

It was the custom in the old days to return evil for evil, hurt for hurt, injury for injury. "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," was the law. It is the common law yet with too many people. Our hearts urge us to seek revenge, and forgiving injuries is not natural with us. It is a law of the kingdom of heaven, which we are slow in learning. Even many who call themselves Christians claim that they have a right to return evil for evil. A person who returns kindness for unkindness, who does an obliging act for one that was disobliging, is not commended as a manly man. The almost universal feeling is that an offense must be pun-

ished. But that is not the way Jesus teaches us to do when we have been wronged. "I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." We are to endure wrong patiently. We are to forgive those who have injured us.

This is one of the hardest lessons we have to learn in becoming Christians and in the cultivation of the Christian graces. It is hard when others treat us unjustly to keep on loving them and to be ready any moment to do them good. Yet that is the way Jesus Himself did, and He wants us to be like Him. He suffered wrongfully, and went on loving. He taught that we should forgive those who have injured us. When one of His disciples asked Him how often they should forgive others, and suggested seven times as a fair number, Jesus told him that not seven times, but seventy times seven, they should forgive. That is, they should never cease to forgive.

The word of Jesus which tells us that when one compels us to go a mile with him to show him the way and give him help on his journey, we should go two miles, is suggestive of the spirit of all true Christian life. Some people do the best they possibly can do for others. They try to carry out the teaching of love in a very literal fashion. But they never go an inch farther than they are required to go, they never pay a penny more than the law demands. Jesus said, however, that we should cultivate the two-mile religion, doing more than we are

expected to do, going farther in helping others than we are required to go. Love should always abound in us. We are never to measure and calculate our kindness to others, giving just so much and no more. Generosity is to be the law of all our life. Anybody can go one mile with another, but we are to do more than others and go two miles.

The law of love to neighbours was taught in the Old Testament, but, like other Divine teachings which were not easy, the people made their own glosses over the Divine commandment, changing the sense to suit their own natural feelings. They interpreted this ancient law thus, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy." They defined neighbours to include only certain pleasant, congenial people, people who were kind to them, people whom they liked. Jesus taught a higher law. "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you." According to His teaching our neighbour is any one who needs our help. The parable of the Good Samaritan was Christ's own illustration and explanation of the meaning of the commandment to love our neighbour. It was a Jew who was hurt, and lay bleeding by the roadside. It was a hated and despised Samaritan who proved neighbour to him, stopping on his way, at much cost to his own interests, caring for the man, nursing him, and providing a place in which he might recover. No matter who it may be that needs any help, ministry or comfort from us—we are not to ask about his nationality, whether he

has been a good friend to us in the past, or not, or whether he belongs to our set—we are to help him, because he is one of God's children.

The Divine example is referred to in enforcing the lesson. God is kind to the sinner as well as to the righteous man. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." When He finds any one in distress He does not ask who he is. He imparts blessing to all alike. Since God is patient with those who wrong Him and neglect Him, if we are God's children we must show the same spirit.

The Master thus sets the highest standard for His followers. It is not enough for them to be as good as other people are—they must be better. "What do ye more than others?" was His question. Anybody can love those that love him. Anybody will salute those who salute him graciously. The Christian is to do more. "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." We should keep before us always the question, "What do ye more than others?" Christian boys among their mates and friends must not be content to live as the world's boys do—they must do more than they do, they must be better than they are. The Christian carpenter must do his work better than the carpenter who does not know Christ and follow Him. The Christian girl must be more gentle, more patient, more thoughtful, more unselfish, more kind, than worldly girls are, because she belongs to Christ. In all life's affairs, we must remember that having

given ourselves to Christ there rests upon us an obligation for a more beautiful life, for nobler service, for sweeter living, for larger usefulness, for Christlier helpfulness, because we represent our Master, and are called to be perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect.



## CHAPTER VII

### ALMSGIVING AND PRAYER

*Read Matthew VI., 1-15*

IT was characteristic of the Pharisees in our Lord's time that they sought publicity and display for their religious acts. They made their prayers in as conspicuous a way as possible so that the people would observe them, mark their devoutness and be impressed with their fervour and their earnestness. This was one thing in which the disciples of Jesus were told that their religion must differ from that of the scribes and Pharisees.

They were to take heed not to do their righteousness before men. This does not mean that they were not to be good before people—they were to live righteously everywhere. There are many Divine words bidding us to be careful of our conduct in the presence of others. Jesus Himself in this same Sermon said, "So let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father." We are to live all the while so that we shall be blameless, that those watching us, to find fault, shall have no reason for speaking

against us. We are to show always to all men an example which shall honour Christ.

What is forbidden is, that we do our righteousness before others in order to be seen of them. We are to live for the eye of God, to get His praise. Some of those who professed great devoutness in Christ's time, making much show of piety in the presence of men, were in their inner life cruel, unmerciful, grasping and unholy. The lesson Jesus taught was lowly humility, devoutness of heart, a goodness which did nothing for display, but was always and everywhere true, faithful, genuine, thinking only of pleasing God.

One special example in illustration of the lesson Jesus gives is regarding the giving of alms. It was the custom of some of the people in those days to give their alms very ostentatiously. If they did not literally sound a trumpet, announcing their gifts, they at least let all people know that they were contributing to the poor and how much they were contributing. They wanted praise for their generosity. The motive was, not to relieve distress, but to "have glory of men." Jesus says they received their reward. That is, they had the name of being charitable. Their deeds were known and talked about. And the inference is that they had no other reward. They did not give their alms to please God or because they cared for the poor, and so they had no honour from God, and no love from men as their reward.

Jesus teaches in contrast, in a very emphatic way,

the true manner of giving alms. "When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret shall recompense thee." The lesson would seem to be that our doing good to others should be, as far as possible, absolutely in secret. When others need our help in their distress we are not to withhold it, but we are not to speak to others of what we do. We are even, as it were, not to let ourselves know of it. We are to give out of love to those who need to be helped, not humiliating them by making a spectacle of our kindness. Our giving, too, is to be only for the eye of God. Then He will reward us and recompense us.

The lesson is applied still further to prayer. "When ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites: for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men." They do not pray to God at all, and their real desire is not to receive blessings in answer, but to have men think they are very devout. They have their reward—that is, they get what they seek for; men see them. We all need to guard against the performance of our acts of devotion for men's eyes and not for God's.

Jesus does not mean to teach that we are never to pray in the presence of others. Public prayer is a duty. What He is pressing is that we are not to do any religious act to have men see us and think us religious. We are to pray to God only and our

prayer will receive His answer of love and grace. In all our life of love and service the same rule should be observed. We should never seek honour for anything we do. We should shrink from praise and publicity. To show consciousness of our goodness and any worthy service we have done is a blemish. We should hide away rather from praise of men.

Florence Nightingale, having gone like an angel of mercy among the hospitals in the Crimea until her name was enshrined deep in every soldier's heart, asked to be excused from having her picture taken, as thousands begged her to do, that she might drop out and be forgotten and that Christ alone might be remembered as the author of the blessings which her hand had distributed in His name.

"When thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber, and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father." The Pharisees chose public places as their places of private devotion. They wanted people to see how devout they were. Jesus bids us guard against all such display of our religion. He teaches here also the duty of secret prayer. We are to go away alone—other persons about us disturb our thoughts. Then we are to shut the door to keep out all the world, that we may be entirely alone with God. He only is to hear us when we pray, and in Him alone must our dependence be. No one can afford to leave out of his life the daily secret prayer. Jesus went oftentimes apart to meet with God.

The form of prayer which Jesus gave His dis-

ciples was not meant as the only prayer they were ever to use, but as showing the spirit in which they should pray and the scope of their requests. "Our Father who art in heaven." This is the golden gate of prayer. If we enter the temple at all we must enter it as God's children. Of what open and loving access the name Father assures us. We know that He to whom we speak has a father's heart, a father's gentleness, a father's yearning for his child. A true earthly parent withholds from his child nothing that is good, so far as his ability goes. God withholds from His children nothing that is really good. We should learn also from a little child how to pray to God. We should come to Him in simplicity, with childlike confidence, with unquestioning trust, with yearning love.

"Hallowed be Thy name." To hallow is to honour, to make holy. If we pray this prayer sincerely we will hallow the Divine name in our own heart, we will pray with reverence and love. Good Christian people sometimes grow very careless in speaking of God. They become so accustomed to using His sacred name in prayer and conversation that they utter it lightly, as if it were the name of some familiar friend. A miner with black, grimy hand plucks a pure flower from the stem. It seems almost a profanation to touch that beautiful flower with the soiled fingers. But what shall we say to our taking on our unclean lips the holy name of God? We should learn to hallow this blessed name in our speech. Then we should hallow it in our

life. We are God's children and we bear His name. We must take heed that in every act of ours, in our behaviour, in our whole character and influence we should live so that all who see us shall see in us something of the beauty of God.

"Thy kingdom come." God's kingdom is where God is king. In praying this petition we are to think first of our own heart. The one place we can surrender to God is our own life. We cannot surrender our neighbour's heart to God. A mother cannot make God king in the heart of her child. But each one of us is master in his own life and can choose who shall rule in it. In praying "Thy kingdom come," our prayer means nothing at all if it does not first of all invite the Divine King to become our king, to rule in us. Then the prayer widens, and we ask God to set up His kingdom in our home, in our community, then over the whole world.

"Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." Some people always quote this petition as if it meant only submission to some painful providence, as if God's will were always something terrible. They suppose it refers only to losing friends or money, to adversity or calamity, or to being sick or in some trouble. But this is only a little part of its meaning. It is for the doing of God's will, not the suffering of it, that we here pray. Our desire should be always to let God's will be done by us and in us. It is easier, however, to make prayers like this for other people than for ourselves. We

all think others ought to do God's will, and we do not find it a difficult prayer to make that they may do so. But if we offer the petition sincerely, it is a prayer that we ourselves may do God's will as it is done in heaven. We can pray it, therefore, only when we are ready for implicit, unquestioning obedience.

Then it may—sometimes it does—mean the giving up of a sweet joy, the losing of a gracious friend, the sacrifice of some dear presence, the going in some way of thorns and tears. We should learn always to make the prayer and then to hold our life close to the Divine will, never rebelling, nor murmuring, but sweetly doing or bearing what God gives us to do or bear.

“Give us this day our daily bread.” This seems a small think to ask. Why are we not taught to pray for bread enough to last a week, a month, or a year? It seems for one thing that Jesus wanted to teach here the lesson of continual dependence. He taught us to come to God each morning with a request simply for the day's food, that we might never feel that we can get along without Him even for one little day. Another lesson He wanted to teach us was that we should live by the day. We are not to be anxious about to-morrow's needs—we are to think only of to-day's. When to-morrow comes it will be right to seek provision for it and to take up its cares and duties.

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” The first part of this petition is not

hard to pray. But the second part is not so easy. When some one has done us an injury and we are feeling bitter and resentful over it, it is not easy to ask God to forgive us as we forgive. Perhaps we do not forgive at all, but keep the bitter feeling against our brother in our heart; what is it then that we ask God to do for us when we pray, "Forgive us as we forgive?" God has linked blessing and duty together in this petition in an inseparable way. If we will not forgive those who have wronged us, it is evident that we have not the true spirit of repentance to which God will grant remission of sins.

"Bring us not into temptation." We ought never to seek any way in which we shall have to meet temptation. Temptation is too terrible an experience, fraught with too much peril, ever to be sought by us or encountered save when God leads us in the path in which it lies. So if we make this prayer we must go only where duty clearly calls us. If we meet temptation there, God will keep us from evil.



## CHAPTER VIII

### WORLDLINESS AND TRUST

#### *Matthew VI., 19-34*

THE Christian life is very simple if only we understand it. It has only one principle—single-hearted devotion to God. St. Paul stated this principle when he said, "To me to live is Christ." Jesus states it here also when He says, "Seek ye first His kingdom, and His righteousness."

In our present passage we have a whole scheme of life. To begin with, we must find something real and permanent to live for. It concerns the matter of possessions. Earth's banks are not absolutely safe, and if they were they are not eternal. We are immortal and we must find a place of deposit secure for immortal years. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

How can we lay up treasures in heaven? By liv-

ing for God, by committing our lives to Jesus Christ, by spending our money for the glory of God. There are men who possess little money or property when they leave this world, but are rich in treasures laid up in heaven. Paul had only the clothes he wore, an old cloak and a few sacred parchments, when his martyrdom came, but he was rich beyond measure in glory. There are millionaires here who will be beggars in the other life, and there are poor men here who will have an inheritance of glory in heaven.

Single-heartedness is the secret of true life. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Some people seem to think they can keep on safe terms with God and at the same time maintain close relations with the world. The Master's teaching here shows us that it is impossible to be half God's and half the world's. There is room for only one lord in our life, and we must settle who this will be. If we belong to God, the world is our servant. It seems strange indeed that any one with an immortal soul should be willing to have mammon—money—for his god. Money may do much good and be a great blessing if it is used for God, but when a man gets down upon his knees to his money, crawls in the dust for its sake, and sells his manhood to get it, it has only curse for him. One who truly serves God cannot give money half his heart. God will share a human heart with no other lord.

A great many people are talking now about the secret of happy living. The Master gives it here.

“Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious.” Anxiety is very common. There is a great deal of worrying in the world, even among good people. One does not meet very many whose faces shine always with the light of a perfect peace. The majority of faces show lines of care. Not many persons pass undisturbed through all manner of experiences. Is worrying a sin, or is it only an infirmity? There certainly are a great many cautions and warnings in the Bible against worrying.

But how can we help it? St. Paul tells us how to keep it out of our life. “In nothing be anxious.” But how can we obey this counsel? What shall we do with the things that we would naturally worry about? Here is the answer: “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” That is, instead of worrying about matters that would naturally fret us, we are to put them out of our own hands into God’s hands by prayer. Then we have this assurance: “The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.”

It will help us with our lesson if we look carefully at the connection of the words as they stand in the Gospel. “Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious.” That is, anxiety comes from serving mammon. We say we are God’s children, yet when mammon seems to be failing, then we begin to worry. That is, we trust mammon more than we trust our Father.

We feel safer when mammon's abundance fills our hands than when mammon threatens to fail and we have only God. If we truly served God only, we should not be afraid, though we have nothing of mammon, not even bread for to-morrow.

Jesus illustrates His teaching: "Behold the birds of the heaven, . . . your heavenly Father feedeth them." Elsewhere Jesus says that not even a sparrow is forgotten by our Father. The sparrows are the most useless and the most troublesome of all birds. You can buy two of them for a farthing. Yet God watches over them, and not one of them shall fall to the ground without His permission. If God so cares for quarrelsome sparrows, He will care much more for His own children. We are of more value than many sparrows. Two souls are worth more than a thousand farthings—it took the blood of the Son of God to buy us back from bondage. Birds do not bear the Divine image. They have no spiritual nature. The God who cares for the soulless little bird will surely care much more thoughtfully, more tenderly, for a thinking, immortal being, capable of eternal life. God is our Father—He is not the birds' father; He is their creator and provider, but they are not His children. A woman will give more thought to her baby than to her canary. Our heavenly Father will provide more certainly for His children than for His birds.

Worrying is also most useless. "Which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the meas-

ure of his life?" A Chinese philosopher illustrated the uselessness of worry in this way: "The legs of the stork are long, the legs of the duck are short; you cannot make the legs of the stork short, neither can you make the legs of the duck long. Why worry?" A short person cannot, by any amount of anxiety, make himself an inch taller. Therefore, why should he waste his energy and fret his life away in wishing he were taller, and in worrying because he is not?

Worrying about a coming trouble does not keep the trouble away. Worrying over a loss does not bring back that which is gone. People find obstacles, difficulties and hindrances in their life. There are hard conditions in their lot. But is there any use in worrying over these things? Will it make them any easier? Will anxiety cure the lame foot, remove the ugly mole, reduce the undesired corpulency, or put flesh on the thin body? Will fretting make the heavy burden lighter, the hard work easier, the rough way smoother? Will anxiety keep the winter away, put coal in the bin, or bread in the pantry, or get clothes for the children?

Even philosophy shows the uselessness of worrying, since it helps nothing and only wastes one's strength, unfitting one for doing his best. But religion goes farther than philosophy, and tells us that even the hard things, the drawbacks, the obstacles, may be changed into blessings if we meet them in the right spirit. So we learn that we should quietly and with faith accept life as it comes to us,

fretting at nothing, changing hard conditions to easier if we can, but if not, using them as a means for growth and advancement.

The fact that God cares for us ought to keep us from worry. "Why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies." Does God really care for flowers? Yes, He weaves for them their matchless garments and fills their little cups with fragrance. Yet they live but for a day. If God clothes these frail plants so gloriously for only a few hours' beauty, will He not far more surely clothe His own children? It is told of Mungo Park, the great traveler, that once in the desert he was famishing for drink, and could find no water. In his exhaustion he had sunk down in the hot sands in despair, and had given up to die. He saw a tiny shoot of moss growing in the sand, and the thought came to him, "God tends this little plant. He placed it here and He is watering it. Surely, then, He will not forget me, but will provide for me, too." He roused up from his despair and passed on and was saved.

Here we come upon the great central principle of Christian living. "Seek ye first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." That is, we are to put all the energy of our thought and life into one effort—to do God's will. We are not to take thought about our raiment or food—that is God's matter, not ours at all. We are to take thought, however, about our duty, our work, the doing of God's will, the filling of our place in the world. Too many people worry

far more about their food and raiment, lest they shall be left to want, than they do about doing well their whole duty. That is, they are more anxious about God's part in their life than about their own. They fear that God may not take care of them, but they do not have any fear that they may fail in faithfulness to Him.

It will be a great point gained if we learn here once for all that providing for our wants is God's matter, not ours; and that our first and only care should be our duty, the doing of our work. This God will never do for us, but if we are true to Him we shall never have any occasion to fret ourselves about our care. Suppose we are nearly starving? Well, we must go on, doing our duty in the circumstances, and not worrying; and in due time, perhaps at the last moment, but somehow or other, and in some way, the Lord will provide. Or if not, He will take us home.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE GOLDEN RULE

*Read Matthew VII., 1-12*

WHEN some one asked Raphael how he made his wonderful pictures, he replied, "I dream dreams and I see visions, and then I paint my dreams and visions." The teachings of Christ, if reverently received, fill our mind with dreams and visions of spiritual beauty. But there is something we must do if we would receive from these teachings the good they are intended to impart—we must get them wrought into our own life.

The lesson on judging is not an easy one. We may as well confess that most of us are quite prone to the fault which is here reproved. Of course, the teaching is not that we should never have any opinions concerning the actions of others—we cannot avoid having judgments either of approval or disapproval. It is not understood either that we shall never express condemnation of the acts of others; we are required to censure men's evil courses. A little later in this same Sermon on the Mount Jesus bids His disciples beware of false



prophets which come in sheep's clothing, while in reality they are ravening wolves. It is not an easy-going acceptance of all sorts of people that is taught. What we are forbidden to do is to be censorious. Rather, we are to treat others as we would have them treat us.

There are reasons enough why we should not judge others. One is, that it is not our duty. We are not our neighbour's judge. He does not have to answer to us. God is his Master, and to Him he must give account.

Another reason is that God is patient with men's faults, and we represent God. If He bears with a man's shortcomings, surely we should do so, too. He is patient with people in their indifference to Him, in their disobedience, in their selfishness. Should we be more exacting with others than God is? Should we exercise severity where He shows leniency?

Another reason we should not judge others is because we cannot do it fairly. We see but the surface of people's lives. We do not know what has been the cause of the disagreeable features, the faults, we see in them. Perhaps if we knew all we would praise where we condemn. A young man was blamed by his fellow clerks for what they called his stinginess. He did not spend money as they did. They did not know that an invalid sister in another part of the country, shut away in her room, with none but her brother to care for her, received nearly all of his monthly salary.

Another reason for not judging others is that we have faults of our own which should make us silent about the failings of others. When we glibly condemn our neighbour's shortcomings, we assume that we ourselves are without shortcomings. But quite likely we have a beam in our own eye at the very time we are pointing out to our brother the mote in his eye. A mote is a mere speck; a beam is a great log. The meaning is that we make more of a little speck we see on another's life or in his conduct than we make of a very large fault in ourselves. Our first business certainly is with ourself. We shall not have to answer for our brother's faults, but we must answer for our own. It is not our business to look after his blots and blunders, but we must look after our own. We should be severe in dealing with our own faults and then we will be able to help in curing the faults of others.

Another reason against judging is that the law of love requires us to look charitably at the faults and sins of others. "Love covereth a multitude of sins." An artist placed his friend in the chair so that the blemish on one side of his face would not show in the picture. That is the way love prompts us to see our friends and neighbours, and show them to others—exhibiting the noble things in them and throwing a veil over their defects.

Still another reason for not judging others is that when we do we are setting a standard for the judging of ourselves by others. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye

shall be judged." If you criticise others you must expect them to criticise you, and they will. Those who deal gently with the acts of others may expect gentle treatment by others in return. People will give back to you exactly what you give to them.

The Master has more to say here about prayer. The promise is very large. "Ask, and it shall be given you." Thus our Father throws wide open the doors of all His treasure houses. There seems to be nothing of all His vast possessions which He is not ready to give His children for the asking. "All things are yours, and ye are Christ's." We need not try to trim down the promise and yet we must read into it other teachings about prayer. Elsewhere we are taught that in all our praying we must say "Thy will be done." That is, we must submit all our requests to God's love and wisdom. We do not know what things will really be blessings to us. What would not be, our Father will withhold.

We get an important lesson here, too, on the manner of prayer, in the words "ask," "seek," "knock." They teach importunity and growing earnestness. Much that is called praying is not worthy the name—is not praying at all. We have no burning desire, and there is neither importunity nor intensity in our asking. What did you pray for this morning? Do you remember?

The Father-heart of God is unveiled in the words about bread and a stone, a fish and a serpent. It is far more likely to be the other way, however—what

we ask would be a stone to us, would not be a blessing, and God, knowing what we really need, gives us a loaf instead of the stone we cried for. We know certainly that our Father is kinder to His children than earthly parents are to theirs—as much kinder as His love and His ability to give are greater than the largest human love and ability. Yet we must emphasise the words “ask,” “every one that asketh,” etc. Some people never ask and then wonder why they do not receive. Then, we must ask with the highest motives. “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures.” Selfishness in prayer gets no answer.

The Golden Rule, as it is called, is wonderfully comprehensive. It bids us consider the interests of others as well as of ourselves. It bids us set our neighbour alongside of ourself and think of him as having the same rights we have and requiring from us the same fairness of treatment that we give to ourself. It is in effect a practical way of putting the command, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” It gives us a standard by which to test all our motives and all our conduct bearing on others. We are at once in thought to change places with the person toward whom duty is to be determined, and ask: “If he were where I am and I were where he is, how would I want him to treat me in this case?” The application of this rule would instantly put a stop to all rash, hasty actions, for it commands us to consider our neighbour and question our own heart before doing anything. It would

slay all selfishness, for it compels us to regard our neighbour's rights and interests in the matter as precisely equal to our own. It leads us to honour others, for it puts us and them on the same platform, as equal before God, and to be equal, too, before our own eyes. The true application of this rule would put a stop to all injustice and wrong, for none of us would do injustice or wrong to ourselves, and we are to treat our neighbour precisely as if he were ourself. It would lead us to seek the highest good of all other men, even the lowliest and the humblest, for we surely would like all men to seek our good.

The thorough applying of this Golden Rule would end all conflict between labour and capital, for it would give the employer a deep, loving interest in the men he employs and lead him to think of their good in all ways. At the same time it would give to every employé a desire for the prosperity of his employer and an interest in his business. It would put an end to all quarreling and strife in families, in communities, among nations. The perfect working of this rule everywhere would make heaven, for the will of God would then be done on earth as it is in heaven.

## CHAPTER X

### FALSE AND TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

*Read Matthew VII., 13-29*

THERE are two gates—one narrow and one wide—and two ways corresponding thereto. The easy way is not the good way. This is true in a very wide sense. It is true in the life of a child. There is a broad way of indulgence and indolence, but we know where it leads. There is a way of patient obedience in duty, and the end of this is worthy life and noble character. It is true in young manhood and womanhood. There is a way of pleasure, of ease, which leads to unworthy character. There is a way of self-denial, of discipline, of hard work, and this leads to honour. Then there is a broad way of selfishness and sin which never reaches heaven's gates; and there is a way of penitence, of devotion to Christ, of spending and being spent in His service, whose end is a seat beside the King on His throne.

It is a reason for great thankfulness that there is a gate into the spiritual and heavenly life and into heaven at the end. The glorious things are not

beyond our reach. They are high, on dazzling summits, but there is a path that leads to them. We must note, however, that the gate is strait, that is, narrow. Some people have a way of saying that it is very easy to be a Christian. But really it is not easy. It was not easy for the Son of God to prepare the way for us. It was necessary for Him to come from heaven in condescending love and give His own life in opening the way. Jesus said also that any who would reach the glory of His kingdom must go by the same way of the cross by which He had gone. He said that he who will save his life, that is, withhold it from self-denial and sacrifice, shall lose it, and that he only who loses his life—gives it out in devotion to God and to duty—shall really save it. In one of His parables, too, Jesus speaks of salvation as a treasure hid in a field, and the man who learns of the treasure and its hiding-place has to sell all that he has in order to buy the field. In another parable the same truth is presented under the figure of a merchant seeking goodly pearls, who had to sell all his stock of pearls that he might buy the one peerless pearl.

The truth of the difficulty of entrance into the kingdom is put in another way in this Sermon on the Mount. There are two roads through this world and two gates into the other world. One of these ways is broad and easy, with descending grade, leading to a wide gate. It requires no exertion, no struggle, no sacrifice to go this way. The other road is narrow and difficult and leads to a

narrow gate. To go this way one has to leave the crowd and walk almost alone—leave the broad, plain, easy road, and go on a hard, rugged path that oftentimes gets difficult and steep, entering by a gate too small to admit any bundles of worldliness or self-righteousness, or any of the trappings of the old life. If we get to heaven we must make up our minds that it can be only by this narrow way of self-denial. There is a gate, but it is small and hard to pass through.

Jesus forewarned His friends against false prophets who should come to them in sheep's clothing, but who inwardly would be ravening wolves. There is something fearful in the eagerness of Satan to destroy men's lives. He resorts to every possible device. He sends his agents and messengers in forms and garbs intended to deceive the simple-minded and unwary. He even steals the dress of God's own servants in order to gain the confidence of believers and then destroy their faith and lead them away to death. There always are such false teachers and guides. They try to pass for sheep, but the sheep's covering is only worn outside, while inside is the heart of a hungry, bloodthirsty wolf.

Many young people in these times fall under the influence of persons who have caught smatterings of skeptical talk which they drop in the form of sneers or mocking queries into the ears of their confiding listeners. They laugh at the simple old cradle faiths which these young Christians hold, calling them "superstitions." Then they go on to



cast doubt upon, or at least to start questions about, this or that teaching in the Bible, or to caricature some Christian doctrine and hold it up in such a light as to make it look absurd. Thus these "false prophets" poison the minds of earnest young believers, and oftentimes destroy their childhood faith and fill them with doubt and perplexity.

Jesus makes it very plain in His teaching that not profession but obedience is the test of Christian life. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father." It is not enough to believe in Christ, intellectually, even to be altogether orthodox in one's creed. It is not enough to seem to honour Christ before men, praying to Him and ascribing power to Him. Jesus tells us that some at least who thus seem to be His friends, publicly confessing Him, shall fail to enter the heavenly kingdom.

Why are these confessors of Christ kept out of the heavenly kingdom? What are the conditions of entrance into this kingdom? The answer is given very plainly. Those alone enter the kingdom who do the will of the Father who is in heaven. No confession, therefore, is true which is not attested and verified by a life of obedience and holiness. "Simply to Thy cross I cling" is not all of the Gospel—it is only half of it. No one is really clinging to the cross who is not at the same time faithfully following Christ and doing whatsoever He commands. To enter into the kingdom of heaven is to

have in one's heart the heavenly spirit. We must do God's will. We cannot have Christ for Saviour until we have Him also as Master. We pray, "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." If the prayer is sincere, it must draw our whole life with it in loving obedience and acquiescence to the Divine will.

The illustration at the close of the Sermon on the Mount makes the teaching very plain. "Every one therefore that heareth these words of Mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock." Everything turns on the doing or not doing of God's word. Both the men here described hear the words, but only one of them obeys, and thus builds on the impregnable foundation. These two houses were probably very much alike when they were finished. Indeed, the house on the sand may have been more attractive and more showy than the house built farther up on the hillside. The difference, however, lay in the foundations.

There were two kinds of ground. There was a wide valley, which was dry and pleasant in the summer days, when these men were looking for building sites. Then away above this valley were high, rocky bluffs. One man decided to build in the valley. It would cost much less. It was easy digging and the excavations would be less expensive, for the ground was soft. Then it was more convenient also, for the bluffs were not easy of access. The other man looked farther ahead, however, and de-

cided to build on the high ground. It would cost a great deal more, but it would be safer in the end.

So the two homes went up simultaneously, only the one in the valley was finished long before the other was, because it required much less labour. At last the two families moved into their respective residences and both seemed very happy. But one night there was a great storm. The rains poured down in torrents until a flood, like a wild river, swept through the valley. The house that was built on the low ground was carried away with its dwellers. The house on the bluff, however, was unharmed.

These two pictures explain themselves. He who built in the valley is the man who has only profession, but who has never really given his life to Christ, nor built on Him as the foundation. The other man who built on the rock is he who has true faith in Christ, confirmed by loving obedience. The storms that burst are earth's trials which test every life—the tempests of death and of judgment. The mere professor of religion is swept away in these storms, for he has only sand under him. He who builds on Christ is secure, for no storm can reach him in Christ's bosom.

## CHAPTER XI

### JESUS, THE HEALER

*Read Matthew VIII., 2-17*

AFTER the Sermon on the Mount, we have narratives of many healings. The first was that of a leper. The case was remarkable because the disease was loathsome, contagious and incurable. The leper's cry to Jesus was very earnest. He worshipped Him and said, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." He had no doubt of Christ's power to cure him,—“Thou canst,”—but he seems uncertain regarding His willingness to do it. Instantly came the answer, “I will.” As He said this He reached out His hand and touched him. Straightway the cure was wrought. The man was ready to go back again to his home and to take his place once more in society. Marvelous was the touch of Christ always. It never took defilement; it was so full of health that it cleansed the utmost loathsomeness. The same touch that changed the leper's flesh into cleanness changes the worst lives into whiteness and wholeness.

The next act of healing was wrought on a slave.

A Roman centurion had a servant who was very sick and a great sufferer. Somehow the centurion had heard of Jesus and the wonderful works He was doing, and he went to Him beseechingly and told Him of his trouble. We learn much about this soldier from seeing him at Jesus' door. He was greatly distressed, and yet it was not his child that was sick—it was only his slave. This tells us what kind of a man the centurion was—he had a gentle heart. All of us are continually betraying ourselves through the little windows of our common, unconscious acts. By the way a boy treats his dog or his pony, or birds and insects, especially by his treatment of his sisters, and by his manner toward his playmates, and toward the poor and the weak, he is showing what is really in him.

We see here also the immortality of good deeds. It is sweet to be remembered, long after one has passed out of life, by what one has done. It was a great while ago that this centurion went on his errand, but here we find his gentle deed set down among the memorials of Christ's own life. Ages since, a beautiful fern leaf grew in a shaded valley, and as it fell it sighed that it would have no memorial. But the other day a man of science broke off a piece of rock, and there his eye traced

“Leafage, veining, fibres, clear and fine,—  
And the fern's life lay in every line.”

So it is that good deeds are kept in memory. This one of the centurion's is found imbedded on a Gos-

pel page. Every good deed done in Christ's name is recorded in God's books and on human lives. It is worth while, therefore, to train our hearts to gentle thoughts and our hands to gentle deeds.

Jesus received the Gentile soldier most graciously and said at once He would accompany him home and heal the servant. Here we have a revelation of the heart of Christ. He was quick to respond to every cry of suffering. It will greatly help us in our thoughts of Christ in heaven, to remember that He is the same now that He was while on the earth. He is still quick to hear our prayers and respond to our requests. His heart is yet tender and full of compassion toward pain. The Gospel pages are not records of what Christ was, but glimpses of what He is.

Another lesson here is for ourselves. It is said that Dr. Livingstone rarely ever offered a prayer, even in his early Christian life, in which he did not plead to be made like Christ in all his imitable perfections. This should be the daily prayer of every Christian. We should seek to have Christ's great kindness of heart. The world is full of suffering and we ought to seek in all possible ways to give comfort, relief or help. We have power to scatter happiness, to relieve distress, to give cheer and hope. We may not be able to heal diseases, but we can love people in Christ's name, and give them courage and strength to go on with their troubles and be happy.

But the centurion shrank now in his lowliness

from having Jesus enter his home. This was true humility. We cannot truly see Christ and not be humbled. The reason we are so proud and self-conceited is because we do not see Him. If our eyes but beheld Him in the glory and splendour of His Divinity, all our vain pretensions would instantly shrivel. We should look at Christ with long, loving gaze until a sense of His Divine greatness fills our hearts.

Another thing here to be noted is the centurion's conception of Christ. He thought of Him as a great Commander with all the forces of the universe under Him. The soldier knows only one duty—to obey—and all these forces know only to obey Christ. Christ is the Commander of the army of the universe—"Captain of the Lord's host." The stars and planets are under Him and obey Him, all winds and tempests and all the powers of nature are subject to His sway. All diseases, all events, come and go at His word. This ought to give us great confidence in the midst of dangers of whatsoever kind. Diseases and pestilences are only Christ's soldiers. They are obedient to His will and can never transcend it nor go contrary to it. They can go only where and as far as He sends them. Death is one of His soldiers, too, and can do only His command. Why then should we dread death, since it is the obedient servant of our King? So of all events and occurrences—they are but the messengers of our Master and cannot harm us. It was not necessary for Jesus to go to the centurion's house to heal

his slave. He had only to speak the word, and the illness would obey Him and flee away.

The centurion's great faith wrought a great cure. "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." Blessing depends upon faith, the measure of blessing upon the measure of faith. Little faith gets little help. We have all God's fulness from which to draw, and there can be no limit to our receiving save the capacity of our believing. It is because we have such small faith that the answers to our prayers are so meagre. If we prayed for our friends as the centurion prayed for the healing of his servant, there would be more conversions.

The next case of healing was wrought in the home of one of the disciples. Jesus blesses homes. It was after a Sabbath service in the synagogue. When Jesus entered the house He found the woman lying sick of a fever. We are not told of any request for healing by any of the family. The thought seems to have been the Master's own. He saw her sick and His heart was full of compassion. The record is very beautiful. "He touched her hand, and the fever left her." What strange power has that touch! There are other fevers besides those that burn in people's bodies. There are fevers of the mind, of the soul. There are fevers of discontent, of passion, of ambition, of lust, of jealousy, of envy, fevers of anxiety, of remorse, of despair. All of these, all life's fevers, the touch of Christ has power to heal. Let Him only touch the hot hand



and the fever will flee away and quietness and peace will come.

“The fever left her; and she arose, and ministered unto Him.” She could not minister until the fever was gone. Nor can we minister while life’s fevers are burning within us. But when the fever leaves us we at once arise and begin to serve the Master. It would add immeasurably to our power among men and to the influence of our lives if we would always get the touch of Christ upon our hands at the beginning of each day. Archdeacon Farrar says of his mother: “My mother’s habit was, every day, immediately after breakfast, to withdraw for an hour to her own room, and to spend the time in reading the Bible, in meditation, and in prayer. From that hour, as from a pure fountain, she drew the strength and the sweetness which enabled her to fulfil all her duties, and to remain unruffled by all the worries and pettinesses which are so often the intolerable trial of narrow neighbourhoods. As I think of her life, and of all it had to bear, I see the absolute triumph of Christian grace in the lovely ideal of a Christian woman. I never saw her temper disturbed; I never heard her speak one word of anger, or of calumny, or of idle gossip. I never observed in her any sign of a single sentiment unbecoming to a soul which had drunk of the river of the water of life, and which had fed upon manna in the barren wilderness. The world is the better for the passage of such souls across its surface.” Let other weary mothers wait each morning to get

the touch of Christ before they go to the day's tasks and frets. Then the fevers of life will leave them and they will enter upon a day of quiet peace and gentle ministry.

The closing words of our passage present a most remarkable picture. "When even was come, they brought unto Him many possessed with demons: and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all that were sick." It would seem that there were scores and hundreds healed in one hour.

"At even, ere the sun was set,  
The sick, O Lord, around Thee lay;  
O in what divers pains they met!  
O with what joy they went away!

\* \* \* \*

"Once more 'tis eventide, and we,  
Oppressed with various ills, draw near:  
What if Thy form we cannot see?  
We know and feel that Thou art here.

\* \* \* \*

"Thy touch has still its ancient power;  
No word from Thee can fruitless fall:  
Hear in this solemn evening hour,  
And in Thy mercy heal us all."

## CHAPTER XII

### TWO MIGHTY WORKS

*Read Matthew VIII., 23-34*

JESUS was going out upon the sea. So He entered into a boat and His disciples followed Him. "Behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea." It was not an ordinary gust, but came with a shock as of an earthquake. Yet the boat had gone out at Christ's own bidding, and He Himself was in it. So we learn that even in the way of duty, in the course indicated by the Master Himself and with the Master as companion, there may be great storms. Therefore we are not to regard opposition and difficulties as indications that we are not in the way of duty. Hindrances and obstacles oftentimes are part of God's discipline. We grow in struggle better than in ease. Conflict is good for us. It tries our faith. It teaches us our own weakness and our dependence on God. It develops our powers. Victory is always better than peace. Then we never should be afraid of any storm when we have Christ with us in our boat. The barque which carries Jesus cannot be overwhelmed in the waters.

“He was asleep.” This shows that He was weary. He had been very busy in exhausting labours and His strength was gone. Mark suggests this when he says that the disciples “take Him with them, even as He was, in the boat.” He was not weary of His Father’s service, but He was weary in it. There is a great difference in the two kinds of weariness. There is an Old Testament story of another who slept in a storm, who was weary not in, but of, God’s work, and was fleeing from duty. Jesus was weary and slept the moment His head touched the hard pillow, but it was because He was overwrought. The sleep of Jesus also shows His humanity. He needed rest just as we do. We may be sure that He sympathises with us in all our weariness and faintness. He knows when our work is too hard for us. He does not blame us for being tired in duty, if we are ready, as soon as we are rested, to work again. The provision of sleep is wonderful. Think how it repairs the waste of toil—

“Sleep, that knits up the ravell’d sleeve of care,  
The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,  
Chief nourisher in life’s feast.”

His disciples “came to Him, and awoke Him.” Sometimes now Christ seems to be asleep when His disciples are in danger. He appears also to pay no heed to their peril. He is with them, but seems not to be conscious of their need or to be caring for them. But He never really is indifferent. At

the first call of danger here He awoke. The wild storm did not disturb Him, but at the first voice of prayer He instantly responded with ready help for His people's time of need. To Him the storm was like a gentle lullaby and soothed Him to sleep. His perfect faith saved Him from fear. The disciples, however, lacked faith, and the storm filled them with dread.

"He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm." This showed His power. He has power over all nature. He has control of all tempests, all winds, all waves. We need never be afraid when we are in His care. Writers look at this event as a parable of the Church in storms of trial or persecution. Christ seems to sleep for a time and does not interfere. At length, however, He stretches forth His hand or speaks His word of power, and the storm becomes a calm.

The story of the casting out of the Gadarene demons is given with greater fulness of detail in Mark. In these demoniacs we have a sample of Satan's work when he gets full control in a man. He destroys every beautiful thing in the life and leaves only ruin. No chains could bind the men. When sin is on the throne, all other influences and constraints become like spiders' threads in comparison. No cord is strong enough to bind the man who has yielded himself to the sway of evil. The love of a godly mother is a strong bond, but many a child breaks off this holy chain and rushes into

wayward paths. Home ties are strong, but these, too, are broken asunder by the victim of Satan's rule.

One feature of this case was that the demoniac cut and gashed himself with stones. This illustrates just what in many ways sin's captives always do. They may not literally go about insanely cutting their flesh with knives or bruising their bodies with stones, but they do gash and bruise their lives. Sin always wounds its victims, and one of its fearful consequences is the self-destruction it works. Every sin one commits leaves an ugly scar. We grieve God by our wrongdoing, we harm others when we sin against them, but we always injure ourselves by every evil word we speak, by every wrong act we commit, even by the evil thoughts we think in our hearts. The self-hurt of sin is one of its saddest consequences.

There are different theories of demoniacal possession of which there are so many examples in the Gospels. We need not trouble ourselves in trying to solve the mystery. Jesus treated these cases as if the demon was a distinct personality from the man in whom he was dwelling for the time. It is the demons that speak in the words, "What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of the Most High God?" That is the way Satan always talks. He resents any interference with his work. He wants to be let alone, and to be left in quiet possession of whatever he has under his power. Whenever a move is made against any entrenched sin or

vice, the same scream breaks from the Prince of Evil, "What have I to do with Thee, Jesus?" Touch any sin in the community, and instantly you are greeted as Jesus was greeted by these demons. But we must learn not to be intimidated by such cries. It is the work of Christ's Church to dislodge evil wherever it may be entrenched, and drive it out. The very purpose of Christ's coming into the world was to destroy the works of the Devil.

The demons were afraid of Jesus. In Mark the appeal is, "I adjure thee by God, torment me not." The torment they dreaded was in being deprived of the opportunity of tormenting the men in whom they had possession. Demons find their pleasure in destroying the beautiful work of God's hands, and in ruining human lives. Good men count that day lost in which they have done no act of kindness to another. Demons count the day lost in which they have stained no pure soul or led no one into sin. Evil comes to us, pretending to be a friend. It holds flowers in its hands and whispers entrancing words, promising rich rewards. "Only do this and it will bring you pleasure, honour, wealth, joy"—that is the way sin talks. But this is all false. However plausibly Satan may present his temptations under the colour of pleasure, his secret aim is to destroy the soul he tempts. Nothing gives the Evil One such pleasure as to see a fair and beautiful life stained and debauched.

It is most comforting to us to find that Christ is able to dislodge even the most obdurate and per-

sistent demons. No one could bind these demoniacs nor resist their superhuman strength. But when the poor man met Jesus, he met one who was stronger than "the strong man" in possession. No human hand can break the chains of sinful habits. No mere resolution can free one from Satan's bondage. But when Christ comes He can set the captives free. Those who have long been trying in vain to reform, to give up sins, to break away from evil practices, see in Christ the Friend who can and who alone can deliver them and save them. No demon-power can resist His command. If the poor slaves of Satan would only put themselves absolutely into the hands of Christ, He would free them, drive out their enemy, and save them from his fearful sway.

In the swine, under demoniacal possession, rushing down the steep cliff and perishing in the sea, we have another illustration of the end of all Satan's ruinous work. It is with men as it was here with the swine. It never yet has been known that Satan impelled any one upward to a better life or to anything noble and lofty; he always drives down steep ways into choking floods. Christ never sent a man downhill; He always inspires upward. It would be well to keep this picture in our mind when we are tempted in any way by the Devil, for if we follow him this is the way it will surely end with us.

It was a marvelous change which the people observed in these men whom they had known always



and dreaded as dangerous demoniacs. Yet it is a more wonderful change that is oftentimes seen when those who have been under the power of Satan become Christians. We say that miracles have ceased, but have they really? We may not see raving demoniacs restored to sanity, but we certainly see those whom Satan has broken in sin set free from his terrible power and transformed into the likeness of Christ. Spiritual miracles are no less wonderful than miracles of bodily healing.

It is strange how the people were affected by this miracle. Jesus had come among them to bless them. He would have gone on, working other miracles, if they had been willing. But the loss of the swine was too much for them. They besought Jesus to depart, and He did. He would not stay where He was not wanted. He went away, carrying with Him the blessings He had brought and meant to leave. So the sick remained unhealed, the lame man still continued lame, demoniacs remained demon-possessed.

Jesus knows where He wants His saved ones to witness for Him. Mark tells us that this man wished to go with Him, but there was other work for him to do. There are different ways of serving Christ. Some of His disciples He asks to leave home and friends and to follow Him into distant lands. Others He wants to bear witness, among those who have known them, to the grace and love of God. If He wants one young minister to go to

the foreign field as a missionary, he must go. But we must not blame his classmate who does not go to the foreign field, but enters the field at home. We serve Christ best when we serve in the place and in the manner in which He directs us.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A PARALYTIC FORGIVEN AND HEALED

*Read Matthew IX., 1-13*

JESUS never rested. He crossed the sea to save the demoniacs in Gadara. Then He returned at once to Capernaum and found the people waiting for Him: "They brought to Him a man sick of the palsy." Elsewhere we learn that four men brought this paralytic. The picture is very suggestive—four strong men carrying their helpless friend to the Healer. We ought to help one another. We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. This applies both to physical and spiritual weakness. If there is a lame boy in the school, the other boys should lend him their legs. If one girl is sickly and not able to go out, the other girls should do all in their power to brighten her loneliness and make up to her her loss. Then those who have been healed and blessed by Christ should help to bring to Him their friends who need Him.

It is interesting to notice here that four of this sick man's friends united in helping him. One of them alone could not have carried him. Two of

them could not have done it. It would have been hard for three. But when all four put their shoulders to the burden, it was comparatively easy. We can help others in some ways single-handed, but oft-times it is better that two or more friends unite in praying for another or assisting him.

It is said that Jesus saw their faith. How could He see faith? We have but to read the narrative in the other Gospels to have the question answered. There was not a word of prayer uttered either by the paralytic or by his friends; and yet there really was most intense and earnest prayer. It was not expressed in words, but in acts. Christ both saw the faith and heard the prayer as He beheld the earnestness of the man and of his friends. When the carriers could not get in through the door to Christ because of the crowd, they lifted their friend up the outside stairway to the roof, tore up the tiling and then lowered the helpless sufferer into the presence of the Healer. It was in the determined overcoming of all obstacles and difficulties that Jesus saw their faith.

We do not know just how much of this faith was the sick man's and how much his friends'. Certainly part of it was in the latter. So we may exercise faith in behalf of others. Our faith alone may not save them, but it makes the case stronger. There is great power in intercession. These men believed Christ could heal their friend or they would not have wrought so hard to get him into His presence. No doubt there was faith also in the suf-

ferer. It was shown in his very helplessness, as he lay there on his mat, his trembling feebleness appealing to the pity of Christ. There may have been no words of pleading on his lips, but there was faith, nevertheless, and the faith found expression in wordless supplication more eloquent than the stateliest human liturgy. Jesus saw the faith in the man lying in all his helplessness at His feet, expecting to be healed.

This palsied man was a striking type of every sinner. The sinner has noble faculties and powers, made to shine in great beauty, and to do great things; but they are palsied. He cannot serve God acceptably. He cannot do any good thing. He cannot obey God's commandments. He has hands, but he cannot do God's work. He has feet, but he cannot walk in God's paths. He has lips and a tongue, but he cannot speak. With glorious possibilities in his being he is a poor, wretched, spiritual paralytic.

Here is a man who once was most active in life, brilliant in thought, eloquent in speech, skilled in execution. Now he lies on his bed or is wheeled about in his chair, a complete wreck in body and in mind. The old powers are all there, but the blight of paralysis is on them. What a picture of the moral and spiritual paralysis which we see in the impenitent sinner! Made in God's image, meant to soar like the eagle in heavenly flights, there he lies, dead while living. There was only One who

could heal this paralytic; there is One only who can give life to the spiritually palsied.

When Jesus saw the man laid before Him, He said, "Thy sins are forgiven." Had Jesus misunderstood the poor man's prayer? Had He given the wrong answer by mistake? The man wanted his palsy cured, his friends had brought him there to have him healed, and then Jesus forgave his sins instead, leaving him still palsied. What does all this mean? As we look more deeply we see that there was no mistake. Indeed, the prayer was really answered, over-answered. We do not always know what we most need. We think it is the curing of our sickness, the lifting away of our burden, or the changing of our circumstances, when our deepest, realest need is the lifting away of our sin, the changing of our relation to God. This man's dumb prayer was for healing. He wanted to walk about again, to use his hands and feet and be active. The Master looked at the palsied limbs and quivering frame and saw deeper and answered another prayer first, because that was what the poor man needed most to have done.

Perhaps sin had been the cause of his paralysis. Many a man with broken health and shattered constitution knows well the cause of his physical wrecking. Christ makes no mistake in His way of helping us. There are a great many troubles we would like to have removed, but which we can keep and yet be noble and useful and be saved. But sin we must get clear of or perish forever, and Christ

answers our heart's needs before He gratifies its mere wishes. Ofttimes then when we cry for comfort or ease, God looks deeper and says, "It is your sin, my child, that is your sorest trouble." Then He does not give us what we ask because He wants us to ask for the curing of the sorer, deeper trouble first.

Some of the people were offended when they heard Jesus telling the man his sins were forgiven. "What right had He to forgive sins?" So He showed them another form of healing to convince them that He had power also to forgive. "Then saith He to the sick of the palsy, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house." First, Jesus answered the deepest need, and then, when peace had filled the man's soul and joy had overspread his face, and he was willing now to go on keeping his palsy, since heaven had come into his heart, then the Master gave him the other boon—health. The palsy had a mission; its mission was to bring the man to the Healer and Saviour. As soon as its mission was accomplished it was dismissed as a servant no longer needed.

Does Christ ever cause us pain or suffering without some loving purpose? Is He pleased to see us suffer? No, every pang of ours goes to His heart. In all our afflictions He is afflicted. But He is far too kind to call away His hot-handed angel Pain before his work is done. The surgeon would be weakly cruel, not kind, who, because of the patient's cries, should withdraw the knife when his

operation was but half done. God's love is not of that sort. He is not too tender to cause us pain and to leave us to suffer unrelieved, even for long years, when suffering has yet a mission uncompleted in our soul; yet the moment pain's work is done God dismisses it.

"He arose, and departed to his house." The bodily healing was wrought for a purpose—"that ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins." The man's arising and walking away proved then that his sins had been forgiven. It proved that Christ had not blasphemed in pronouncing the sufferer forgiven. It proved that Christ was Divine and had power to forgive sins. When our sins are forgiven, our paralyzed spiritual powers are restored to health. We get life when we get forgiveness. The proof that we are forgiven is our new Christian life—loving God and loving our fellow men, and walking in holiness and righteousness before the world.

There is a quiet little paragraph here after the exciting story of the paralytic which tells of another miracle of stupendous importance. A man was sitting at his toll-booth gathering in taxes from all who were passing by carrying any taxable article. The publicans were bitterly despised because they accepted pay from the Romans for collecting taxes from their own people. Tax collectors are rarely ever well loved men. Most people pay no other debts so reluctantly and unwillingly as they pay their taxes. But it is still harder to pay taxes



to a foreign power. It is a humiliating mark of subjugation. It was supposed that no publican was honest, for the amount of the taxes was not fixed by law—the collector took all he could get.

One day in passing, Jesus looked into Matthew's booth and said, "Follow Me." The record says, "He arose and followed Him." So the publican became a disciple. Then a little later, when the twelve apostles were chosen, Matthew was among the number.

It is Matthew himself who tells the story here, and he tells it modestly. The people found fault because Jesus mingled with publicans and sinners. "Birds of a feather flock together," was their taunt. Yet Jesus only said that a physician did not go among well people, but among the sick. He went among sinners because they were the people who most needed Him.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE POWER OF FAITH

*Read Matthew IX., 18-34*

ONLY comparatively few of our Lord's healings are recorded. He seems never to have refused to heal any who came to Him or were brought to Him. Besides, He healed some for whom no one interceded. Here it was a ruler—an exceptional case, for the rulers were not His friends. Probably this man's great distress led him to seek healing for his child even in spite of his dislike of Jesus. The ruler and his prejudice were lost in the father.

The man came himself, saying, "My daughter is even now dead." Trouble comes just as inevitably and as resistlessly to the mansions of the great and rich as to the homes of the lowly and poor. None are exempt. We can build no walls and set up no doors to exclude sickness and death. This is one lesson. Another is, that when sickness or any other trouble comes to us, we ought to send for Christ. We are to send for physicians, too, in sickness. They are God's ministers of healing. Usually God requires our co-operation in all that He does for us.

But we should also send for Christ. He alone has original power to heal. Life is His gift and is under His care. Health is His alone to give. Medicines unblessed by Him give no relief. Only at His bidding can any one be restored from illness. While we use all the means within our reach, we should use them with prayer for Divine blessing on them and in dependence on Divine power. Whenever any one is sick in our house we should send for Jesus and put the case in His hands.

Jesus was eager always to help those in trouble. He arose at once at the ruler's request and followed him to his home. It seems strange, when we think who the man was, probably unfriendly to Jesus, that He should so quickly rise and follow this ruler. But it was always thus. He did not wait to make inquiry concerning the man, whether he was worthy or not, before going with him. The man that needed Him was the man He wanted. In this alacrity in doing good Jesus was only showing the alertness of Divine love. In heavenly glory now He is as quick to hear and as prompt to answer our cries as He was that day in His earthly humiliation. He is always at our call. He never has so much to do or so many calls to answer that He cannot attend to our case. Indeed, when we come to Him with any need, He has no other thing to do but attend to us. We should be like our Master in all this. We should be quick to respond to the calls of need and distress about us. We ought to train our

hearts to sympathy and thoughtfulness, and our hands to quick, gentle ministry in Christ's name.

Then came an interruption as the Master was hastening with the ruler to his house. "Behold, a woman . . . came behind Him, and touched the border of His garment." The street was thronged with persons waiting for an opportunity to get near to the Healer. The "border of His garment" is always within reach of earth's sufferers. He has gone up now on high, out of our sight, but His garment floats everywhere. We never can get beyond the sweep of its folds. We can always come near enough to Christ to reach out a trembling finger and touch His garment and find healing. Of course, we must not make a mistake about this border. It is not a crucifix, nor is it some relic of a dead saint, nor is it a bit of the wood of the true cross. It is not even the Bible, for touching the Bible will do no one any good. Nor is it the Church and its ordinances; for we may belong to the Church and observe its ordinances, and get no benefit to ourselves. To touch the border of Christ's garment is to touch Christ Himself. His garment is His life, His love, His Spirit, His grace.

A human physician, if hurrying on such an errand, would probably have refused to listen to any calls for help on the way, as the ruler's child was actually dying. But Jesus stopped quietly and turned to see the woman who had touched Him. Mark says He asked, "Who touched My garments?" How did He know that one touch amid all the jost-

ling of the crowd? The multitudes were close about Him, pressing up against Him. Many of them touched Him. The disciples thought it strange that He should ask such a question. The people could not help touching Him. 'Ah! but there was one touch different from all the rest. There was something in it which sent a thrill through Him. There was a heart's cry in it, a piteous, earnest supplication. It was a touch of faith. It was not like the jostlings of the crowd—an accidental or unconscious touch, the mere touch of nearness. It was intentional. There was a soul's cry in it. So, amid all the rude pressure of the multitude, He recognised it and turned about to see her that had done this thing.

Jesus always knows the touch of true faith and prayer among all the touches of this great world. In one sense all men are near to Him, for He is everywhere present. We cannot move without pressing up against Him. But when among all earth's millions one person intentionally reaches out a hand to feel for Him, to touch Him with a purpose, with a longing or a desire, to seek for some blessing, or to crave some help, He instantly knows the pressure of that touch and turns to answer it. He knows when a hungry heart wants Him, no matter how obscure the person, how poor, or how hidden in the crowd.

Notice His graciousness in answering the woman's prayer. "Jesus turning and seeing her said, Daughter, be of good cheer." This was a bit of

Christ's wayside work. He was hastening with Jairus to his home, to restore his dying child, and healed this poor woman on the way. We would call it incidental work, unpurposed, unplanned. The things we set out in the morning to do are not by any means all the things that we do in any well spent day. If we have the life of Christ in us, every one that touches us gets some blessing from us. While busy at our work we speak kindly to those who meet us or who are near us, and an influence of warmth, cheer or encouragement, or an inspiration toward better living, goes from us to them. We meet one in trouble as we hurry by, and stop to give a word of comfort. We hear of a case of distress and we send or carry relief. Thus, if we have the spirit of Christ, our wayside service will be a most valuable and important part of our work in this world.

We do not know how long Jesus was detained in healing and comforting the woman on the way. "Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute-players." The child was dead and they were preparing for the funeral. So it seemed that He had tarried too long on the way. To us it appears that He ought not to have stopped at all to heal or talk with the woman. She could have waited. The child of Jairus was dying and there was not a moment to lose. But when we read the story through to the end we are glad that He did stop to help the woman. We learn from His delay that Jesus never is in a hurry. He is never so much engrossed in

one case of need that He cannot stop to consider another. He is never so pressed for time that we have to wait our turn. No matter what He is doing, He will always hear instantly our cry for need. Another thing we learn from this delay is that Jesus never comes too late; never waits too long. True, the ruler's child died while He lingered, but this only gave Him an opportunity for a greater miracle. He delayed that He might do a more glorious work for this family. There is always some good reason for it when Christ seems to delay to answer our prayers or come to our help. He delays that He may do more for us in the end.

"The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth." This was Christ's word always about death. He said His friend Lazarus was asleep. He says the same of all His friends. They are not dead. Indeed, they never lived so really, so richly, so fully, as they live when we call them dead. They are away from all the limitations of earthly life, set free from the hampering prison of the flesh, cleansed of all sin, "spirits of just men made perfect." Christ changed the whole aspect of death for His people. To them it is but the passage to life—rich, blessed, glorious life. Even bodily death is a sleep, and sleep is not a terrible experience. It is restful and refreshing, and then we wake again from sleep and live on beyond it. So the body sleeps, and will rise again renewed and wearing immortal beauty. Christ called this child from her sleep very soon; it will be longer before He will call those whom we lay down in

death's sleep, but He will surely wake them in His own time, in the blessed, glorious morning. It is wonderful comfort to us to know that Christ has care of our sleeping dead and has the keys of their graves and can call them when He will.

Another phase of human need is met in the next incident. "Two blind men followed Him." There are a great many people blind in another way. They can see certain things, but certain other things they cannot see at all. They can see mountains and plains and blue skies, and human faces, and money and real estate, and all earthly things; but they cannot see God, nor heaven, nor the beauty of holiness, nor the inheritance of believers, nor any of the unseen things of blessedness and Divine glory. They can see only material things, which are not enduring nor eternal; but they cannot see spiritual things, which alone are real. Natural blindness is a sore loss. A blind man misses all the glorious beauty of this world. He cannot see where to go and has to be led by the hand. But spiritual blindness is an infinitely sorer loss. Christ alone could give sight to the blind. He opened eyes that had always been closed. He alone can open the eyes of the spiritually blind. If we cannot see spiritual things we should call upon Christ to have mercy upon us.

Always faith was required. "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" The men must have faith before Jesus could heal them. When we come to Him asking Him to do anything for us, He wants to



know if we believe that He is able to do it. Once a father came to Him for his demoniac son, and his prayer was, "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." But the "if" marred the request—the father was not sure that Jesus could cure his son, and Jesus sent him back to get a better faith. "If thou canst!" He answered. "All things are possible to him that believeth." As soon as the man could say, "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief," Jesus cured the boy. May it not be that the reason why many of our prayers are not answered is because we do not believe that Christ is able to do what we ask of Him? If we can believe He can give what we ask. If we cannot believe He cannot do anything for us.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE

*Read Matthew IX., 35—X., 15, 40-42*

JESUS never rested. He went about doing good. His work is summed up here in three words—teaching, preaching, healing. He was in this world to seek and save the lost, and He went everywhere on His holy mission of love. He did not stay in one place, because then other places would have been neglected. He knew that He had blessings for the sad, suffering world, and His soul was burdened until He had borne these blessings to every one's door. So He went everywhere, from house to house. He was a shepherd seeking the lost, and we can see Him pressing through the dark ravine, up the steep cliffs, out upon the wild crags and over the rugged mountains, through storm and darkness, cold and heat, searching for the lost sheep. That is what He wants us to do now, for we are left in this world in His place, to carry on His work.

“When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them.” Christ's compassion

was wonderful. The sight of suffering humanity filled Him with grief. We have a picture here of the way the world of people looked to Jesus. They were "distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd." This means that they were neglected by those who ought to have been their friends and helpers. The rulers were intended to be shepherds to their people. Instead of this, they showed them no love, no kindness, no care, but wronged them, robbed them. Jesus was among them as a true shepherd, and His heart was full of compassion toward them.

Out of the deep pity of His heart Jesus begins now to plan for the great work of saving men. "The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the labourers are few." He seems to have been almost appalled at the vastness of the work as He looked out over His own people and thought of their condition. But His vision was not limited to His own country. He had come to save the world, the whole world, all nations. No wonder He said to His disciples, "The harvest indeed is plenteous." To meet the great need there must be many labourers enlisted. This is the beginning of the great missionary movement which is now reaching out all over the world.

"The labourers are few," said the Master as He looked upon the great fields with their vast human needs, their sorrows, their hungerings. Indeed, Jesus himself was the only labourer at that time. The apostles were only a handful and they were still untrained.

Note the first word His heart uttered as He thought of reaching the world with mercy. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He send forth labourers into his harvest." The Lord of the harvest is God Himself. At that time the chief duty was prayer that the Lord would send forth labourers. Men were first to be called for the work and then trained for it. There is still need for making the same prayer, for even yet the labourers are few in consideration of the vastness of the field to be harvested. But few young men are entering the Christian ministry and the ranks are growing thin. The gates of missionary lands are open and the money is ready to send men into the fields, but the men are not offering themselves.

Already Jesus had chosen the twelve apostles. Luke tells us of this. It is said that He spent all night in prayer to God before choosing these men. He thus sought His Father's guidance in making His choice and His blessing on the men to be chosen. The work of the kingdom was to be committed to their hands, and it was of the greatest importance that they should be in every way the right men. We have a suggestion here also as to the importance of choosing our personal friends. It should be with prayer. Their influence upon our lives will be vital and far-reaching and only God can choose them for us.

Here we have a description of the mission and work of the apostles. "He called unto Him His twelve disciples, and gave them authority." First

He called them to Him. No one is ready to go out for Christ until he has come to Him. Discipleship must come before service. There is no place to start but at the Master's feet. We must lie on His bosom and catch His Spirit. It is not enough to attend colleges and theological seminaries and be graduated from these. It is not enough to be commended by committees and mission boards; every one who would go as a worker for Christ or as a missionary must first come to Christ. Christ must choose and call His own apostles and send them out with His benediction. None are ready to go until Christ has given them power and authority. He is the King, and He only can commission any to represent Him. If we want them to help Christ save the world we must personally surrender ourselves to Him and let Him prepare us and then send us out with authority to represent Him.

The names of the apostles are given. They were not famous men when they were chosen. They were very plain and ordinary men; but afterward they became men of wonderful power and all the world felt their influence. We see out of what common stuff Christ can make great men, holy saints and heroic missionaries. There is something in His method of preparing His apostles that those who would be preachers and teachers should note. He took these men into His family and kept them there for three years. He lived with them, pouring the light and the love of His holy life upon

their dull, sinful lives, until they were literally permeated with His Spirit. Thus He stamped His own impress upon them so that they were ready to go out and repeat His life and teaching among men. Perhaps many of us scatter our work too much. If we would select a few persons and give to them continually our strongest and best influence, month after month, and year after year, carrying them in our prayers, and in our thoughts, and doing all we can to impress them and make them noble, true and Christlike, might we not do more for our Lord in the end than by trying merely to touch a hundred or a thousand lives?

The apostles had their field laid out for them. They were not to go into the way of the Gentiles. This was not the final command; it was only for the first tour of the country. The Gentiles were not always to be left out from the proclamation of the Gospel. The great final commission was universal; they were to carry to every creature under the heavens the news of salvation. But as yet the Gospel was not ready to be proclaimed everywhere. The blood of the Lamb of God had not yet been shed. The alabaster box of the Saviour's precious life had not yet been broken to pour out the ointment. For the present the messengers were not to go beyond the limits of the Jewish nation.

The great law of Christian life is that we receive in order to give, that we are blessed in order that we may be a blessing. "Freely ye have received, freely give." Christ has liberally blessed us, but

the blessing is not for ourselves alone. The things He has given us we are to pass on to others. He wants to reach the many through the few. We sin against Christ, and therefore against others, if we keep in our own hands and do not use the good things He has so generously bestowed upon us. We take the bread and are to pass it to those who are hungry. We receive the cup and are to give it to those next to us. We are disloyal, therefore, to Him if we close our hands and hold the blessings He gives us in tight clasp just for ourselves. Let us freely pass on all that Christ has so freely given to us.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE QUESTION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

#### *Matthew XI., 1-19*

JOHN was a brave man and a firm believer in Jesus as the Messiah, but in his prison questions arose. "When John heard in the prison the works of the Christ, he sent two of his disciples." There were some things which he could not make out himself, and he sent promptly to Jesus to ask Him about them. That is just what we should learn to do in all our perplexities. There often are times when all seems dark about us. We cannot understand the things that are happening to us. We are apt to get very much worried and disheartened. The true Christian way in all such experiences is to take the matters at once to Christ.

John's faith in the Messiahship of Jesus wavered in his hard circumstances. "Art Thou He that cometh?" Some people think that John could not really have been in doubt. It is impossible, they say, that such a brave, grand man should ever have wavered in his confidence. They forget that John lived in the mere dawn of Christianity, before



the full day burst upon the world. He had not the thousandth part of the light that we have, yet do we never have our questions? The truth is, there are very few of us who are not sometimes disheartened without a hundredth part of the cause John had. But that is usually the way. We are amazed at every person's blindness or dulness but our own. Other people's failures look very large to us, but we do not see our own at all. We wonder how Moses, once, under sorest provocation, lost his temper and spoke a few hasty and impatient words; while we can scarcely get through a single sunny day ourselves without a far worse outbreak at a far slighter provocation. We wonder how the beloved disciple, with all his sweet humility, could once show an ambition for a place of honour, while we ourselves are forever miserably scrambling for preferments. We say, "Isn't it strange that the people of Christ's time would not believe on Him when they saw all His power and love?" Yet we do not believe on Him any more readily or any more fully than they did, though we have far greater evidence. We think it strange that the Baptist grew despondent when his trials were so great, though many of us are plunged into gloom by the merest trifles.

Somehow Jesus was not realising John's expectation as the Messiah, and he thought that possibly there was yet another to come after Him. "Look we for another?" It is the same yet with many people. When everything is bright and sunny they

think they surely have found Christ, and their hearts are full of joy. But when troubles come and things begin to go against them, they wonder whether after all they really have found the Saviour. They begin to question their own experience. Christ does not do just the things they thought He would do for them. Their religion does not support them as they supposed it would do. If they are indeed Christians, why does Christ let them suffer so much and not come to relieve them? So they sink away into the slough of despond, sometimes losing all hope.

But we see from John's case how unnecessary all this worry is. Of course, we must have some earthly trials. Christ does not carry us to heaven on flowery beds of ease. We must expect to bear the cross many a long mile. The true way is never to doubt Him. Suppose there are clouds, the sun still shines behind them, undimmed, and the very clouds have their silver lining. Suppose we have disappointments, Jesus is the same loving Friend as when all our hopes come to ripeness. There is no need to look for another; all we want we find in Him. If we turn away from Him, where shall we go?

When John's messengers came with their question, Jesus did not give a direct answer. He went on with His ministry of love and mercy that they might see what His work was. Then "Jesus answered." Jesus always answers. Many of our prayers to Him are mixed with doubts. Many of

them are full of complaints, fears and murmurings. Still He never grows impatient with us. He never shuts His door upon us. We must cause Him much pain by our distrusts and our unhappy fears. We wonder whether He loves us or not, whether He really has forgiven us or not, whether or not He will take care of us all through our life. Half the time we are worried or perplexed about something and are full of frets and cares. Does Jesus never get tired listening to such prayers? No, no; He listens always, and though His heart must oftentimes be pained by the discordant notes of our murmurings and fears, He never grows impatient, and never chides but always answers. He remembers how frail we are, that we are but dust, and gives loving answers.

“There’s no place where earthly sorrows  
Are more felt than up in heaven;  
There’s no place where earthly failings  
Have such kindly judgment given.”

Jesus let the messengers get their own conclusions from what they saw. “Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see.” Here we see how Jesus proved His own Messiahship. The best evidence of Christianity is not a long array of arguments, but the things Christianity has done. The tree’s fruits are the best index to the tree’s character. Jesus pointed to the miracles He had wrought. Yet it was not to the miracles as miracles, merely as wonderful works, that He pointed; it was the character of these works that proved His

Messiahship. The blind received their sight, the lame were enabled to walk, lepers were cleansed, the deaf were made to hear. All these were works of Divine mercy and love. Pulling down mountains, walking on the water, floating in the air, performing remarkable feats of magic, would not have proved our Lord's Messiahship; the miracles He wrought were never ostentatious, never for show, but were acts of love, done to relieve suffering, lift up fallen men, give joy and help, and thus manifest the Divine character. Once He walked on the water, yet it was not for show, but in carrying relief to His imperilled and terrified disciples.

Jesus said nothing about John while the messengers from John were there, but when they were gone He spoke of him. "As these went their way, Jesus began to say." What a beautiful thing this was for Jesus to do for His friend! The people and the disciples would misunderstand John's perplexity about the Christ, and would be sure to misjudge Him, thinking Him weak and vacillating. Jesus would not rest a moment until He had removed any unfavourable impression about John that might have been left in any one's mind. He was most careful of the reputation of His friend. The lesson is very important. We should always seek to guard the good name of our friends. We should not allow any wrong impression of them or of their acts to become current. We should hold their name and honour sacred as our own. If we find that anything they have done is likely to leave an unfair or

injurious impression on others who do not know all the circumstances, we must try to set the matter right. It is very sad to see persons sometimes even apparently glad to find others unfavourably regarded. Instead of hastening to remove or correct wrong impressions, they seem quite willing to let them remain and even to confirm them by significant silence or by ambiguous words. Surely that is not the Christ-like way.

John was not a weak man, blown with every breeze. He was not a "reed shaken with the wind." That is what many people are. A reed grows in soft soil by the water's edge. Then it is so frail and delicate in its fibre that every breeze bends and shakes it. There are people of whom this is a true picture. Instead of being rooted in Christ, their roots go down into the soft mire of this world and are easily torn up. Thus they have no fixed principles to keep them upright and make them true and strong, and they are bent by every wind and moved by every influence. They want nothing so much as backbone. The boy that cannot say no, when other boys tease him to smoke or drink or go to places he ought not to go, is only a reed shaken with the wind. The girl who is influenced by frivolities and worldly pleasures, and drawn away from Christ, and from a noble, pure, beautiful life, is another reed. They are growing everywhere, these reeds, and the wind shakes them every time it blows. Who wants to be a reed? Who would not

rather far be like the oak, growing with roots firm as a rock, which no storm can bend?

It was a splendid commendation that Jesus gave His friend. "There hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist." So a man may sometimes have doubts and perplexities of faith, and yet be a good and a very great man. Christ does not cast us off because we sometimes lose faith. Of course, we ought never to have any doubts about Christ, or about His way being the best way, but if ever we do yield to such discouragements, we must not think we have lost our place in Christ's love. He makes a great deal of allowance for our weakness and for the greatness of our trials, and keeps on loving us without interruption. Thousands of good people have their times of despondency, and Jesus is always gentle and tender to all in such experiences. He does not chide. He does not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. He restores the sick or wounded soul to health.

## CHAPTER XVII

### WARNING AND INVITATION

*Read Matthew 'XI., 20-30*

IT seems strange to hear Jesus upbraiding. His words usually were most gracious and loving. Here, however, we hear Him speaking in tones of sharpness and severity. Yet the phase of His character which is now revealed is not inconsistent with other representations of Him in the Gospels. We must not think of Jesus as having no capacity for anger. He was all love, but love can be severe, even terrible. While He was a friend of sinners and went to His cross to redeem the ungodly, He hated sin. He was just and holy.

We should notice carefully, however, the reason for this upbraiding. It fell upon the cities in which Jesus had done most of His mighty works. These were not His first words to the people of these cities. There had been long months of loving ministry, with miracles of mercy, with words of grace, revealings of the Father-heart of God, and offers of eternal life, before He spoke the words of chiding we now hear Him speak. But the people

of these favoured cities had been unaffected by all this love. They had gone on in their sins, unrepentant. They had accepted Christ's gifts of love, but had not accepted Him as their Lord. They had taken His help, His kindness, the things He had done for them so lavishly, but they had rejected Him.

The upbraiding of these cities was because after all that He had done for them, after all their spiritual opportunities and privileges, they had rejected Jesus. It was not impatience on His part that made Him severe. He had not grown weary loving even without return. But the fact that the cities had received so much Divine favour made their sin in rejecting Christ far greater.

Tyre and Sidon, great commercial cities which had been denounced by the prophets for their sins, would have repented, Jesus said, if such Divine blessings as had been shown to Chorazin and Bethsaida had been given to them. Sodom was the great historical example of wickedness in the history of the world, and its destruction was a notable instance of judgment. But even Sodom would have repented if it had received such calls and had enjoyed such privileges as had Capernaum. And Sodom's judgment would be more tolerable than that of Capernaum.

There is something startling in what Jesus says here about the doom of these Galilean cities and the reason for it. They had had high privileges, and had disregarded them. What then about the places



in our own day which have had exceptional privileges and have not improved them? What about those who have been brought up in Christian homes, amid the most gracious influences, who have seen Christ continually and have known the beautiful things of His love from infancy, and after all have kept their hearts closed upon Him, refusing His love? The question with which we are really personally concerned is not Chorazin, its site, its doom, or Capernaum, the improbability of its identification, but ourselves, our privileges and what we are doing with them.

“More tolerable.” So we would better have been born and brought up in some heathen land, never hearing of Christ, than to have had the highest Christian privileges and then to have turned our back on the Saviour of men. In the end we are responsible for our own salvation. Even God cannot save us but by our consent. Even the Son of God, coming to our door, and pressing His mercy upon us, cannot bless us unless we receive Him. We can make the whole work of redemption—the love of God, the cross of Christ, the striving of the Spirit—in vain, so far as we are concerned. We may perish with Christ at our door. Christian privileges will not save us. The question after all is, “What are you doing with Christ?”

The other part of our passage is in a different tone. Here we find mercy again in its most gracious mood. The invitation in the closing verses is better understood when we have studied the

great words that precede it. "All things have been delivered unto Me of My Father," said Jesus. All things had been put into His hands, all power, all mercy, all gifts, all life. This ought to be a great comfort to us, amid this world's mysteries and perplexities, when there are things which threaten to destroy us. It is Jesus Christ, the Christ of the Gospel, in whose nail-marked hands are all our affairs.

There can be no revealing of the Father save as Jesus Christ wills to reveal Him. It is very important then to learn how He dispenses the revelation which is in His hand exclusively. Will He impart it only to a few great saints, to a little company of wise men, to certain rare spirits? The answer is in the gracious invitation which follows, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Yet there is a distinct class of persons to whom the gracious invitation is especially given—"all ye that labour and are heavy laden." This does not mean the rich, the noble of birth, the high of rank, the wise, the great among men. It includes the lowly, the oppressed, the overburdened, the weary, those who are in any distress. Need is the only condition. There is no one anywhere who desires the blessings of love, of mercy, of grace, to whom this wonderful invitation is not given and who may not claim it and accept it with all confidence.

Perhaps no other of Christ's words has given comfort to more people than this promise of rest.

It meets every heart's deepest longing. What is this rest? It is not cessation from work. Work is part of the constitution of human life. It is necessary to health, to happiness, even to existence. God works. "My Father worketh," said Jesus, "and I work." There is a curse on idleness.

"Rest is not quitting  
The busy career:  
Rest is the fitting  
Of self to one's sphere."

It is rest of soul that Jesus promises. The life is at unrest. It is all jangled and can have no rest until it is brought into harmony. Sin is the cause of this universal human unrest, and rest can come only when forgiveness has come. And this is the first rest that is promised. Every one who comes to Christ is forgiven.

There are two rests promised. "I will give you rest." This rest comes at once. Every weary one who comes to Christ in penitence and with repentance is forgiven, reconciled and restored to Divine favour. Then there is a rest which comes later and only through self-discipline and patient learning. "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; . . . and ye shall find rest." To take Christ's yoke on us is to take Him as our Master, to let Him rule our life. The thought of a yoke is suggestive of bondage and humiliation. But the yoke of Christ has nothing galling or dishonouring in it. "My yoke is easy," He says. He is a gentle taskmaster. He requires

entire submission to His will. He will not share our subjection with any other master. We must take His yoke upon us willingly, cheerfully, without reserve. But His commandments are not grievous, His burden is light. Then we will find honour and blessing in it.

A yoke implies two united, serving together, walking side by side under the same load. It is Christ's yoke we are to bear, which means that He shares it with us. His shoulder is under every load of ours. If we have a sorrow it is His, too. In all our afflictions He is afflicted. Thus it becomes a joy to take Christ's yoke. When He is our Master we are free from all other masters. In bearing His yoke we will find rest unto our souls. Our lives under His sway will be at peace.

Another step in finding rest is to enter Christ's school. "Learn of Me," said the Master. We are only beginners when we first become Christians. A good man said, "It takes a long time to learn to be kind—it takes a whole lifetime." He was right—it does take as many years as one lives to learn the one little lesson of kindness. St. Paul said, and said it when he was well on in life, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content." We would suppose that such a wonderful man as St. Paul was did not have to learn the lesson of contentment. We can scarcely think of him as ever fretting about his condition and circumstances. But evidently he did, and it was a long, difficult lesson for him to learn to be contented anywhere, in

any experiences. Even Jesus Himself had to learn life's lessons. In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is said that He learned obedience by the things that He suffered.

All Christian life is a school. We enter it when we first come to Christ. We begin at the lowest grade. We do not have to wait until we know a great deal before we begin to attend school. School is not for finished scholars but for the most ignorant. We may come to Christ when we know almost nothing. He is a teacher and He wants us to become learners. Gentleness is a lesson which we are to learn. One young girl said, "I never can get over being jealous. I cannot bear to have my friends love anybody else. I want them to love only me." But she must learn the lesson of generosity in friendship. She must learn to want her friends to love others. It probably will take her a good while, the lesson will be a long one, but she must learn it because it is in Christ's curriculum for all His students, and no one can get His certificate of graduation without learning it.

Patience is a lesson that has to be learned. An impatient person is not a complete Christian. Thoughtfulness is another necessary lesson. There are a great many thoughtless Christians. The poet tells us that evil is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart. Many people are always blundering in their relations and fellowships with others. They say the wrong word, they do the wrong thing. They leave undone the things they

ought to have done. They are always hurting other people's feelings, giving pain to gentle hearts. Yet it is all from thoughtlessness. "I didn't mean to offend him. I didn't mean to be unkind. I just never thought." There are few lessons in Christian life that more people need to learn than this of thoughtfulness.

We have to learn to trust. Worry is a sin. It is probably as great a sin as untruthfulness or profanity or bad temper. Yet a good many Christian people worry at first, and one of the most important lessons in Christ's school is to learn not to worry. Joy is a lesson to be learned. Peace is another. Humility is another. Praise is a great lesson. All life is a school, and it is in learning these lessons that Jesus says we shall find rest. Christ Himself is our teacher, and with Him we should never fail to learn, though it be only slowly. Then as we learn, our lives will grow continually more and more into quietness and peace. All our questions will be in the faith that accepts God's will as holy and good even when it is hardest.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### TWO SABBATH INCIDENTS

*Read Matthew XII., 1-14*

THE question of proper sabbath observance arose several times during our Lord's public ministry. The Jewish law made careful provision for the keeping of the seventh day of the week, but the Rabbis had added many rules of their own, making the sabbath really a burdensome day. Jesus did not recognise these added requirements, and hence often displeased the rulers by what they considered violations of the law.

The criticism at this time was caused by our Lord and His disciples going through the grainfields on the sabbath. Probably they were on their way to the morning synagogue service. The disciples were hungry, and as they walked along by the standing grain, which was then ripe, they plucked off some of the heads and, rubbing them in their hands and then blowing away the chaff, they ate the grains.

The Pharisees were always watching Jesus that they might find something of which to accuse Him.

There are two ways of watching good people. One way is to watch them to see how they live that we may learn from their example; the other way is in order to criticise and find fault with them. It was the latter motive which prevailed with the Pharisees. They went along with Jesus, not because they loved to be with Him, but as spies upon His conduct. The conduct of Christians is always watched by unfriendly eyes, eyes keen to observe every fault. We need to live most carefully, so as to give no occasion for just censure. Yet the example of Jesus shows us that we are not to be slaves of traditional requirements which have no authorisation in the word of God.

Good people can find better business than to play the spy upon the life and conduct of others. The unfriendly espionage of these Pharisees on Jesus and His disciples appears in our eyes very far from beautiful. We are behaving no better, however, than the Pharisees did if we keep our eyes on others for the purpose of discovering flaws. Perhaps they do not live quite as they should live; but are we their judges? do we have to answer for them? Then, perhaps, our sin of censoriousness and uncharitableness is worse than the sins we find in them. There are some people so intent on trying to make other people good that they altogether forget to make themselves good.

When the Pharisees said to Jesus that His disciples were doing that which was not lawful on the sabbath, He reminded them of what David did when



he and his companions were hungry. "Have ye not read?" It was in their Scriptures. David, fleeing from Saul, went to Ahimelech very hungry, he and his companions, and asked for something to eat. There was no bread about the place save the shewbread. It was not lawful for any but the priests to eat this bread. But the men's need satisfied the custodian of the tabernacle that he might deviate from the letter of the law in this emergency.

The act of the disciples in plucking and rubbing out the heads of grain to satisfy their immediate hunger was a work of necessity and therefore not a sin. Though the letter of the law may have been violated, yet it was not violated in its spirit. What works of necessity are cannot be established by minute rules and regulations. The settling of the question must be left in each particular case to the enlightened consciences of faithful followers of Christ.

Jesus made a startling claim when He said to His critics, "One greater than the temple is here." It is usually supposed that He refers to Himself. But a marginal reading suggests "a greater thing," meaning the law of love. That is, love is always the highest law. This different rendering seems to be favoured by the words which follow. "If ye had known what this meaneth—I desire mercy, and not sacrifice—ye would not have condemned the guiltless." Love would have made you think of the men's need as higher than the observance of the let-

ter of a sabbath rule. No Divine law means to have men go hungry.

Then Jesus uttered another startling word, "For the Son of man is lord of the sabbath." He thus claimed the right to interpret the laws of the sabbath. In Mark we have also this strong assertion, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." The sabbath was part of the Divine constitution which God had ordained for His children. Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfil. He took the sabbath, therefore, and stripped from it the burdensome regulations which men had attached to it, and put into it its true spiritual meaning. He set the Church free from the cumbrousness of a rabbinical sabbath, and made it a day of joy and gladness, a type and foretaste of heaven.

Almost immediately afterwards another question of sabbath observance arose. It was in the synagogue. A man was present who had a withered hand. Again the Pharisees were watching Jesus to see what He would do. They asked Him if it was lawful to heal on the sabbath day. They were not humble seekers for the truth, but were looking for a ground of accusation against Him. It was a violation of the rules of the Pharisees to attend the sick or even console them on the sabbath. Jesus knew the intention of the Pharisees in their question and bade the man arise.

Then He asked them, "What man shall there be of you, that shall have one sheep, and if this fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold

on it, and lift it out?" In this He appealed to simple common sense. Whatever their traditions said about the sabbath day, the practise of the people would be on the merciful line. The Talmud says that if the animal is in no danger in the ditch it should be allowed to remain unrelieved over the sabbath. But the form of our Lord's question shows that this was not the practise of the people. "What man shall there be of you, that shall have one sheep, and if this fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?" Then He added, "How much then is a man of more value than a sheep!" If it was right to help a sheep out of a pit on the sabbath, it certainly was right to relieve a human sufferer from his sickness on that day.

So we have the lesson, "Wherefore it is lawful to do good on the sabbath." It is right for physicians to attend to their patients on the Lord's day. It is right for those whose duty it naturally is to nurse the sick to care for them on the sabbath. It is right to visit the sick when they need our sympathy and when we can carry to them blessing or cheer. It is right to visit those who are in affliction when we can carry comfort to them; to visit the poor when we can minister to their needs or relieve their distresses. Especially is it right to go out among the unsaved, when we can do anything to bring them to Christ. It is right to gather neglected children from the streets and from

Christless homes, and bring them under the influence of Divine grace.

We must be careful not to pervert our Lord's teaching here. Not all kinds of work can be brought into the class indicated in the words, "It is lawful to do good on the sabbath day." It was the Jewish sabbath concerning which Jesus was speaking here, and our Christian Lord's day is in every way more beautiful, more joyous. Yet we need to keep most holy guard over it, for there are many influences at work to rob us of it. There was a time when very much of the old rabbinical spirit was exercised in some parts of the world toward the Christian Sunday. Now, however, the tendency is in the other direction, and we are in danger of losing the sacredness of this day. The Lord's day is not well kept when its hours are devoted to mere social purposes. The best preparation that can be made for its proper observance is to prepare for it as far as possible on Saturday. This was the old-time way. Everything was done on Saturday that could be done to lighten the burden of the work on Sunday. Some one tells us the story of a man who was trying to get his negro servant to do some unnecessary work on Sunday. He reminded the servant that Jesus had said it was lawful to pull an ass or an ox out of a pit on the sabbath. "Yes, massa," was the ready reply, "but not if it fell in on Saturday."

Jesus never was deterred from His work of mercy by the censorious criticism of His enemies. He bade

the man to stretch forth his hand. The arm was withered, dried up, dead. How could the man stretch it forth? But when Jesus gave the command it was implied that He would also give power to obey. The man must make the effort to do what he was bidden to do. That was the way he showed his faith. Then with the effort came new life into the dead arm.

Whenever Christ gives us a command He is ready to give us strength to obey it. We may say the thing required is impossible, but it is the privilege of the Christian to do impossible things. Anybody can do possible things; but when Christ is working in us and through us we need not ask whether the things He commands are possible or not. "I can do all things in Him that strengthened me." People often say that they cannot begin a Christian life because they have not the strength to do what Christ requires of them. True, but if they will begin to obey they will be enabled to obey, helped by the Master Himself.

## CHAPTER XIX

### GROWING HATRED TO JESUS

*Read Matthew XII., 22-32, 38-42*

THE heart of Christ was a great magnet that ever drew to it all human suffering and human need. The description given of Him in a quotation from Isaiah, in the verses immediately preceding this incident, are wonderfully suggestive. His compassion and His gentleness are depicted in the words,

"A bruised reed shall He not break,  
And smoking flax shall He not quench?"

This prophetic picture of the Messiah found its perfect realisation in the life of Jesus. He was the friend of the frail, the feeble, and the bruised. In those days men despised the weak. The deformed and the incurable were not considered worth saving, but were thrust out to perish. Jesus, however, had special compassion for that which was crushed or broken. He invited the weary to come to Him. The sick, the lame, the blind, the paralyzed and all sufferers soon learned that He was their friend.

Wherever He went throngs followed Him, and these throngs were made up largely of those who were distressed and those who had brought distressed friends to be helped or healed.

Now it was one possessed with a demon, and also blind and dumb, that was brought to Him. Nothing is told of the manner of the cure. All we learn is that "He healed him, insomuch that the dumb man spake and saw." No wonder the multitudes were amazed. "Can this be the son of David?" they asked. They thought that possibly a man who did such wonders might be the Messiah, yet it did not seem to them that He was. Or it may be that they feared to give expression to the feeling, knowing how bitter the Pharisees were against Him.

When the Pharisees heard what the people were suggesting they became greatly excited and set to work to account for Jesus and His power. They felt that they must account for Him in some way, must give the multitude some explanation of Him which would satisfy them and prevent their concluding that He was the Messiah. In Mark's account of this incident we learn that there were scribes and Pharisees present that day who had come down from Jerusalem to watch Jesus and to make a report of what they saw and heard. They set to work to create in the minds of the people the impression that Jesus was working in co-operation with evil spirits and that it was through their power that He did the wonders they had seen Him do. So they answered the people's question, "Can

this be the son of David?" by saying, "This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub the prince of demons." Beelzebub seems to have been an opprobrious name for Satan, probably having its origin in the story of Ahaziah's idolatry in inquiring of Baal-zebul, lord of flies, a Philistine deity.

One thing to notice here is the admission that Jesus had really done wonderful works, had actually wrought miracles. They did not attempt to deny this. They felt that some explanation must be given to the plain, simple-minded people who were following Jesus in such numbers. There was no doubt about the supernatural works. We find the same admission throughout the whole story of Christ's public ministry. Herod believed that Jesus had wrought miracles, and in his remorse imagined that John, whom he had beheaded, had risen from the dead. No opponent of Christ in those days ever even hinted that He did no miracles.

Another thing to notice here is the strange explanation these learned men gave of the miracles of Jesus. They frankly admitted them, but to account for them without confessing that He was the Messiah they said that He was in league with the Prince of evil. The giving of such an explanation of the power of Christ shows a prejudice that was not only stubborn but debased. Of course, it was intended also to put odium upon Jesus, impugning His character. They said He was an agent of the Devil. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and said He was doing His Father's will and the works of



His Father. They sought thus to slander Him and make Him an impostor, an enemy of God.

Wicked men oftentimes resort to the same course in our own days when they are seeking to destroy the influence of Christianity. They cannot deny the good that is done, but they seek to account for it by alleging wrong motives in those who do the good. Sometimes they try to blacken the names of those who represent Christ. They start evil stories about them, to defame their character. That is, they accuse the saints of being in league with Satan.

The answer of Jesus to this charge is clear and convincing. "Knowing their thoughts." He understood well their motives. He knows all men's thoughts. We can carry on no schemes or conspiracies without His knowing of them. We can keep no secrets from Him. His answer was: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation." This proved at once the absurdity and preposterousness of the charge His enemies had made. They said He was an agent of Satan. Yet He was not doing the work of Satan, but the work of God. Satan had a man under his power whom he was destroying. Jesus had taken the man, driven out the demon, opened his eyes and ears and healed him. Who could believe that He was in league with the Devil and was thus undoing the Devil's ruinous work? "If Satan casteth out Satan, he is divided against himself." This shows the folly of their charge. All the works of Christ were good works. He came to bless men, to save them, to heal the sick,

to make the lame walk, to raise the dead. Are these the works of the Evil One?

One of the strongest evidences of Christianity is in what it does for the world. When the disciples of John came asking for their Master, in his dungeon, whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah, they were bidden to tell John what they had seen Jesus doing—"the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up." These were all works of love, and they proved that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. Men are trying to prove to-day that He is not Divine, denying His miracles, taking away every vestige of the supernatural from His person, His life, His work. But look at Christianity, not as a creed merely, but as a regenerating force. Look at the map of the world and find the white spaces which show the effect of Christianity in the countries where it has gone. Was it an impostor that wrought all this? Was it one in league with Beelzebub who left all these records of blessing, who transformed these countries? Was it an agent of Satan that made the home life of Christian lands, that built the churches, the asylums, the hospitals, the orphanages, the schools, and that has given to the world the sweetness, the beauty, the joy, the comfort, the fruits of love, which are everywhere the results of Christian teaching and culture? Could anything be more absurd than trying to account for the mighty works of Christ by saying the Devil did them through Him?

Jesus gives the true explanation of His works in the words: "If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you." Christianity is the kingdom of God in battle with the kingdom of evil. The work of Christ in this world is to destroy the works of the Devil. This is a work in which every follower of Christ has a part. "He that is not with Me," said the Master, "is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth."

One of the most frequently misunderstood of all the words which Jesus spoke is found in His reply to His defamers: "Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven." Does not this seem to refer to the act of the Pharisees in imputing to the Prince of evil works which Jesus had done through the Spirit? One writes, "The conclusion of the whole is—you are on Satan's side, and knowingly on Satan's side, in this decisive struggle between the two kingdoms, and this is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost—an unpardonable sin."

Thousands of people, however, have stumbled at this word of Christ's and fallen into great darkness, fearing that they themselves had sinned a sin which never could be forgiven. There is not the slightest reason why this saying of Christ should cause anxiety to any who are sincerely striving to follow Christ. It may be said that those who have any anxiety concerning themselves and their spiritual

state may be sure that they have not committed such a sin. If they had, they would have no anxiety. The only actually unforgivable sin is the sin of final impenitence. All sin that is confessed and repented of will be forgiven. "This sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit is unforgivable because the soul which can recognise God's revelation of Himself in all His goodness and moral perfection, and be stirred only to hatred thereby, has reached a dreadful climax of hardness, and has ceased to be capable of being influenced by His beseeching. It has passed beyond the possibility of penitence and acceptance of forgiveness. The sin is unforgiven because the sinner is fixed in impenitence, and his stiffened will cannot bow to receive pardon."

"Much torture of heart would have been saved if it had been observed that the Scripture expression is not sin, but blasphemy. Fear that it has been committed is proof that it has not; for if it has been there will be no relenting in enmity nor any wish for deliverance."

Accustomed as we are to think of the gentleness of Jesus, His lips ever pouring out love, it startles us to read such words as He uses here in speaking to the scribes and Pharisees who were contending with Him. "Ye offspring of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak evil things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." We are reminded of the manner of the Baptist's speech, when he was calling men to repent. But we must not forget

that love is holy, that roses become coals of fire when they fall upon unholiness.

The scribes and Pharisees demanded a sign, something that would assure them that Jesus was what He claimed to be. Sincere and earnest inquirers after truth always find Christ most patient in answering their questions and making their real difficulties plain. When Thomas could not believe on the testimony of the other disciples, and demanded to see for himself the hands with the print of the nails, Jesus dealt with him most patiently. He is always gentle with honest doubt and quick to make the evidence plain to it. But the men who here demanded a sign were not honest seekers after truth. Jesus knew their thoughts and spoke to them in words of judgment. They were an evil and an adulterous generation—estranged from God, false to Him. They had had signs, but they had disregarded them. Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, and before them now was a greater than Jonah. The queen of the South came from afar to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and a greater than Solomon now stood before them. But they believed not, repented not. Impenitence gets no sign.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

*Read Matthew XIII., 1-9; 18-23*

JESUS was always teaching. On this particular day His pulpit was a fishing boat, from which He spoke to the multitudes standing on the shore. Perhaps there was a sower somewhere in sight, walking on his field, carrying his bag of grain and slinging his seed broadcast. The sight suggested the parable.

Christ Himself is the great Sower, but we all are sowers—sowers of something. Not all who sow scatter good seed; there are sowers of evil as well as of good. We should take heed what we sow, for we shall gather the harvest into our own bosom at the last. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”—that, and not something else.

In the parable the seed is good—it is the word of God. The soil likewise is good—it is all alike, in the same field. The difference is in the condition of the soil.

The first thing that strikes us in reading the parable is the great amount of waste of good there seems to be in the world. On three parts of the soil noth-

ing came to harvest. We think of the enormous waste there is in the Lord's work, in the precious seed of Divine truth which is scattered in the world. What comes of all the sermons, of all good teaching, of the wholesome words spoken in people's ears in conversation, of wise sayings in books? What waste of effort there is whenever men and women try to do good! Yet we must not be discouraged or hindered in our sowing. We should go on scattering the good seed everywhere, whether it all grows to ripeness or not. Even the seed that seems to fail may do good in some way other than we intended and thus not be altogether lost.

"What though the seed be cast by the wayside  
And the birds take it—yet the birds are fed."

The wayside is too hard to take in the seed that falls upon it. There are many lives that are rendered incapable of fruitfulness in the same way. They are trodden down by passing feet. Too many people let their hearts become like an open common. They have no fence about them. They shut nothing out. They read all sorts of books, have all kinds of companions, and allow all manner of vagrant thoughts to troop over the fields. The result is that the hearts, once tender and sensitive to every good influence, become impervious to impressions. They feel nothing. They sit in church, and the hymns, the Scripture words and exhortations, the appeals and the prayers fall upon their ears, but are not even heard. Or, if they are heard, they are

not taken into the mind or heart, but lie on the surface.

“The birds came.” The birds always follow the sower, and when a seed lies within sight they pick it up. The wicked one “snatcheth away that which hath been sown.” So nothing comes of the seed which falls on the trodden road.

The lesson at this point is very practical. It teaches our responsibility for the receiving of the truth which touches our life, in whatever way it is brought to us. When we read or listen we should let the word into our heart. We should give attention to it. We should see that it is fixed in our memory. “Thy word have I laid up in my heart,” said an old psalm writer. “Give God a chance . . . His seed gets no fair opportunity in a life which is like a trafficking highroad.”

The next kind of soil on which the seed fell was stony—only a thin layer over a hard rock. There is none of the fault of the trodden wayside here. The seed is readily received and at once begins to grow. But it never comes to anything. The soil is too shallow. The roots get no chance to strike down. The grain starts finely, but the hot sun burns up the tender growths because they lack depth of rooting.

There are many shallow lives. They are very impressionable. They attend a revival service and straightway they are moved emotionally and begin with great earnestness. But in a few days the ef-



fect is all worn off. Life is full of this impulsive zeal or piety which starts off with great glow but soon tires. Many people begin a book, read a few chapters and then drop it and turn to another. They are quick friends, loving at first, but it is soon over.

One of the pictures of the crucifixion represents the scene of Calvary after the body of Jesus had been taken down and laid away in the grave. The crowd is gone. Only the ghastly memorials of the terrible day remain. Off to one side of the picture is an ass nibbling at some withered palm branches. Thus the artist pictures the fickleness of human applause. Only five days before, palms were waved in wild exultation as Jesus rode into the city.

The goodness of too many people lacks root. The resolves of too many lack purpose. The intentions of too many lack life and energy. There are many shallow lives in which nothing good grows to ripeness. What this soil wants is the breaking up of the rock. What these shallow lives need is a thorough work of penitence, heart-searching and heart-breaking, the deepening of the spiritual life.

The third piece of soil in which the seed fell was preoccupied by thorns whose roots never had been altogether extirpated. The soil was neither hard nor shallow, but it was too full. The seed began to grow, but other things were growing alongside of it, and these, being ranker than the wheat and growing faster, choked it out.

Jesus tells us what these thorns of the parable stand for. They are the cares, riches and pleasures of this world. Cares are worries, frets, distractions. Many people seem almost to enjoy worrying. But worries are among the thorns which crowd out the good. Martha is an illustration of the danger of care. There are plenty of modern examples, however, and we scarcely need to recall such an ancient case as hers.

Riches, too, are thorns which often choke out the good in people's lives. One may be rich and his heart yet remain tender and full of the sweetest and best things. But when the love of money gets into a heart it crowds out the love of God and the love of man and all beautiful things. Judas is a fearful example. The story of Demas also illustrates the same danger. A good man said to a friend: "If you ever see me beginning to get rich, pray for my soul."

The pleasures of the world are also thorns which crowd out the good. It is well to have amusements, but we must guard lest they come to possess our heart. We are not to live to have pleasures; we are to have pleasures rather only to help us to live.

The fourth piece of soil was altogether good. It was neither trodden down, nor shallow, nor thorny; it was deep plowed and clean. Into it the seed fell and sank and grew without hindrance. By and by a great harvest waved on the field.

This is the ideal for all good farming. The

farmer must have his field in condition to receive the seed and to give it a chance to grow. That is all the good seed wants. This is the ideal, too, for all hearing of the word of God. If only we give it a fair chance in our life it will yield rich blessing.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE PARABLE OF THE TARES

*Read Matthew 'XIII., 24-30; 36-43*

THE sower is Christ Himself. He always sows good seed in His field. When He was living here He went up and down the country, dropping the words of life wherever He found a bit of heart-soil that would receive them. It is wonderful to think of the blessings which have come to the world through the words of Christ. They have changed millions of lives from sinfulness to holiness. They have comforted sorrow. They have guided lives through the world's perplexed paths. They have been like lamps for the feet of countless hosts.

In this parable, however, Christians themselves are the seeds. "The good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom." Every one who has received into his heart the grace of God becomes himself a living seed. Wherever a good seed grows, it springs up into a plant or a tree. Every good life has its unconscious influence, diffusing blessings, making all the life about it sweeter. Then it yields fruit. St. Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit in the lives

of those who receive the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering. There are also fruits in the activities of the Christian life, in the words one speaks, in the things one does, in the touches of life upon life.

We here come upon the truth of an Evil One who is in the world, an enemy of Christ, marring or destroying Christ's work. The Bible does not tell us about the origin of evil, but it everywhere takes for granted that there is a kingdom of evil, at the head of which is the great enemy of God and man. Evil is not dropped accidentally into lives or homes or communities. The bad work is done designedly. "While men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away."

People sometimes wish that there was no evil in the world. But, unfortunately, the feet of the Adversary go in every path. He is always watching for opportunities to steal in and do mischievous work while no one is watching. He is represented here as coming by night when good people are asleep. Our hours of greatest peril are those in which we are least conscious of peril. What can we do to protect ourselves in these unsheltered, unwatched times? If a man knows that a thief is coming, he will be on the watch. But the thief does not come then—he comes when he knows that no one is watching. How can we keep ourselves safe from the dangers we know not of? All we can do is to keep our lives ever in the hands of the un-sleeping Christ.

We are in danger of underestimating the enmity of Satan, and the evil wrought by his sowing. His own distinct purpose is to destroy the work of Christ. Whenever any good seed has been sown in a heart, he comes and tries to get some bad seed in among it. He whispers his evil suggestions in our ears, even while we are reading our Bible, praying, or partaking of the Lord's Supper. The Devil is far more busy among good people than among the bad. Those who are wholly given over to sin he can afford to let alone—they are safely his already; but those who are trying to be Christians he seeks to destroy. Young people need to guard against the baleful evil which seeks entrance in vile books and papers, in indecent conversation or unchaste pictures. When an officer in General Grant's presence was about to tell an obscene story, he glanced about him and said, "There are no ladies present." The general promptly answered, "But there are gentlemen present." Nothing that should not be said in the presence of a lady should be said in any presence.

In the early stages of growth the tare or darnel is so much like wheat that the two can scarcely be distinguished. Evil in its first beginnings is so much like good that it is often mistaken for it. By and by, however, as they grow, the true character of the tares is revealed. Seeds of evil sown in a heart may not for a while make much show. A child under wrong influences or teachings may for a time seem very innocent and beautiful, but at

length the sinful things will show themselves and will shoot up in strength. Many a man falls into ruin at mid-life through bad habits which he began to form when he was a boy. The time for young people to keep their hearts against evil is in the time of their youth.

The farmer's servants wished to clean out the tares before they had come to ripeness. The farmer said, however: "No, you would do more harm than good if you began to do this. Wait until the harvest, and then we will separate the tares and the wheat." Good men must live among the evil in this world. Sometimes they grow together in the same home, or in the same group of friends, or are associated in the same business, dwelling in constant communication and association. Even in the apostle family there was one traitor. Besides the impossibility of making a separation, there is a reason why the evil should remain—the hope that they may be influenced by the good and may yet themselves be changed into holiness. Every Christian should be an evangelist, eager in his desire and effort to bring others into the kingdom of God.

In Old Testament days God tolerated many evils like polygamy, divorce, blood revenge, and did not root them out at once because the people were not then ready for such heroic work. We are not to grow lenient and tolerant toward sin, but we are to be wise in our effort in rooting it out. Especially must we be forbearing and patient toward the sinner. If our neighbour has faults, we are not to

rush at him with both hands and begin to claw up the tares by the roots. We must be patient with his faults, meanwhile doing all we can by love and by influence to cure him of them. We are never to lower our own standard of morality nor to make compromise with evil; we must be severe with ourselves; but in trying to make the world better, we need much of the wise patience of Christ.

There will be at last a complete separation between the good and the evil. Hypocrites may remain in the Church in this world and may die in its membership and have a royal burial, but they cannot enter heaven. This solemn word should lead all believers in Christ to honest and earnest self-examination. Are we wheat, or are we tares? The same law applies to the good and the evil in our own lives. In the holiest character there are some things not beautiful. In the worst men there are some things that are fair and to be commended. But in the end the separation will be complete and final.

When the disciples had an opportunity of speaking to the Master alone they asked Him what this parable meant. "Explain unto us the parable of the tares of the field." That is what we should always do with our difficulties concerning the teaching of Christ, and with all perplexities concerning our duty as Christians—we should take them all to the Master himself. Some things may be explained to us at once by careful reading and study of Christ's teaching. Some things that once



were obscure and hard to understand become very plain as we go on; experience reveals them to us. Then the office of the Holy Spirit is to guide us into all truth.

Some people talk about this world as if it belonged to the Devil. Indeed, Satan himself said that all the kingdoms of the world were his. It looks sometimes, too, as if this were true. But really this is Christ's world. After His resurrection Jesus Christ sent His disciples forth into all the world, claiming it, bidding them go everywhere to make disciples of all the nations.

Jesus taught plainly that there is a personal spirit of evil, called the Devil. He says here distinctly, "The enemy that sowed them is the Devil." The Devil is the enemy of Christ. No sooner had Jesus been baptised than Satan began his assaults upon Him, seeking to overcome Him and destroy Him. Satan is the enemy also of every Christian. He takes the utmost delight in getting his poison into the lives of Christ's followers. Sometimes people think that they can play with evil safely, but it is always perilous play, and every one who thus ventures will surely be hurt. One great comfort we have in thinking of Satan as the enemy of souls and our enemy is that Christ overcame him at every point. While Satan is our enemy, strong and alert, he is a vanquished enemy. We cannot ourselves stand against him, but with Christ's help we can stand. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

## CHAPTER XXII

### PICTURES OF THE KINGDOM

*Read Matthew XIII., 31-33; 44-52*

THE parables of Jesus are unforgettable pictures. They are stories laden with truth. Some preachers tell stories which thrill those who hear them, and yet they are tales with no lesson. The parables of Jesus are homely and interesting, and yet they are vital with spiritual meaning.

The mustard seed is little, so small that one can scarcely see it. Yet it has life in it, and when it is sown in a field it grows and becomes a tree, so large that the birds come and nest in its branches. There would be no reason for our Lord's telling us about this little seed and its plant merely as a bit of natural history. It is beautiful and interesting even in this way, but He had a further purpose in His parable. He uses it as an illustration of His kingdom in the world. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed." Christianity began in a very small way. A little baby lay in a manger, sleeping its first sleep—that was the beginning of the kingdom of heaven in this world.

A kingdom implies a king. Christ ruled over a very small kingdom that night. His mother loved Him as mothers always love their children, and He reigned in her heart. Some shepherds came in during the night and saw the Child-King and worshipped Him. Their lives were never the same again, for one who has had a vision of Christ can never lose the influence out of his heart. They returned to their lowly duty—keeping watch over their flock—but they were better shepherds afterwards and better men. The kingdom of heaven had entered their hearts.

But the beginning of the kingdom was small indeed—like a mustard seed. For thirty years it seemed to have no appreciable growth. The child grew, but dwelt in a lowly home in a peasant village. His childhood was not unusual. He was not a precocious boy. There was no halo about His brow. Nothing showed that He was kingly. There were no flashings of divinity on His face. He did no brilliant things. He wrought no miracles. He went to school and learned His lessons, but revealed no greatness. According to the rules of His people He entered the carpenter's shop at twelve as an apprentice, and for eighteen years worked at the carpenter's bench. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed . . . which indeed is less than all seeds."

We know what the kingdom of Christ is to-day. It has touched many lands with its holy influence. It has become a great tree with wide-spreading

branches. On its boughs the birds sit and sing. In its shadows the people rest. Its fruits feed the hunger of multitudes. The tree is still growing. The great missionary movement of to-day is extending it, and it is destined to fill all lands. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is less than all seeds; but when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the heaven come and lodge in the branches thereof."

The next parable tells of the pervasive and permeating influence of the Gospel of Christ. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened." Usually in the Bible leaven stands for something evil. It was a symbol of sin in the Mosaic dispensation. St. Paul exhorts believers to purge out the old leaven. But here it is used in a good sense. The teaching is very apt. Leaven works secretly and silently. It makes no noise. It works pervasively, creeping out through the dough till every particle of it has been affected. Thus it is that the influence of Christianity permeates society, penetrating everywhere, touching every institution, changing all things.

The illustration may be widely applied. Thus individual lives are changed. The leaven of Divine grace in the heart works out until the whole character is changed. Henry Drummond in one of his books tells of a girl whose life was transformed

into great spiritual beauty. Her friends wondered what had wrought the change. At length the secret was discovered in a verse of Scripture which she carried in a locket—"Whom having not seen ye love." The leaven works also in communities. Neighbourhoods are changed, transformed by the Gospel. In mission lands there are many notable illustrations.

The truest work of Christianity is quiet. It is a religion less of organization than of personal influence. It is not always the most active person who does the most for the advancement of the kingdom of God; oftentimes it is the quiet man or woman whose life is holy and beautiful, that really does the most for the changing of other lives. Many an invalid, who cannot take any active part in the affairs of the Church, yet exerts a sweetening and ennobling influence in a home, in a community, which far surpasses in its value the busy ministry of one who is always going about, talking, doing good.

The lesson from the leaven is that it does its work by being put into the midst of the loaf. It will not do any good if laid on the shelf, in however close proximity to the dough. It must be in the mass. There are some Christian people who seem to feel no responsibility for the touching or influencing of other lives. They incline to keep away from people and to be exclusive. But leaven will never do its work if kept wrapped up in a dainty vessel. A Christian man can do good only

by going among people. Thus Jesus did—He was called a friend of publicans and sinners. He ate with them and mingled with them in all social ways, and His pure, loving, gentle life left its impress on their lives. Jesus did not teach His disciples to hide away from people, to keep out of the world, but to live in the world, to be friends of men, to seek to influence others by being with them. He said they were salt, but salt to do its work, to perform its mission, must be rubbed into that which it is to preserve.

We need to take the lesson. Be leaven wherever you are. Let your goodness be felt. Let your kindness touch others. Let your example have in it a contagion of joy, of peace, of unselfishness, of sweetness, of purity, which shall be a benediction everywhere. Be sure that you make one little spot of the world better, cleaner, whiter, brighter, gladder because you live in it.

In another parable Jesus speaks "of a treasure hidden in the field; which a man found, and hid; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." There were no banks in ancient times, especially in unsettled countries. It was common therefore to hide treasure in the ground. Not infrequently did one come upon such concealed treasure. Of course, Jesus had spiritual treasure in His thought, as He is illustrating the kingdom of heaven. We do not dream of the wealth of invisible riches that are always close to us as we go through this world. A man may work for years in

a field, digging and ploughing over it, not thinking of anything of value in it, and then suddenly some day discover that there are valuable minerals or even gems hidden under his pick and plough.

Dr. Newell Dwight Hillis says: "Lecturing in Kentucky recently, I saw a cave of diamonds, newly discovered. One day a farmer, ploughing, thought the ground sounded hollow. Going to the barn he brought a spade and opened up the aperture. Flinging down a rope, his friends let the explorer down, and when the torches were lighted, lo! a cave of amethysts and sapphires and diamonds. For generations the cave had been undiscovered and the jewels unknown. Wild beasts had fed just above those flashing gems, and still more savage men had lived and fought and died there. And yet just beneath was this cave of flashing jewels."

We do not know what hidden treasures of spiritual good there are all the while so close to us that our hand could take them if we saw them. Sometimes we come suddenly upon them, and then we should instantly seize them and appropriate them, whatever it may cost us. The man in the parable sold all he had and bought the field in which the treasure was concealed. We should be ready to give up all we have to get the spiritual riches that we find.

The parable of the pearl teaches almost the same lesson as that of the hidden treasure. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls: and having found one

pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it." This merchant was in a good business—he was a buyer of pearls. He sought goodly pearls—the best that could be found. Then when he heard of this best of pearls, he was willing to give up all he had that he might possess it. We should live always for the best things—too many people do not, but are content to take things that are not the best. It is better to seek for pearls than for tinsel. Then when we find something even better than the good we should be eager to possess it, no matter if we have to give up all we have to buy it.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

*Read Matthew XIV., 1-12*

JOHN THE BAPTIST was one of the noblest men that ever lived. Jesus said of him that no greater man had arisen. His mission was only a brief one. His one definite errand to the world was to introduce Jesus as the Messiah. He preached about six months before Jesus was baptised, and continued to preach a few months afterwards. Then he was cast into prison because of his faithfulness, and never came out.

The fame of Jesus reached everywhere, even to Herod's palace, and no one could have been more unsympathetic toward Him than Herod. The influence of Christ's life was like the light, or like the fragrance of flowers—it diffused itself everywhere. Jesus was talked about all over the country. People told each other the stories they had heard of His wonderful works. This sick woman and that lame man had been healed by Him. The demoniac boy at the other end of the village had been taken to Him, and he was now well and sane

as any other young fellow in the town. Jesus never can be hid. No matter how quiet, humble and obscure we may be, if we are living a true, beautiful life the influence of our life will reach far and wide.

It was a strange effect that the news about Jesus had on Herod. When he heard it he said, "This is John the Baptist." It was Herod's guilty conscience that put this uncanny fancy into his mind. He never had been able to get the memory of that terrible crime out of his thoughts. A guilty conscience is a fearful avenger. Conscience obeyed brings peace, but conscience disobeyed causes untold bitterness. No earthly suffering is so terrible as remorse. For a time conscience may seem to be asleep, but no one can tell when it will awake. A chance word, a sudden noise, some unusual occurrence, the glimpse of a face in a crowd, a letter, a sentence in a book, a sickness, the death of a friend—and the memory comes up again. It was so with Herod that day.

Herod was not so bad as Herodias. He was driven on to his crime by her. He laid hold on John and bound him, and put him in prison "for the sake of Herodias." Here we see illustrated the power of a bad influence. Herod cast John into prison to please the woman he had taken unlawfully to be his wife. Thousands of men owe whatever is good and beautiful in them to the woman whom they love and honour as wife. A good wife's influence is simply immeasurable. She inspires in

her husband all right impulses, all noble aspirations, all lofty ambitions, all gentle sentiments. But when a man has a bad woman for his wife he is under an influence which may kindle in his breast every unholy passion and feeling and compel him to deeds that are malign and dark. Herod was bad enough himself, but when he took Herodias to be his wife he sold himself into a bondage of sin yet worse than that of his own wicked heart. We need to be most careful under whose influence we allow our lives to fall. The whole future of young people depends oftentimes on the character of those whom they admit into their lives as friends.

What Herod was angry at in John was really one of the noblest things John ever did. He had said frankly to this guilty man, "It is not lawful for thee to have this woman for thy wife." John was a lion-hearted preacher. Wherever he saw a sin he denounced it, whether it was in a lowly peasant, a proud Pharisee, or a king. To his eye a sin was black, whoever it was that had sinned. John did not soften his terms of speech because it was a tetrarch's sin he was reproving. He did not preach against Herod's sin in Herod's absence either, but went and told the king of it right to his face. He knew that fidelity to the truth might cost him his life, but that did not alter his duty. We would better die any day for being true than save our life by being untrue to God. It does no good man any real harm to be cast into prison, or even to be

killed; but it does him irreparable harm to fail in his duty.

The story shows debased lives in the actors. It was Herod's birthday, and there was a great feast in the palace. When the revelry reached its height a strange thing occurred. The young daughter of Herodias came in and danced in the banqueting hall before the men. The dance was indelicate and improper, and only those who had lost all sense of modesty and womanly propriety would degrade themselves by indulging in it. A woman has fallen very low when she will debase her own daughter in order to accomplish a wicked purpose. Young girls should learn here the lesson that they cannot be too careful of their behaviour in public. A young woman's name is a precious jewel which she should prize above all else. Once tarnished, it never can become altogether pure again in the eyes of the world. Many young girls are thoughtless and careless in this matter.

No doubt Herod and his companions were well advanced in intoxication when this scene occurred. When Herod saw the young girl dancing he was so exhilarated that he promised, with an oath, to give her whatsoever she should ask. Men are forever repeating Herod's mad folly. In the excitement of pleasure they throw away not the half only, but the whole of their kingdom. One day, when he was hungry, Esau sold his birthright just to get a single meal. Every day some men sell their souls in like manner for a little pleasant self-gratification. In

moments of passion compacts are made which darken all the future, and solicitations are yielded to which cost a lifetime of sorrow and remorse. The whole matter of making promises should be carefully considered. Some people promise almost anything they are asked to promise, and then never think of keeping their promises. We should never make promises in blank, as Herod did, not knowing what the pledge may involve.

It is not often that a mother encourages her own daughter in crime, but it was so in the case of Herodias. The child was "put forward by her mother," the record says. The brazenness of the girl is only equaled by the guilt of the mother. Salome went to her mother for instructions when she had received Herod's promise. "What shall I choose?" With half a kingdom to choose from, what did this mother bid her child to ask? A ghastly crime. Too many mothers, with all the world, and heaven, too, to choose from, select for their children, not the things which would truly enrich, ennoble and beautify them, but things which in the end can only ruin their souls and blot the joy and beauty of their lives. They choose for them worldly and sinful companions, who will lead them away from God. They teach them to look for money, for worldly possessions, for fitting earthly honours, rather than for nobility in earthly life and for true riches in heaven. It was an awful choice which Salome made at her mother's bidding.

It was a bitter moment for Herod. With all his

wickedness he was not himself ready for such a crime as his wife demanded of him. He was "grieved; but for the sake of his oaths, and of them who sat at meat with him, he commanded it to be given." Herod hated himself that minute for having been ensnared by his wife in her foul plot of vengeance. Yet such a poor slave was he that, though claiming to be a king, he could not refuse the iniquitous request. True, he had promised and sworn, repeating his oath many times, but nothing promised even on oath is binding when it requires one to sin against God. There are some things we have no right even to swear away. One of these is right. Herod had sworn to give Salome whatever she asked, even to half his kingdom. But John's head was no part of Herod's kingdom—it was not his to give. If, in a thoughtless moment, we have promised to do anything which would injure another, we dare not keep our promise. An engagement to sin should always be broken.

So the crime was enacted. Into the dungeon stole the executioner, and John was beheaded. This seems a strange fate to befall a servant of God. We know it was not an accident, however, for there is One who watches over human destinies, so that not even the lowliest can fall without Divine permission. John's mission was to introduce the Messiah. His work was finished, therefore, when Jesus began to preach. Hence we cannot lament here an unfinished life. Then John died for his faithfulness to duty.

It is not long years that make a complete career. A life is complete, whether long or short, which fulfils the purpose of its creation; and the longest life is incomplete and a failure if it does not do that for which it was made. It is better to die young, with a life pure and unspotted, than to live to old age in evil and crime. It was a thousand times better to die as John did than to live on as Herod and Herodias lived on.

But was it worth while for John to die when nothing came from his faithfulness for God? The guilty pair continued in their guilty relations. Still, let us not say that John's faithfulness was in vain, for

"No life

Can be pure in its purpose and strong in its strife,  
And all lives not be purer and stronger thereby."

All these centuries since that day John's reproof of Herod has been ringing in men's ears. John died for his faithfulness, but his testimony lives as part of the world's moral force.

It is a pathetic sentence which closes our story. "His disciples came, and took up the corpse, and buried him; and they went and told Jesus." They did love's duty to their master's remains; then they carried their sorrow to Christ. They were perplexed and dismayed, but they took their perplexity and dismay to the right place. We should put into Christ's hands the things we cannot understand, sure that blessing and good will always come.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE MULTITUDES FED

*Read Matthew XIV., 13-21; XV., 29-39*

It was just after the death of John the Baptist. John's disciples went and told Jesus of their great sorrow. Their grief touched the heart of their Master, and He withdrew, seeking a little season of quiet. The best comforter in our times of trouble is God, and when our hearts are sore we can do nothing so wise as to flee into the secret of His presence.

Jesus went out in a boat to cross the lake. But the people saw the boat departing and flocked round the lake to meet Him on the other side. He had not been long in His quiet retreat when the multitude began to gather, eager to see Him. Although He was seeking for rest, His compassion drew Him to the people that He might help them.

It was always thus that Jesus carried people's sorrows. When He looked upon the great throng who had flocked after Him and saw among them so many suffering ones—lame, sick, blind, palsied—His compassion was stirred. When we remember



that Jesus was the Son of God, these revealings of His compassion are wonderful. It comforts us to know that there is the same compassion yet in the breast of the risen Christ in glory. He did not lose His tenderness of heart when He was exalted to heaven. We are told that as our High Priest He is touched by every sorrow of ours. Every wrong that we suffer reaches Him. Every sorrow of ours thrills through His heart. It was not their hunger, their poverty, their sickness, nor any of their earthly wants, that appeared to Him their greatest trouble, but their spiritual needs. Our worst misfortunes are not what we call calamities. Many people may seem prosperous in our eyes, and yet when Christ looks upon them He is moved with compassion, because they are like sheep with no heavenly Shepherd.

Yet the first help Christ gave that day was the healing of the sick. He thinks of our bodies as well as our souls. If we would be like Him, we must help people in their physical needs, and then, like Him, also, seek further to do them good in their inner life, their spiritual life. There are times when a loaf of bread is a better evangel than a tract. At least the loaf must be given first, to prepare the way for the tract.

As the day wore away it became evident that the people were very hungry. They had brought no provisions with them, and there were no places in the desert where they could buy food. Combining the stories in the different Gospels, we get the com-

plete narrative of what happened. Jesus asked Philip, "Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" Philip thought it was impossible for them to make provision for such a throng. "Two hundred shillings' worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little." The apostles could think of no way to meet the need of the hour but by dispersing the people. "Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves food." To this suggestion the Master answered, "They have no need to go away; give ye them to eat."

We are like the disciples. We are conscious of having but little of our own with which to help or bless others, and we conclude hastily that we cannot do anything. If we feel responsibility, we meet it by deciding that it is impossible for us to do anything. Our usual suggestion in such cases is that the people go elsewhere to find the help they need. We suggest this person or that person who has means, or who is known to be generous, thus passing on to others the duty which God has sent first to our door. We are never so consciously powerless and empty in ourselves as when we stand before those who are suffering, those in perplexity, or those who are groping about for peace and spiritual help. Our consciousness of our own lack in this regard leads us often to turn away hungry ones who come to us for bread. Yet we must take care lest we fail to do our own duty to Christ's little ones.

Jesus said to His disciples that day, "They have no need to go away; give ye them to eat." That is precisely what He says to us when we stand in the presence of human needs and sorrows. He says, "Feed these hungry people." There is no use sending them to the world's villages—there is nothing there that will feed them. Nor need you send them to people who seem to have more than you have—they have no duty in the matter. Whenever Christ sends to us those who are in need, whether it be for physical or spiritual help, we may not lightly turn them away. The help they actually need we can give them. They would not have been sent to us if it had been impossible for us to do anything for them. If we use the little we have in Christ's name, He will bless it so that it shall feed the hunger of many.

The disciples had but little in their hands to do with that day. Five loaves and two fishes might feed one or two hungry men, but they would be nothing for five thousand people. A young Christian is asked to teach a Sunday-school class, but says: "I have no gift for teaching. I have nothing to give these children." A young man is asked to take part in a meeting, but he says he cannot. We are all the while excusing ourselves from helping others, pleading poverty or unfitness. The great lesson we should get here is that however little we may have of ability, when our little is blessed by the Master, we can do large things with it.

We learn how to use our resources of ability by

studying the way the disciples fed the multitude that day. The first thing they did was to bring their loaves and fishes to the Master. If they had not done this they could not have fed the people with them. The first thing we must do with our small gifts is to bring them to Christ for His blessing. If we try with unblest gifts and powers to help others, to comfort the suffering, to satisfy people's spiritual hungers, we shall be disappointed. We must first bring to Christ whatever we have, and when He has blessed it then we may go forth with it.

The next thing in the miracle was the passing of the loaves by the Master, after they had been blessed, back into the hands of the disciples. That is always the way. When Christ would train a child for usefulness He puts love and gentleness into the mother's heart and skill into her hands, and then gives her the task of nursing and training the child for Him. When He would help some one in trouble and need, He does not go Himself, but sends a man or a woman to carry the message and the gift. This suggests the responsibility of those who have the bread of life. They have it not for themselves only, but also to pass to others. Suppose that the disciples had just fed themselves and then not passed on the food; the people would have hungered still, with provision enough for them close at hand. Do we not sometimes feed ourselves with the bread God gives us, without any thought of the hungry ones beyond us?

The miracle seems to have been wrought in the disciples' hands as the bread was passed to the people. They gave and still their hands were full. In the end all were fed. So with our small gifts, when Christ has blessed them, we may carry comfort and blessing to many people. It was a boy who had these loaves. Here is a good lesson for the boys.

Some one says that this boy was a whole Christian Endeavor Society himself. He and Jesus fed thousands of people with what ordinarily would have been a meal for but one or two. The boys do not know how much they can do to help Christ bless the world through the little they have. The young girl who thinks she cannot teach a class in Sunday-school, and takes it at last tremblingly but in faith, finds her poor barley loaf grow under Christ's touch, until many children are found feeding upon it, learning to love Christ and honour Him. The young man who thinks he has no gifts for Christian work finds, as he begins, that his words are blessed to many.

In the closing of the story we have a lesson on caring for fragments. Though Christ had so easily made the little into a great supply of bread, yet it was He who gave the command to gather up the fragments, that nothing might be lost, not even a crumb of bread. We are all apt to be careless about fragments, especially when we have plenty. There is no waste in God's world. "The decay of rocks forms the soil of plants. The decay of plants forms the molds in which future plants will grow,

The water dissipated in the air becomes clouds and rain." We should be careful of the fragments of our time. Many of us waste minutes enough every day to make hours. Every moment is valuable, since in it we may speak the word or do the kindness which will bless another. We should take care of the little bits of money. Many are careless of the pennies, and thus waste countless pounds. We should be careful of all our opportunities for honouring Christ and doing good. Many of us every day miss chances of doing kindness to others—chances of which we may hear again by and by in the Master's words, "I was hungry, and ye did not give Me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink."

We must notice, also, that the disciples had more bread after feeding the vast multitude than they had at the beginning. We think that giving empties our hands and hearts. We say we cannot afford to give or we shall have nothing for ourselves. Perhaps the disciples felt so that day. But they gave, and their store was larger than before. So the widow's oil was increased in the emptying. The disciples said that Mary's ointment was wasted when she poured it upon the Master's feet. But instead of being wasted it was increased, so that now its fragrance fills all the earth.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### JESUS WALKS ON THE SEA

*Read Matthew XIV., 22-36*

It was after the feeding of the five thousand. As we learn from John's account the people were so excited by this miracle that they wished to take Jesus by force and make him king. To prevent this act Jesus sent the multitude away and then went up into a mountain for prayer.

Before going into the mountain, however, He sent His disciples out upon the sea in the boat, to go before Him to the other side. The record says "He constrained" them. It ought to have been a comfort to them that night, in the midst of the storm, to remember that their going out upon the lake was not at their own suggestion—then they might have thought it a mistake—but that the Master had bidden them to go. They were in the way of obedience, and when we are doing Christ's will we are under Divine protection, and need fear no storm.

We must not expect that every voyage we take at Christ's bidding shall be without storm. We may be pleasing God and yet meet dangers. When

we find obstacles in something we are doing under God's guidance, we may not conclude that we have made a mistake, and that these difficulties are indications that we ought not to have taken such a course. On the other hand, such troubles are not meant to discourage us, but to inspire us to stronger faith and greater endeavour.

“He went up into the mountain apart to pray.” No doubt His prayer was partly for Himself. There had come to Him a temptation of earthly honour and power—and He sought relief and strength in prayer. Then He prayed also for His disciples. Mark tells us that from this mountain top He saw them that night on the sea, distressed in rowing. Jesus always sees us when we are toiling in any tempest, any struggle, and speaks for us to His Father.

“In the fourth watch of the night He came unto them, walking upon the sea.” He did not come to them immediately—indeed, it was almost morning when He appeared. The boat in the wild storm represents Christ's friends in this world in the storms of life. Sometimes we think we are forgotten, that Christ does not see us, or does not care. Here we have an illustration. From His mountain top He sees His disciples in their struggles in the wild sea. He does not forget them. He watches that no wave shall engulf them. Then at the right time He comes to them with help. So it is in all our experiences of danger and distress. He is interested in our earthly life. Some people tell us sneeringly



that there is no one who cares, no one who thinks of us. But the picture here is the true one. Christ cares, watches, keeps His unsleeping eye upon us, keeps His omnipotent hand on all affairs so that no harm can come to us on ocean or on shore.

When He came He came as no other friend could come. "He came unto them, walking upon the sea." No human help could possibly have got to them that night in the wild sea. Their friends, though standing on the shore, and seeing their peril, could not have done anything for them. So we may stand and look at our friends in their sorrow, and our hearts may break for them, but we can do nothing. We cannot get to them through the wild waves. But there is One who can reach them—Jesus can walk on the roughest billows as if they were a crystal floor.

Sometimes Jesus alarms His friends by the way He comes to them. It was so that night. "When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled." In their terror and superstition they thought it must be an apparition, and they were affrighted. Yet it was their best friend, and He was coming to deliver and save them. They were terrified because He came in such a strange way. It is the same with us oftentimes. He comes in the black cloud of trial, sickness, loss, bereavement, disappointment, and we think it is some new peril, when really it is our Saviour. We should learn to see Christ in every providence, bright or painful. The sternest things of life carry in them,

if only we have faith to receive them, Divine blessing and good.

“It is I; be not afraid.” As soon as the disciples heard the voice of Jesus they recognised Him and their fear changed to joy. So it was with Mary at the sepulchre. He whom she took to be the gardener was her own Master; she knew Him as soon as He spoke her name.

Then comes the story of Peter’s venture and failure. Peter was always impulsive. As soon as he heard the voice of Jesus, and knew who it was that was walking on the waves, he was seized with a desire to rush to meet Him. “Bid me come unto Thee,” he cried. Jesus said, “Come,” and for a time Peter walked on the waves and did not sink. His faith was simple and he was upheld by Divine power. But soon he took his eye off his Lord and looked at the tossing waves and instantly he began to sink. That is the way most of us do. We go a step or two as if we were borne up on wings, while our faith is strong and our eye is fixed upon Jesus. But soon we begin to look at the dangers, and then our faith trembles and we begin to sink. If we could always keep our eye upon Christ, not thinking of the perils, our faith would not fail.

“Jesus stretched forth His hand, and took hold of him.” In his fear and helplessness Peter did the right thing—he turned to Jesus for help, crying, “Lord, save me.” Said an old Alpine guide to a tourist who was timid at some point of danger,

“This hand never lost a man.” Christ never lost a man out of His hand.

As soon as Jesus was in the boat with the disciples, the storm was over, the boat was at the land, and the tired rowers, after their long night of toil, dropped their oars, and all went on shore. So will it be at the end of life, if we have Christ with us. As the morning breaks we will pass out of the storm into the quiet calm and will find ourselves on the shore of eternal blessedness.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE CANAANITISH WOMAN

*Read Matthew XV., 21-28*

JESUS seems to have gone out of His own country into the borders of Tyre and Sidon seeking a little quiet. He needed rest. He entered a house and would not have it known that He was there. But He could not be hid. A Canaanitish woman somehow heard of His being there and came straight-way to Him. Her daughter was in a distressing condition.

This woman was a Gentile, and yet she must have known something of the true God. How she had learned about Jesus we are not told. No doubt the fame of His ministry of healing had reached her. So when she heard that He was in the house of a neighbour she instantly determined to see Him.

The world is full of sorrow. Few are the homes in which there is not some grief or affliction. Many are the sad mothers who move about through the world, carrying their heavy burden of pain or grief. No wonder this mother was glad when she heard of Jesus coming to her neighbourhood. No wonder she was so persistent in her pleading that He would heal her child.

We may notice here that while the trouble was in the child it was the mother's heart that carried the burden. Whenever we see a child sick or in any pain or distress, and the mother watching, the mother suffers more than the child. Children never can understand how the hearts of their parents are bound up in them.

To this woman's intense pleading with Jesus, her appeals to His mercy, her cries of distress, Jesus answered her not a word. This is one of the strangest incidents in all the story of Jesus. Usually He was quick to hear every request made of Him by any sufferer. Scarcely ever had any one to ask twice for His help. His heart instantly responded to cries of distress. Ofttimes He gave the help unasked. Yet now He stood and listened to this woman's piteous pleading, and answered her not a word. Like a miser with hoards of gold, at whose gates the poor knock, but who, hearing the cries of need and distress, yet keeps his gates locked and is deaf to every entreaty, so Jesus stood unmoved by this woman's heartbroken cries. Why was He thus silent? Was this a weak hour with Him, when He could not give help? The most compassionate man has days when he can do nothing, but there never were such hours in the life of Jesus. Was it because He was so engrossed in His own coming sorrow that He could not think of any other one's trouble? No, for even on the cross He forgot His own anguish, and prayed for His murderers and cared for His mother. Evidently the reason

for His silence was to draw out the woman's faith. He was preparing her to receive in the end a far richer, better blessing than she could have received at the beginning.

Our Lord sometimes yet seems to be silent to His people when they cry unto Him. To all their earnest supplications He answers not a word. Is His silence a refusal? Does it indicate that His heart has grown cold, or that He is weary of His people's cries? Not at all. Ofttimes, at least, the silence is meant to make the supplicants more earnest, and to prepare their hearts to receive better blessings.

The woman's cries seem to have disturbed the disciples. They grew almost impatient with their Master for keeping her waiting so long. They wanted her daughter healed because they could not endure the mother's crying. Yet Jesus was in no haste to yield to her imploring. He is not so tender-hearted that He cannot see us suffer when suffering is the best experience for us. He does not immediately lift burdens from our shoulders when it is needful for our growth that we bear the burdens longer. There is about some people's ideas of Christ a mawkish sentiment, as if He were too gentle to endure the sight of suffering. Here we get a glimpse of a different quality in Him. He does not promise always to save us from suffering—His promise rather is to bless us through the suffering. It is possible to be too tender-hearted toward pain and distress. It is possible for parents to be too emotionally kind to their children. Uncon-

trolled pity is positive weakness, and oftentimes works great injury.

Christ's gentleness is never too tender to be wise and true as well as tender. He never makes the mistake of yielding to any one's entreaties so long as denial is better than the granting of the favour. He never lets us have what we want because He cannot bear to say "No" to our tearful cries. Nor is He so emotionally kind that He cannot bear to punish sin. He will not let even His truest disciples go unchastened when only by chastening can He save them or best promote their spiritual growth.

But one thing we must not forget—it is love that prompts what seems severity in Christ. He was silent here that in the end He might give the full, rich blessing which He wished to give this woman, but which in the beginning she could not receive. He denies us our requests and is silent to us when we cry, that He may draw out our faith and give us His best blessings in the end.

Jesus told the woman that it was not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs. This seemed a strange word to fall from the lips of the gentle Christ. If it had been some Pharisee who spoke to this poor woman as a dog it would not have seemed out of keeping. Even if Christ's own disciples had spoken thus to her, we could have understood it, for they had not yet got away from Jewish prejudices, nor had their hearts grown gentle with love for all humanity. But it certainly

seems strange to hear the sympathetic, loving Jesus speak to the lowly sufferer at His feet as a Gentile dog. We can understand it only when we remember that in all His treatment of her He was trying her heart, training her faith, schooling her into truer submission and more earnest believing.

Both the woman's humility and her alert, eager faith appear in her answer, "Yea, Lord: for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." She was not hurt by the offensive words Jesus had used. She was willing to be as a little dog under the Master's table. She was ready to grant to the Jews the children's place at that table. The position Jesus had assigned to her quite satisfied her. For the dogs under the table did not starve. The children were first served, and then the pieces of bread they let fall, rejected, or did not eat, belonged to the dogs at their feet. All she asked was the portion which usually went to the dogs. Even the crumbs from that table were enough for her. Thus her humility and also her faith were shown in her answer, and in both she is an example to us. We should come to Christ with a deep sense of our unworthiness, ready to take the lowest place; and we should believe that even the crumbs of His grace are better than all the feasts of this world.

"Not worthy, Lord, to gather up the crumbs  
With trembling hand that from Thy table fall,  
A weary, heavy laden sinner comes  
To plead Thy promise and obey Thy call.



“I am not worthy to be thought Thy child,  
Nor sit the last and lowest at Thy board;  
Too long a wanderer and too oft beguiled,  
I only ask one reconciling word.”

It is most interesting to trace the growth of this woman's faith. There were many difficulties in her way, but she surmounted them all. She was a Gentile and her Healer was a Jew. When she first came to Jesus she was repulsed and called a dog. But none of these discouragements chilled the ardour of her faith or hindered her in her determination. So at last she got the blessing and won from the lips of Jesus one of the highest commendations ever given by Him to any one—“O woman, great is thy faith.” Large faith gets large blessings; small faith receives but small favours. We should go to God making large requests, believing His promises. We should never be discouraged by delays, by seeming repulses, by obstacles and hindrances. We should fight our way to victory. With infinite fulness in our Father's hand, we should not live in spiritual hunger as so many of God's children do. This is a wonderful saying—“Be it done unto thee even as thou wilt.” These words simply throw heaven open to our faith. We can get—we do get—what we will. So upon ourselves comes the responsibility of the less or the more blessing which we receive from the bountiful God.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### PETER'S CONFESSION

*Read Matthew XVI., 13-28*

JESUS had led the disciples to a quiet place, away from crowds and excitements. The time had come to declare to them His Messiahship. It was a new epoch in His ministry.

He asked two questions. The first referred to the opinion of the people concerning Him. "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" The disciples told Him that there were different opinions about Him. Some thought He was John the Baptist risen again; others, that He was Elijah returned to earth; still others that He was Jeremiah, or some other one of the old prophets. There still is a wide diversity of opinion among people concerning Jesus. Some think He was only a man, others, that He was a great teacher, but nothing more. Others then think that He was the only-begotten Son of God, Divine as well as human.

Jesus asked another question, "But who say ye that I am?" What other people thought about Him was not half so important as the opinion the

disciples themselves had of Him. We may be able to state what the creeds say about Jesus Christ, and yet never have brought ourselves to answer the more important question, "Who do you think that I am?" Some people tell us that it makes very little difference what our beliefs are, even about Christ—that conduct is everything in life. But it is of greatest importance what we think of Christ. If we think of Him as only a man, though the best of men, the wisest of teachers, we may learn much from His words and from His life; but can one only a man be to us all that we need to find in Him to whom we look for salvation? We may change the question a little and ask: "What is Jesus Christ to you? Is He only in your creed? or is He also in your life as your personal Saviour, Lord, Friend, Helper?" This is the question that decides our relation to Christ.

Peter was always the first one to answer Christ's questions. Sometimes he answered rashly and unwisely; this time he answered well. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." It was a noble answer. Jesus was the Messiah promised through the ages, come at length to save His people from their sins. This is the true thought about Christ. God sent Him to earth on an errand of love. He became man, thus drawing close to us. He was also the Son of God, Divine, possessing all power, infinite in His love and grace, able to do for us all that we need, and to lift us up to eternal life and glory. If our belief is like Peter's, and Christ is all

to us in our life that we make Him in our creed, we are resting on the Rock.

Too many people, however, have Christ only in their creeds, and not in their life. There is a story of a little deaf boy whom the mother takes with her to church. He loves to have her find the hymns, though the music never thrills his quiet ear nor touches his tender heart. He looks at the words, however, guiding his little finger over every line, to the end. If he finds the name of Jesus there, he is satisfied, and sits absorbed to the close of the singing. But if he cannot find this sacred name in the verses, he closes the book and will have nothing more to do with it. The true test of every creed, every system of theology, and every life's hopes, is 'Jesus. If Jesus be not there, there is nothing to give rest, nothing to bring life and salvation.

Peter had made a noble confession, and now Jesus said to him, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church." Peter was the new name which Jesus had given to Simon when Andrew brought him and introduced him. Jesus saw in Simon the possibilities of a noble future and so He said to him, "Thou shalt be called Peter." The new name was a prophecy of his future. Jesus sees the best that is in people and tries to inspire them to reach the best. At that time Peter was very far from being a rock, which means stability and strength. But, by and by, he became rocklike, firm and strong, under the training and discipline of his Master. Whatever view we take of the meaning

of the Lord's words, it is a great comfort to know that the Church of Christ is indeed founded upon a rock, an impregnable rock.

As soon as Peter had declared that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus lifted the veil and gave the disciples a glimpse of what Messiahship would mean to Him. They were thinking about a worldly Messiah. Jesus swept all this dream away and told them that, instead of being an earthly conqueror, He was going to a cross. That was the way marked out for Him from the beginning—the will of God for Him, God's plan for His life. They were so overwhelmed by His saying that He must be killed that they had no ear for the bright, joyous word, the note of victory, which came after—that He would rise again the third day. However, Jesus Himself saw through the darkness to the light that shone beyond. He knew that He must suffer and die, but He knew also that the grave could not hold Him and that He would come again. It is always in the story of Divine grace as it was with Jesus Christ—the cross is the way to glory. Beyond every dark valley in the Christian's path is a hill-top bathed in light.

Peter was always making mistakes. Jesus commended his confession. But a little later we again find him speaking rashly and ignorantly. When Jesus had said that His Messiahship meant suffering and death, this impulsive disciple, in his great love for his Master, possibly, too, lifted up by the praise of his confession which the Master had

given, sought to interfere. "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee." He would have held his Master back from His cross. But suppose Jesus had listened to love's entreaty that day and had not gone forward; what would the world have lost? We should never meddle with God's plans, whether for ourselves or others. This is one of the dangers of friendship. A loved one of ours is called to some hard service, to some great self-denial or sacrifice. In our warm-hearted affection we try to hold our friend back from the costly calling. We may say almost as Peter said, "This shall never be unto thee."

The answer of Jesus to Peter's rash though loving restraint is full of suggestion. "He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan." What Peter said had proved a temptation to Jesus, suggesting to Him an easier way in place of the way to the cross. The friends of St. Paul once tried to keep him from going to Jerusalem when a prophet had foretold that he would be seized and bound there. St. Paul begged his friends not to weep and break his heart by urging him not to go on to peril which had been foretold. They were only making it harder for him to do his duty. It is a constant danger of friendship that we shall try to keep our loved ones from hard tasks to which God is calling them.

Jesus lifted another veil. He told his disciples that not only was the way of the cross God's way for Him, but also that His followers must go by the

same way. "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." We never can go after Christ and walk only on flowery paths. There is no way to heaven but the way of self-denial and sacrifice.

We may notice that it is "his" cross, that is, his own cross, that each follower of Christ must take up and bear. Each life has its own burden of duty, of struggle, of self-denial, of responsibility. Each one must take up and carry his own load for himself. Each one must bear his own burden. This is a most solemn truth. No one can choose for us, no one can believe for us, no one can do our duty for us. A thousand people about us may do their own part with beautiful faithfulness, but if we have not done our part we stand unblessed amid all the multitude of those who have done their part and received their reward.

Our Lord closes with the question no one ever has been able to answer, "What shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" Even the whole world, with all its wealth and splendour, would give no real benefit to us if our life should be lost. We could not buy pardon, peace or heaven, even with the treasures of the whole earth in our possession. Then we could not keep the world and carry it with us into the other life even though we had won it all.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE TRANSFIGURATION

*Read Matthew XVII., 1-8, 14-20*

THREE men, Peter, James and John, were with the Master when He was transfigured. All the apostles belonged to His personal family, but these three were taken into the inner circle and enjoyed closest intimacy with Him. On several occasions we find Him choosing the same three for special companionship. In the Garden of Gethsemane these three were chosen to be nearest to Him, that by their sympathy and tenderness they might strengthen Him and thus help Him to endure His sore agony. We know that the holiest will get nearest to Christ. Faith brings men near, while doubt and unbelief separate from Him. Purity of heart brings us close—the pure in heart shall see God. Likeness to Christ fits for close personal friendship. Jesus said that those who serve most self-forgetfully are first in His kingdom. Selfishness keeps us far off. It is a comfort to find that Peter, though a very faulty disciple, was one of those who were admitted to closest friendship with Christ.



It is interesting to learn from Luke's Gospel that Jesus was praying when this wonderful change in His appearance occurred. While He knelt before His Father, the change began to come on His face. It is recorded of certain saintly men that a like change has come upon them when they prayed. We learn thus that prayer has a transfiguring power. Communing with God brings heaven down into our life. It was after Moses had spent forty days on the mountain alone with God that the people saw the dazzling brightness on his face. So it was when Stephen was looking up into heaven, beholding the glory of God, that even his enemies saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel. Only the upward look can give heavenly beauty. Our communings make our character. If we think only of earthly things we shall grow earthly. If we dote on gold our lives will harden into sordidness. If we look up toward God we shall grow like God. A life of prayer will transform us into spirituality and bring upon us the beauty of the Lord.

Not only was the face of Jesus transfigured, but His very garments shone. A writer suggests that the garments here may represent the circumstances and experiences of the Christian's life. When one lives near Christ everything that concerns him is transfigured. For example, care. Every life has its cares, its burdens, its anxieties, its experiences that would naturally fret and vex the spirit. St. Paul tells us that if we make known all our requests to God, the peace of God shall guard our hearts and

our thoughts. The same is true of life's toils and tasks. Many of us find life hard, with its incessant duty and drudgery. But when the secret of the Lord is in the heart, we can sing songs of joy even in the most wearisome way. The same is true of sorrow. Every life has sorrow. But if Christ is ours, we have comfort in sorrow. Thus all the garments of life—all life's experiences and conditions—are brightened by peace in the heart.

While the disciples were awed by the shining on the face and garments of their Master, they became aware of the presence of heavenly visitants beside Him. "There appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with Him." How they learned who these men were we are not told. Perhaps the Master told them afterward. This was something very wonderful. For more than nine hundred years Elijah had been in heaven and for more than fourteen hundred years Moses had been away from this world; but both reappear here on the earth, still living, speaking and working. There are many proofs of immortality; here is an illustration—we see two men long centuries after they had lived on earth, still alive and busy in God's service. It will be the same with us and our friends—thousands of years after we have vanished from earth we shall still be alive and active. This is a great thought. If we could only get it into our heart, how much grander it would make all life for us! We should then form our plans to cover thousands of years, not merely the little space which we now call time.

The transfiguration was not a purposeless incident in the story of Jesus. Evidently it was intended to prepare Him for what was before Him. It had just been made known to Him that He was to die at Jerusalem. He may not have been depressed—He may have known long before that He was going to the cross. Yet as He now set out on His last journey and saw the end He needed encouragement and cheer, and it was for this that the transfiguration was given, with its embassy from heaven and its confirming voice. When we keep this purpose in mind the meaning of the several incidents becomes plain.

It is interesting, with this in mind, to think of the talk which these two men had with Jesus. It was about His decease, His exodus from this world, Luke tells us. They had been sent from heaven to comfort and strengthen Him as He set out on His journey to His cross. He would have bitter sorrows and great sufferings, and they came to speak their word of cheer before He entered the experience. No doubt, all the way unto the end, His heart was braver and stronger because of this visitation.

May there not incidentally be a hint in this heavenly visitation of the kind of employment that shall fill the hearts and hands of the redeemed in the other life? Possibly we may be sent to distant worlds on errands of love, to carry help to weary ones. At least we are sure that heaven is not a place of idle rest. We shall serve Christ, and in

some way we shall be allowed to serve others in His name.

Peter could not keep quiet. Even heavenly glory did not silence him. When he became aware of the wonderful splendour which he was witnessing, he proposed to keep it on the earth and not allow it to depart. "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Peter was right—it was good to be there. But at this very moment work was waiting for Jesus at the mountain foot. There was a poor demoniac there whom the disciples could not cure. Then, farther off, were Gethsemane and Calvary for Jesus, and for Peter there was Pentecost, with years of earnest apostolic service, and then martyrdom. It is very sweet to commune with God in the closet, at the Lord's table, but we must not spend all of our time even in these holy exercises. While the raptures fill our soul we must not forget that outside human wants and needs are crying for help and sympathy. We may not build tabernacles and keep our heavenly visions; we must get the vision into our heart and then go out to be a blessing to the world.

Then came the other witnessing. Moses and Elijah had come to talk with Jesus about His death, and the blessed outcome it would have in human redemption. Then from heaven the Father speaks, witnessing to the Messiahship of Jesus. The disciples had been greatly startled by what Jesus had

said a week before—that He must suffer and be killed. Their idea of the Messiah had been the kingly and earthly one. Their faith must have been strengthened by the words, "This is My beloved Son," and by the command that they should listen to His voice and to His voice only. Even if they could not understand, and if the things He said seemed to destroy their hopes, they were content now to hear.

There are times when God's ways with us seem mysterious, when we think disaster is coming to every fair prospect in our life. In all such hours we should remember that He who rules over all is the Son of God, our Friend and Saviour, and our trust in Him never should fail. We should listen always quietly and submissively to what He says, and when everything seems strange and dark we should never doubt nor be afraid. What so staggered the disciples then concerning the Messiahship of Jesus we see now to have been the most glorious and loving wisdom. So in our strangest trials there are the truest wisdom and the richest love. This voice came out of the cloud; out of the clouds that hang over us come the voices of Divinest love.

When Jesus and the disciples came down next morning from the Mount of Transfiguration they found the other disciples in trouble. In the Master's absence an epileptic boy had been brought to them for healing. They tried to cure him, but failed. When Jesus appeared, the distressed father knelt before Him, pleading that He might have

mercy on his son. He told his story in all its pathos—the boy's grievous suffering and his bitter disappointment when the disciples could not cure him. Jesus listened with compassion and then said, "Bring him hither to Me." A word from Him was enough—"The boy was cured from that hour."

## CHAPTER XXIX

### A LESSON ON FORGIVENESS

*Read Matthew XVIII., 21-35*

PERHAPS no other lesson is harder to learn than to be forgiving. It never gets easy to bear injury or wrong. Yet the lesson is essential. We can ask forgiveness for ourselves only when we are ready to forgive those who trespass against us.

Jesus had been speaking to His disciples about forgiving others. He said if any one sin against us we should first go and talk the matter over with him privately. Mutual explanations will likely settle the matter. It will be still better if the two kneel and pray together before they begin to talk about their difference. If the matter cannot be settled between the two, then one or two witnesses are to be taken along. If one man still remains implacable, the other has done his part.

It was always Peter who spoke first, and when he heard the Master's words, he asked Jesus how oft his brother should sin against him and he forgive him. This question still troubles many people. In some persons' minds patience quite soon

“ceases to be a virtue.” If they have forgiven another two or three times, they think they have really acted very generously. Peter supposed he was going to the very extreme of Christian tolerance when he suggested that seven times would be a good limit for Christ’s disciples. The rabbis said, “Forgive the first offense, the second, the third; punish the fourth.” But the answer of Jesus showed that there should be no limit. That is what seventy times seven means—not any definite number, however great, but infinitely. We are to forgive as God forgives us, and He does not keep account of the number of times. He forgives all the multitude of our transgressions. The time never comes therefore when we may say: “I have exhausted the requirements of Christian love. I cannot forgive you any more.”

Jesus told a little story to illustrate and enforce His teaching. He said the kingdom of heaven is like unto “a certain king, who would make a reckoning with his servants.” We must never forget that there will be a reckoning with God. We are told that on the last day the books will be opened, the books which record men’s acts, words, motives, dispositions, tempers. But we do not have to wait until the judgment day to have these reckonings—God reckons with us also as we go along. He is constantly calling men to give account to Him. Sometimes the call is given by the preaching of the word which convicts them of sin and makes them stand trembling before the bar of conscience. Some-



times it is by an affliction which compels men to stop and think of their relations to God, revealing to them their sinfulness. Sometimes it is by a deep searching of heart, produced by the Holy Spirit. There is no man who some time or other is not called, even in this present life, before God for a reckoning.

The reckoning is individual—each one must stand before the judgment seat and give an account of his own life. Among the king's servants "one was brought unto him, that owed him ten thousand talents." We need not trouble ourselves about the exact money equivalent of these figures. It is enough to know that the figures stand for our debt to God, and that this is immense. It makes it plain to think of sin as a debt. We owe to God perfect obedience in act, word, thought, motive. Duty is what is due to God and the obligation is beyond computation. We may flatter ourselves that we are fairly good people, because we stand well in the community; but when we begin to reckon with God, the best of us will find that our debt to Him is of vast magnitude.

It transpired at once that this servant "had not wherewith to pay." There was no possibility that he ever could make up the amount that he owed to his king. So it is with those who are called to make a reckoning with God. There is no possibility that they can ever make up to Him their enormous debt. Many people imagine that in some way they can get clear of their guilt—they do not try

to know how. Some suppose they can do it by tears of repentance; but being sorry that we are in debt does not cancel the debt. Some fancy that because their sins do not trouble them any more, therefore the debt has been overlooked. But forgetting that we owe a man a thousand dollars will not release us from our debt to him. We are hopelessly in debt to God, and have nothing wherewith to pay.

If the law had been enforced, the servant would have been sold and his wife and family and all that he had. But this servant came to his king and begged for time. "Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." This appeal to the king touched his generous heart. "The lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt." This is a picture of the Divine forgiveness. We never can pay the enormous debt we owe to God, but His mercy is sufficient to wipe it all away. Bankrupts sometimes pay so many cents on the dollar and are allowed by their creditors to go free. But that is not the way God forgives. He does not require anything on our part, because we have nothing to give. We are justified freely by His grace.

One would think that this servant, after being forgiven such an enormous debt, would have gone out with a heart kindly disposed toward all men. But the reverse was the case. He "found one of his fellow-servants, who owed him a hundred shillings: and he laid hold on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay what thou owest." He had forgotten

the way he had been forgiven. A little while ago he was at his lord's feet, pleading for time and for patience. But the memory of this wonderful forgiveness had failed to soften his heart.

What his fellow-servant owed him was a mere trifle in comparison with his great debt to the king, yet he demanded payment and refused to show mercy. How is it with us? This morning we knelt at God's feet, implored His forgiveness, and received from Him the assurance that all our sins were blotted out. Then we went out and some one said a sharp word to us or did something to pique us, injured us in some way. How did we treat our fellow who did these little wrongs to us? Did we extend to him the same patience and mercy that God had shown to us in the morning?

Soon again the servant was before his king. His harsh treatment of his fellow-servant had been reported. Very stern was the judgment the unforgiving man now heard: "Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt . . . shouldest not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on thee?" The king was right in his severe censure. The man who had received such kindness at his hand should certainly have been kind to his neighbour who had wronged him in such a little matter. An old Spanish writer says, "To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; to return good for evil is godlike."

Jesus makes the application of His parable very plain: "So shall also my heavenly Father do unto

you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts." This does not mean that God actually revokes the forgiveness He has once granted. In fact, the person who acts thus never has been truly forgiven. "If you get pardon from God you will give it to your brother; if you withhold it from your brother, you thereby make it manifest that you have not received it from God."

Thus we are brought face to face with a most definite practical teaching which we dare not ignore. Have we the forgiving spirit? An old proverb says, "Revenge is sweet;" but this is not true. "The unforgiving spirit is a root of bitterness from which there springs a tree whose leaves are poisonous, and whose fruit, carrying in it the seeds of fresh evil, is death to all who taste it." A little poem by Charles Henry Webb is very suggestive:

Revenge is a naked sword—  
It has neither hilt nor guard,  
Wouldst thou wield this brand of the Lord?  
Is thy grasp then firm and hard?

But the closer thy clutch of the blade,  
The deadlier blow thou wouldst deal,  
Deeper wound in thy hand is made—  
It is thy blood reddens the steel.

And when thou hast dealt the blow—  
When the blade from thy hand has flown—  
Instead of the heart of the foe,  
Thou mayest find it sheathed in thine own.

## CHAPTER XXX

### JESUS ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM

*Read Matthew XIX., 1, 2; 13-26*

THE words, "He departed from Galilee," have a significance, when we consider the circumstances, which gives them a peculiar sadness. This was our Lord's final departure. He had been brought up in Galilee. Much of His public ministry had been wrought there. In that part of the country He had met with the kindest reception. He had multitudes of friends in Galilee. He had performed countless miracles there and had been a comforter of numberless sorrowing and suffering ones. Now He was leaving the dear familiar scenes and the people He loved so well. No wonder the throngs followed Him. The farewell must have been tender.

Some incidents of the journey are given. One was a discussion with the Pharisees concerning divorce. Jesus in His words gave most important teaching on the sacredness of marriage. "They are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

Another incident was the bringing of little children to Him that He might bless them. It is not said that the mothers brought them, but this is probable. The language in Luke strengthens this inference. "They were bringing unto Him their babes, that He should touch them." The disciples probably thought their Master ought not to be troubled with babies and little children, and so they rebuked those who were bringing them. But Jesus was moved with indignation when He saw what His disciples were doing, and said, "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me." This was one of the few times when it is said Jesus was angry. It grieved Him to have His disciples try to keep the children away from Him. He would not have any one kept from coming to Him, but if any are more welcome than others they are children.

A story is told of a Jesuit missionary that once when excessively weary in his labours, and when people were coming to him in such numbers that he could not get even a moment's rest, he retired to his tent, telling his attendant to let no one see him for a time. "I must have sleep," he said, "or I shall die. No matter who comes, do not disturb me," he said. He had been in his tent but a few minutes, however, when the servant saw him at the door, beckoning to him. He seemed to be in distress. "I made a mistake," he said. "I made a mistake. If a little child comes, wake me up."

Exhausted as he was, he must be called from his sleep if a child wanted him.

This illustrates the spirit of the Master in this beautiful incident. "Do not keep the little children away. Suffer them to come. For of such is the kingdom of heaven. They are dear to God. To thrust one of them away is to thrust God Himself away. Whoever may be kept away, let it never be a little child."

Very beautiful is the picture we see. He welcomed the children to Him, took them in His arms, laid His hands on them and blessed them. We may be sure always of the love of Christ for children, His interest in them, His watchful care over them and His pleasure in every effort to bring them to Him.

Another incident in this journey to Jerusalem is that of the young ruler who came to Jesus with such earnestness and then went away from Him so sadly. All that is told us about this young man's coming to Jesus shows us His sincerity and earnestness. "There ran one to Him, and kneeled to Him." The running shows how eager he was, and his eagerness tells of an unsatisfied heart. He seems to have attained the best that a young man could reach without taking Christ into his life. He was young, with powers fresh and full. He was rich, with the honour, ease, distinction and influence that riches give. The fact that he was a ruler shows the confidence his fellow-men put in him. His moral character was above reproach, for he

said, without boasting, that he had scrupulously kept the commandments. He was a man of winning disposition, for Jesus loved him and was drawn to him in a peculiar manner. It would be hard to conceive of a man with more to satisfy him.

Yet with all his good qualities, his worldly advantages, his good name and his conscience void of offense, he was not satisfied. He needed something more to make his life complete.

The question which this young man asked of Jesus is the most important question ever asked in this world. "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" We do not know how much he understood about the eternal life concerning which he inquired. The fact, however, that he asked the question shows that he had at least some glimmering of the better life for which he hungered. No matter how much pleasure, or how great success, or how high honour one may gain in this world, if at the end of three score and ten years he passes into eternity unsaved, what comfort will it give him to remember his fine success on the earth?

A rich man failed in business. He gathered up the fragments of his wrecked fortune and had in all a few thousand dollars. He determined to go to the West and start anew. He took his money and built a splendid palace car, furnishing it in the most luxurious style, and stocking it with provisions for his journey. In this sumptuous car he traveled to his destination. At length he stepped from the door of his palace and only then thought for the first



time of his great folly. He had used all his money in getting to his new home, and now had nothing with which to begin life there. This incident illustrates the unwisdom of those who think only of this life and make no provision for eternity.

Answering the young man's question, Jesus turned his thoughts to the commandments. "If thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments." He referred him to the law, that he might show him how he had missed the mark, how far short he had come of gaining life by his own obedience. "Thou knowest the commandments." It is easy enough to imagine one's self quite obedient while one puts easy interpretation upon the Divine law. But when one has seen the law in all its lofty purity, in its wide spiritual application, in its absolute perfection, and then has compared his own life with it, he soon learns that he needs a Saviour. A pupil may think his writing fair until he compares it with the copy at the top of the page, and then all its faults appear. The young artist may think his pictures fine until he looks upon the works of some great master, and then he never wants to see his own poor painting again. So long as one has no true conception of the meaning of the commandments, he may think himself fairly good; but when he undertakes what the commandments really require, he is at once convicted of sin.

There must have been pity in the heart of Jesus as He looked upon the young man and heard him say glibly, "All these things have I observed from

my youth." He did not know what he was saying when he spoke thus of his own obedience. But Jesus very frankly answers his question, "One thing thou lackest." He was not far from the kingdom of God, and yet he was not in it. Many men are good, almost Christians, and yet not Christians. It may be only one thing that is lacking, but that one thing is the most important of all, the last link in the chain that would unite the soul to the Saviour. It is the final step that takes one over the line, from death to life, out of condemnation into glorious blessedness. One may go to the very edge and not step over, may reach the door and not enter. Almost a Christian is not a Christian. Almost saved is still lost.

Jesus made a very large demand upon this young man. He said to him, "Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come, follow Me." This is not a prescription for being saved by good works—that is not the way Christ saves men. He saw this young man's lack, that with all his excellent qualities his heart was still wedded to the world, and the test which He gave required him to give up that which stood between him and eternal life. He would not be saved by giving his riches to the poor. Charity is not a way of salvation. But the young man could not be saved until his idol was broken. So the only hope was to get him to give up his money and to take Christ into his heart.

It was a hard battle that was fought those moments in this young man's breast. It grieved him

not to be able to enter the circle of Christ's followers, but he could not pay the price. "His countenance fell at the saying, and he went away sorrowful." He wanted to go with Jesus, but he could not accept the conditions. Let us think of him after this day. He kept his money, but every time he looked at it he would be forced to remember that he had given up Christ and eternal life for the sake of it. He would see written over his piles of gold and his deeds and bonds—"These things cost me eternal life." His experience was just the reverse of the man who found the pearl of great price and then sold all he had and bought it. The young ruler found the pearl, asked the price, and considered the purchase, but did not buy it, because he was not willing to pay so much.

As the young man turned away Jesus was grieved, and said to the disciples, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" So it is not easy to be rich and to be a Christian. Christ spoke many earnest words concerning money and the danger of loving money. Yet not many people seem to be afraid of getting rich. One morning a pastor found on his pulpit desk a bit of paper with these words on it: "The prayers of this congregation are requested for a man who is growing rich." It seemed a strange request, but no doubt it was a wise one. No men more need to be prayed for than those who are becoming prosperous, becoming rich. Francis Xavier said that among all the thousands who had come to

him with confession of sin, not one had ever confessed the sin of covetousness. Men are not conscious of their danger when they are growing rich.

Jesus did not say that a rich man cannot be saved. He said, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." This means that every man growing rich needs God in order to be saved. If riches master him, he is lost. Unless God be his Lord he cannot enter the heavenly kingdom.

There is a story of a rich man, one of whose ships was delayed at sea. When one day had passed with no tidings, the man was anxious, and with each added day his anxiety increased. At length, however, he awoke to the fact that his money was having a tremendous hold upon him. He then ceased to worry about the ship and became anxious for his own soul. He was determined to break the perilous mastery, and taking the value of his ship, he gave it at once to a charitable object. We all need to deal thus rigorously with ourselves, whether we have only a little money or much, that money may never be our master, but that Christ may be Master always, and money our servant, to do our bidding and Christ's.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD

*Read Matthew XX., 1-16*

THE key to this parable is found in what goes just before. A young man came to Jesus eager to follow him and asked what he must do. Jesus said he must give up his riches and go with Him. The young man found the cost too great and went away sorrowful. Then Jesus spoke seriously to His disciples about how hard it was for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. It cannot have been a high spiritual thought which was in Peter's mind when he said to Jesus, "Lo, we have left all and followed Thee; what then shall we have?" Evidently he was thinking that they had done a very worthy thing in leaving all and going with Christ. But his question showed a spirit which was not pleasing to the Master, a mercenary spirit, a disposition to get the best out of duty and service and sacrifice. He expected reward and large reward for faithful service.

In true following of Christ such a question is never asked. Love never thinks of wages in any-

thing it does. If, as a man does for another hard and self-denying things, he is always thinking of the way the other will pay him, expecting large compensation, there is no love whatever in what he does. He is a hireling. A mother never asks, as she cares for her sick child, losing rest, suffering, "What shall I get for this?"

The answer Jesus gave Peter assured him that the disciples who had left all should be amply rewarded. But the parable we are now studying is not always thought of as a part of our Lord's answer to the question. The chapter division in our Common Version obscures this fact. In the Revised Version, however, there is no break in the passage. The words, "For the kingdom of heaven is like," connect this parable directly with the foregoing incident and show that Jesus would warn Peter and His disciples against the disposition to bargain and haggle for pay, or to compare their work with that of others, quibbling about proportionate rewards.

The parable makes it plain, first, that an agreement was made with the labourers. The householder needed men, and when the first came they accepted his offer of a shilling a day\* and agreed to work for that. Later in the day, at different hours, other men were also engaged and sent into the vineyard. Some were even taken on only an hour before the day closed. Evening came and the workmen

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\*A shilling was a labourer's daily wage.

gathered to receive their pay. It happened that those who were last engaged and had worked only one hour were paid first. They received the full amount for a day's work. We need not raise the question of fairness. It is evident that the men who had been in the vineyard only one hour had not done as much as those who began in the early morning and had wrought all through the long hours. The parable was spoken for a definite purpose—to condemn the greedy, grasping, bargaining spirit, and to commend the thought of doing duty for its own sake whether there is adequate compensation or not. Those who came at later hours made no bargains as to their wages, leaving to him who employed them how much they should receive.

The parable is not meant to be a lesson in business. No doubt it is better usually to have an understanding as to wages, so that there may be no misunderstanding at the time of settlement. But it is in the Father's business that Jesus is giving instructions, and here we need not trouble ourselves to put our contracts down in black and white, and need not ask, "What shall we get for this?"

"When the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received every man a shilling. And when they received it, they murmured against the householder, saying, These last have spent but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." Peter could scarcely help hanging his head when the Master

came to this part of the parable. He could have no doubt that He had him in mind in what He said about those who clamoured for more pay. Peter's words, "We have left all—what then shall we have?" had shown in Peter a feeling at least of satisfaction with himself. Somehow he felt that he had done a good deal for his Master, had given up much, had made great sacrifices and that he ought to have a substantial reward for it all. Especially had his words revealed a feeling that he and his fellow-apostles should have a greater reward than those who had done less, come into the service later, made smaller sacrifices. When Jesus spoke of the first-hired labourers and their dissatisfaction with the pay they had received, Peter must have felt rebuked.

If these all-day labourers had had the true spirit they would have rejoiced that they had had the opportunity to serve so many hours for their Lord. Instead of counting the hours they had wrought and considering themselves overburdened, overwrought, they should have felt themselves honoured in the privilege. The Christian who heard the call of Christ in his youth and began in the early morning hours to serve Him should never cease to be glad for his long service. He should not consider the man who gave eleven hours to the world, and then for one hour followed the Master, as more highly favoured than himself who had devoted all his life to the service of the Lord. "It is impossible that a man whose chief desire was to advance his Master's



work should envy another labourer who had done much less than himself.”

These first men were vexed because they did not receive more for their work than those who had come in at later hours. There are some who are envious of others because they seem to have easier work, lighter burdens, more cheerful circumstances. This is an unhappy mood. They think God is not quite just and fair to them. They fret and chafe when they see others called to more prominent positions. They tell of what they have sacrificed, how hard they have worked, how much they have done, and do not hesitate to fret and complain because they have not the recognition they think they deserve. Other men who have been Christians not half as long as they have, and have not given or worked as they have done, are officers in the Church, are talked about and praised among men for their worth and service.

This is a most unwholesome disposition. It makes one wretched and unhappy. The true Christian spirit is glad for all the years of opportunity to do God's service. It begrudges even one opportunity that has been lost. It does not complain that it has served so long—it grieves always that it has not served longer and more faithfully.

The question of pay or reward for Christian work is one that should never have a place in any heart. All service should be inspired by love. Of course, we have to live, and it costs to live. The minister, for example, who devotes his whole life to the work

of Christ, has to live. But when Jesus sent out His disciples to preach He warned them especially against anxiety concerning their food and raiment. They were not to provide luxuries for themselves. They were not to have extra garments—they were going out under their Master's command and He would see that they should be cared for. The minister ought to be supported, ought to have his needs provided for. But when he haggles about the matter, shows anxiety and frets and complains, he is not pleasing the Master, nor practising the spirit and the disposition which He commends.

The motive in Christian service should always be like the Master's. We should work for love—never for reward. We should never say to Christ, when called to any hard service, "What shall I get for this task, this self-denial, this sacrifice?" We should be ready to go anywhere, to do anything, that the Master would have us do. We should never bargain for any reward, whatever we may do. We know that we shall have a reward, but we should never let that be our motive. We should devote ourselves with all the earnestness and all the energy we have to the service of Christ, whether we are to receive pay for the work or not.

An ancient legend tells of one who went about carrying in one hand a burning torch and in the other a goblet of water, crying, "With this torch I will burn up heaven and with this water I will put out hell, that God may be served for Himself alone." This parable teaches that all our service

of Christ is to be lowly and self-forgetting. We are to be eager to do God's will whatever it may be, serving unto the uttermost, but never thinking of reward. We shall have reward if we are faithful, but our service is never to be for the reward. The true reward is that which comes in the serving itself.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### JESUS NEARING JERUSALEM

*Read Matthew XX.. 17-34*

JESUS was setting out for Jerusalem on His last journey. Did He not know that He was going straight into danger? He was safe in Perea; why did He not stay there? Why did He leave this shelter and go straight into the den of lions at Jerusalem? He knew all that awaited Him, but He did not shrink from it; He resolutely set His face to go, because it was the way marked out for Him. The picture shows Him hastening on, striding away before the disciples, as Mark tells us, as if He were eager to reach the city and endure what lay before Him there, and could scarcely wait for the slow steps of the disciples. Why was Jesus so eager to suffer? It was because His time had come and He was eager to do the Father's will. Besides, it was the receiving up to heaven which He saw, and the cross and darkness were forgotten in the triumph and glory beyond. "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame." There ought to be wondrous

inspiration in Christ's example here for all who are called to suffer and endure for His sake. We should be eager to do God's will however hard it may be; and we should train ourselves to look beyond the suffering and the trial to the blessing and joy that will come after.

He took the disciples apart and told them what lay before Him. "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and scribes." The astronomer knows, when others do not, that the dark shadow of the eclipse is traveling toward the sun; and Jesus knew, when no others saw it, that the blackness of the cross was approaching Him and would overwhelm Him, and knew the very moment He would enter it. One of Holman Hunt's pictures represents Jesus as a boy in the carpenter shop. It is evening, and He is weary. Stretching out His arms, the light of the setting sun, shining in from the west, casts His shadow on the floor of the shop, and lo! it is in the form of a cross. The artist's thought is that thus early the shadow of the cross fell upon Jesus, that from the beginning He was conscious of the fact that He must die by crucifixion. What a pathos it adds to the life of Christ to remember this: that all the time, in the midst of His human joys, while He was scattering blessings among others, while He was working miracles of mercy; in all the holy peace and calm of His soul, that dark shadow hung over Him continually—He was going at last to be crucified. Yet the consciousness never kept Him

from speaking one gentle word, nor from doing one kindly deed, nor from being cheerful and loving. Knowing from the beginning all that lay before Him, He went on with His daily duty quietly and joyfully. This reveals something of His love for us and His joy in doing the Father's will.

There is a strange contrast between the words of Christ as He spoke to the disciples of His approaching death and the coming of this mother with her ambitious request: "Command that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the one on Thy left hand, in Thy kingdom." Mothers should be ambitious for their boys, and want them to have high places. They should make sure, however, that the places they desire for them are really high places. Earth's pinnacles are not always such. Taking out of Salome's request its mistaken worldly thought, no parental ambition for a child can be fitter than hers, that her sons should have places near to Christ. It is to be feared, however, that very many parents think more of getting for their children high positions in this world than places near to Christ and high in holiness.

Jesus spoke to the sons in reply, not to the mother: "Ye know not what ye ask." It was an ignorant prayer which they had offered. They did not know what they were asking for. We know that one dark day two malefactors had the places on the Lord's right and left hand. We all many a time ask for things which we would not dare request if we knew what they would cost us. There

is a heathen story, says George Macdonald, which tells that once a man asked for this gift—not to die; and it was granted him by the Fates. He was to live on forever. But he had forgotten to ask that his youth and health and strength might last forever also; and so he lived on till age and its infirmities and weakness were weighing him down, and his life grew to be a weariness and a burden to him. Existence (for it could not be called life) was one long torment for him; and then he wished to die and could not. He had asked for a thing which he was totally unfit to enjoy, but he had to take the consequences of it when it was once given. The better way to pray is to let God choose for us and to give what He sees best for us and in the way He knows is the best.

“To sit on My right hand, and on My left hand, is not Mine to give; but it is for them for whom it hath been prepared of My Father.” So there are places in heaven higher and nearer Christ than others. Surely, too, the high places are worth striving for. We see how men scramble after earth’s positions; heaven’s are infinitely better. But how can we gain the seats nearest to Christ now, in glory? We have many hints. A little farther on in this passage we are taught that the path of lowly, self-forgetful service leads upward in spiritual life. In Revelation our Lord says that they who overcome in their struggles with sin and trial shall sit with Him on His throne. In Daniel we are told that they who turn many unto righteousness; that is,

they who are active and successful in saving souls shall shine as the stars, forever and ever. We know also that the "pure in heart" shall see God. These and many other hints show that the more like Christ we are in character and work here the nearer we shall get to Him both in this world and hereafter.

Jesus was always having difficulty in getting His disciples to understand the spiritual meaning of things. They thought here that rank and official position were the symbols of greatness. "No," said Jesus; "whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister." This seems a strange way of getting on and getting up in the world. According to this, all men's scrambling for place and power is really scrambling downward rather than upward. The real heights in human life are the heights of self-forgetfulness and service. Of course, this does not mean that a Christian is never to accept nor hold a position of honour and trust. A king, ruling millions of people, can be the very chiefest of servants by ruling only for the glory of God and the good of his subjects. A rich man has an opportunity to get very near to Christ if he uses his wealth to bless the world. It is not the worldly position that settles this question, but the spirit of the life. A servant in a family may be a great deal farther from it than the mistress whom she serves. The kind of serving that our Lord means is that which forgets self and thinks only and always of the needs and interests of others,



“The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.” The art of photography is now so perfect that the whole side of a great newspaper can be taken in miniature so small as to be carried on a little pin or button, and yet every letter and point be perfect. So the whole life of Christ is photographed in this one little phrase. He came not to be served—if this had been His aim He would never have left heaven’s glory, where He wanted nothing, where angels praised Him and ministered unto Him. He came to serve. He went about doing good. He altogether forgot Himself. He served all He met who would receive His service. At last He gave His life in serving—gave it to save others, to redeem lost souls. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

You say you want to be like Christ. You pray Him to print His own image on your heart. Here then is the image. It is no vague dream of perfection that we are to think of when we ask to be like our Master. The old monks thought that they were in the way to become like Christ when they went into the wilderness, away from men, to live in cold cells or on tall columns. But surely that is not the thought which this picture suggests, such a dream of uselessness. “To minister”—that is the Christlike thing. Instead of fleeing away from men, to live with men, to serve them, to live for them, to seek to bless them, to do good, to give our lives for them—that is the meaning of the prayer for Christlikeness.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### JESUS ENTERING JERUSALEM

*Read Matthew XXI., 1-17*

THE triumphal entry was one of the most remarkable incidents in our Lord's life. Usually Jesus made no public demonstration, did nothing to draw attention to Himself in any way. Indeed, He avoided publicity; He did not strive nor cry aloud; neither did any one hear His voice in the streets. He spoke to His disciples confidentially of His Messiahship, but did not publicly proclaim it. On this occasion, however, He made a public demonstration, riding into the city as a king would ride, thus proclaiming to the multitudes, assembling for the passover feast, the fact of His Messiahship. How shall we explain this? May we not say that it was another way of presenting Himself to the people, offering Himself to them as their Messiah, for the last time? A prophet had foretold that He would thus in this spectacular way ride into the city, but He did not do it merely to fulfil prophecy. The prophecy was part of the will of God for him and there was a reason for it beyond the fulfilling of what had been foretold.

Two disciples were sent from Bethphage (house of figs, the precise site undiscoverable now) into an unnamed village near by, to prepare for the great occasion. Note their obedience. "The disciples went, and did even as Jesus appointed them." They were glad to have a part in the honouring of their Master. No doubt they themselves shared the expectations of the multitude regarding Jesus, hoping that the time had now come for Him to assume His place as King. It was a lowly errand on which they were sent—to bring to their Master the animal on which He was to ride—but they were proud to be chosen for this service. We should be glad always to run any errand, even the humblest, for our Master. If He were here now and wanted to ride somewhere, who would not be glad to lend Him a beast to ride on? Who would not be eager to bring Him His horse and help Him to mount?

Jesus has told us that we may do just such errands for Him if we will, since what we do for any of His little ones, even the least, in His name, is done for Him. We may so set Jesus before us that our very drudgeries shall be made Divine; we may thus transform them into heavenly ministries by doing them for Him. The angels never think about the degree of honourableness in the tasks they are set to do. The Koran tells of an angel sent from heaven to do two things—to save King Solomon from committing a sin, and to help a little yellow ant with its burden up a hill; and did both tasks with equal alacrity.

Promptly the disciples returned, bringing with them the animals they had been sent to bring. "And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their garments; and He sat thereon." The ass was a symbol of peace. If Jesus had ridden on a horse, it would have spoken of war, but He was the Prince of Peace. In those days there was nothing degrading in riding on an ass. It was the royal beast.

The disciples were bidden to say to the owner that the Lord had need of the animal. There is nothing that Christ may not use—nothing of ours, however lowly, which may not have its place in advancing His kingdom and glory. It is said that once Queen Victoria was traveling through the Highlands and stopped a little while at the home of a poor woman to rest and sat in a common chair. When the royal party was leaving, one whispered to the old woman that it was the Queen who had been in her home. She took up the chair on which the Queen had been sitting and carried it away, saying, "No one ever shall sit in this chair again, because my Queen has used it." Our King will use anything we have, and what of ours He uses is lifted to highest honour. He has need for our money, our hands, our feet, our lips, and we do well when we hold all our possessions ready at any call of His to be used as He desires.

It was a strange scene—the enthusiasm of the people that day as Jesus rode toward the city. "The multitude spread their garments in the way; and others cut branches from the trees, and spread them

in the way." Xerxes, history tells us, when passing over the bridge of the Hellespont, found the road strewn with branches of myrtle, while burning perfumes filled the air. When Alexander the Great was entering Babylon, flowers were strewn before him. It is no wonder that these Jewish pilgrims honoured Jesus that day. For the moment they regarded Him as indeed their Messiah. They were escorting Him into the city, as they thought, to take His place on David's throne. They were not deceived, either, for Jesus was really going to His coronation, though not to such a coronation as they thought. He was to be crowned, but with thorns. The people were indeed escorting the Messiah, but not such a Messiah as they were looking for. The time of His triumph was indeed at hand, though not such a triumph as they expected to see. His kingdom was not of this world. His glory was to be reached through ignominy and shame. He was the king of sorrows, because through sorrow He prepared redemption for the world. The strange pageant of that day was a picture, a Divine foreshadowing, of the coming day, when all nations shall join in honouring Christ as King.

Glad were the songs that rang out on the air that morning: "Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." The people were disappointed in a sense. In a little while all their bright hopes had vanished—Jesus went to a cross instead of a throne. Soon "Hosanna" was

changed to "Crucify Him!" Soon the palm branches were withered and trodden under foot by the throngs. Yet the people sang that morning better than they knew. They thought of the restoring of David's kingdom; the King that was coming was really far more glorious than David. They expected liberty from the Roman yoke; Jesus brought liberty from the yoke of Satan and sin. They expected restoration of homes, riches and honours; Jesus has restored us to our place in our Father's family. They looked for prosperity and peace among the nations; He brought the peace of God and the prosperity that comes by righteousness. They expected the conquest of all nations by their Messiah; He will conquer the whole world by His grace and truth. The earthly blessings they looked for as a result of the Messiah's coming were but the shadows of the heavenly joys which He actually brought.

A remarkable scene occurred in the temple. "Jesus entered into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought." The temple was the house of prayer, but it had been changed into a den of robbers, as Jesus says. Not only did these traders desecrate the sacred house by making it a market-place, but they robbed the people by usury and overcharging. Jesus cast out the traders and the money-changers and cleansed the holy place. Thus it is that He would do when He comes as King into our hearts. Made to be temples of God, houses

of prayer, homes of purity and peace, sin has turned them into dens of robbers, desecrating them and filling them with unholy things. Christ's first work is to drive out all that defiles them, all that is unholy, and make them ready to be God's dwelling-places.

The rulers were vexed when they saw all that Jesus had done. They seem to have been especially annoyed by hearing the children singing their hosannas to Jesus. He reminded them, however, that their own Scriptures had foretold this very scene: "Did ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" Everywhere in the Bible we learn that children are dear to God. He wants their earliest love. He is pleased to hear their voices in songs of praise. A sweeter music rises to heaven from the children's singing than from trained choirs of insincere, formal, or mere professional worshippers. The children should always be in the church services and should join in the songs. The service is completed, perfected by their voices.

The great triumph of Christ is still going on in this world. The palm branches which were waved that day have long since faded, and the music of the songs has died away on the air; but uncounted millions are following in the procession of those who honour Him. Among these are prophets, apostles, martyrs and saints of all ages. Countless multitudes have been gathered from the darkest abodes of sin, and, wearing white garments washed

in the blood of the Lamb, are now among those who honour Christ. Old men and boys, feeble women and maidens, all saved by the power of the cross, are now singing the song, "Hosanna to the son of David."



## CHAPTER XXXIV

### TWO PARABLES OF JUDGMENT

*Read Matthew 'XXI., 33-46*

THE parable interprets itself. The people of Israel were familiar with the use of a vineyard as an image or illustration of themselves. The prophets had employed it. It is easy to explain the parable in its historical sense, but it has a reference also to us. God is continually planting vineyards and leaving them in the care of husbandmen. He has placed one in your care—it is your own life. He has placed in it many vines, which, if well tended and cultivated, will produce rich fruits. He has put a hedge about it, the walls and defenses of your own home and of the Church, and the restraints and safeguards of Christian friendships and associations. You were not born in a heathen land, your life open and unfenced like a public common, to be trodden down by every unholy foot. God has made every provision for His vineyard that is necessary for its fruitfulness. It is well watered—the influences of Divine grace flow all through your life. He has done for His vineyard all that could be done. It

is yours now to keep and care for, not as owner, but as tenant. You are not your own; you belong to Christ; your life is His, and you are to keep it and cultivate it for Him. You are really one of God's tenants. He has "let" to you a little vineyard, for whose care and cultivation you are responsible. Yet He does not compel you to obey Him, to keep your heart, to bring forth fruit; you are free, but He holds you accountable for the way you keep your vineyard.

The analogy is followed: "When the season of the fruits drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, to receive his fruits." This is the way the husbandmen were to pay their rent; they were to give to the owner each year a certain proportion of the fruits of the vineyard. God expects us to return something to Him of the fruits of the vineyard He has let to us. It belongs to Him and He has done all that needs to be done to render it fruitful. He expects a proper "rental." The rental of this vineyard was to be paid, not in money, but in the fruit of the vineyard itself. This is suggestive. God is not satisfied with the mere giving to Him of money or of a portion of the earthly possessions that may belong to us. Of course, our money is part of our vineyard and should pay rent, too; a share of its fruits or earnings should be returned to God, to whom it all actually belongs. But the vineyard proper is our own life and we are to pay our rental to God, the owner, in the fruits of our life, in love, obedience, worship, honour, service. No

amount of money will ever satisfy God if we do not also love Him and do His will.

This business-like illustration of our relation to God is very suggestive. We are His tenants, and all we are and all we have belong to Him. Every tenant must pay a proper rent or he cannot remain on the property that has been "let" to him. The larger our vineyard and the greater our privileges and blessings, the more rent we must pay. If we do not thus make suitable return we are robbing God.

The reception given to the servants sent to receive the rental was not merely discourteous, it was cruel and an act of rebellion: "The husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another." The servants who come to us are those that God sends to us to call us to duty. Of course, none of us ever treat the messengers God sends to us as His ancient people treated the prophets. We do not beat our teachers and preachers. We do not stone them and kill them. We are very kind to them. We show them courtesy. We even love them very much and, as a rule, we listen with great respect to what they have to say to us. We never think of arresting them and putting them in prison or of sawing them asunder. Surely, then, this part of the parable cannot have any application to us.

But, wait a moment. On what errand are the servants sent? What is their request of us? They come to get the rental which we owe to God, to re-

ceive the fruits which are His due. We do not beat the messengers, but do we grant what they in God's name ask from us for Him? Do we give up our sins when they ask us to do it? Do we yield our hearts to God and begin to love and obey Him and live for Him, when they ask these things of us? We are very respectful to God's servants, but we go on in our evil ways, and they carry back nothing from us, no fruits, to the God whose we are. We treat the messengers with high honour, but the message we disregard and Him who sends it to us we reject and neglect. Nothing is sadder to the heart of a pastor or teacher than this, that while those to whom he bears God's message treat him with finest courtesy and gentlest love, and are kind to him, they do not learn to honour God and love and serve Him.

“Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them in like manner.” We read the story of God's dealing with His ancient people and wonder at His marvelous patience with them. Though they treated His servants so badly He continued to send others. He seemed never to tire of trying to bless them. But is it not our own history as really as it was theirs? As soon as we are old enough to understand anything, God begins sending messengers to us—loving mothers, faithful fathers, Godly pastors, teachers and friends, the voices of conscience, of the Scriptures, of the Spirit, the leadings of Providence. But we hear the calls, and then go on as before, unheeding,

despising, sinning. But God does not grow weary. He continues to send His messengers. Not only is this true of the impenitent, but to every believer He sends again and again, seeking for fruits and finding none. We never can measure God's patience.

But we must remember that there will be a last call.

"Afterward he sent unto them his son." Mark says, "He had yet one, a beloved son: he sent him last unto them." There is a matchless pathos in these words when we think of them as referring to God and defining the acts of His love and mercy. All he had left now was his son. His servants had all been sent, and the last of them had been killed. There was no other messenger that he could send unless he should send his son. If he gave him he gave all, for he had not many sons, but one, his only-begotten son. So "he sent him last unto them." He kept nothing back, spared not even his own son, in his great desire to have men reconciled to him. Thus the sending of Jesus was the climax of a long history of gracious acts of love.

There is another thought here. He sent his son last. Then there is no messenger of mercy after Jesus. He is God's best and final gift. There is nothing more that even God in His infinite power and love can do to induce men to be reconciled. When men reject Christ they throw away their last hope of mercy—they lose their last chance. No other messenger will be sent—no other can be sent.

"This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and take

his inheritance." The rulers killed Jesus that the power might still be theirs. There are many now who reject Christ for very much the same reason. They think that the way to get liberty, pleasure and gain is to thrust Christ altogether away from their lives. To become Christians would interfere too much with their plans, perhaps with their business, or with their pleasure. They think that Christian people make great sacrifices. But the Bible puts it very differently. It tells us that those who receive Christ, instead of losing, gain a glorious inheritance; they become children of God, and if children, then heirs to an inheritance unfading. The rulers killed their best friend when they killed Jesus. Had they accepted Him they would have received His inheritance, becoming "joint-heirs with Christ." Rejecting and killing Him, they lost the very inheritance they thought to seize. Those who now reject Christ reject the only One who could give them eternal life. Since Christ is God's last messenger of mercy to men, the rejection of Him is the thrusting away of the last hope of mercy.

"The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner." They did not think Jesus suitable to be their Messiah, and so they rejected Him; now, however, He is King of glory. The very men who rejected Him and crucified Him, when they awake on judgment morning shall see Him whom they thus despised sitting as their Judge. But again, we must not apply it to the first rejecters only. A great many people now

think Christ unsuitable to be their Lord. They do not consider it an honour to be called a Christian. They blush to own His name or enroll themselves among His followers. They do not care to build their life on Christ. But He has now the highest honour in heaven. No highest angel is ashamed to own His name. Redeemed spirits praise Him day and night. The Father has exalted Him to the throne of power and glory. Why then should sinful men be ashamed to own Him as Lord? They should remember further that God has made Him the cornerstone of the whole building not made with hands. No life that is not built on Him can stand. If men ever are saved it must be by this same Jesus whom they are now rejecting.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE KING'S MARRIAGE FEAST

*Read Matthew XXII., 1-14*

JESUS is soon to be condemned by the rulers and put to death, but as He stands now in the holy city He speaks as the Judge, pronouncing the doom upon the people who are rejecting Him as their Messiah. "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son." The marriage feast suggests two great thoughts concerning Gospel blessings. The figure of a feast pictures abundance of provision, and also gladness and good fellowship. Then the figure of marriage suggests the closeness of the relation into which God invites us. Marriage represents the highest ideal of love and friendship. It expresses mutual affection and delight; on the one hand, protecting care; on the other, perfect trust. The blending of two lives in one, which is the meaning of true marriage, suggests the union of Christ and His people in thought, purpose, feeling and motive. We are Christ's, and Christ is ours. Christ and we become one. He lives in us and we live in Him.



The forms of Oriental life are preserved in the framework of the parable. The king sent forth his servants "to call them that were bidden." They had already received a preliminary invitation, and now they are formally called by the king's messengers. The refusal to accept such an honour was a distinct and intentional insult and showed that they were in heart rebellious and disloyal. The meaning of the parable is plain. God was the King who made the feast. The invitation shows the Divine earnestness in seeking to bless men. God does not merely invite them once and then if they refuse give no more thought to them; but He invites them again, and most urgently presses upon them the invitation.

We all have been invited many times to the feast of Divine love. The invitations begin to fall upon our ears in childhood, and are repeated all through our life. "If God is in earnest about anything," says Dr. Marcus Dods, "it is about this; if the whole force of His nature concentrates on any one matter, it is on this; if anywhere the amplitude and intensity of Divine earnestness, to which the most impassioned human earnestness is as the idle, vacant sighing of the summer air—if these are anywhere in action, it is in the tenderness and sincerity with which God invites you to Himself."

After all that God had done for His people and all His efforts to win them to accept His love, they treated His mercy with contempt. "They made light of it." That is, they simply ignored the invitation, paid no heed to it, treated it as a matter of

no importance, and hurried on to their own business. It is in this way that a large class of people always treat the Gospel invitation. They do not oppose Christ in any active way. They do not rush into great wickedness—they are fairly moral people. They speak patronisingly of the Gospel and the Church. But they pay no heed to the calls of Christ. They treat them as if the Gospel were only a sort of child's play, something for sick people and the very old, but not important enough for them to give thought to. They treat the Gospel as if there were no real importance in the messages of love it brings, which break so urgently upon their ears. They regard their worldly business as of far more importance than personal salvation.

Silent neglect is one of the most offensive ways of treating any one, and those who "make light" of the Gospel insult God even more than those who openly refuse its invitations. Yet these people imagine and often say that they have never rejected Christ because they have shown no open enmity to Him. Countless thousands of souls have been lost by simply making light of the guilt and danger of sin and neglecting the way of mercy.

Those who were first invited and made light of the invitation "went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise." That is, their business was more important in their estimation than their king's feast. It is easy to see the same spirit to-day. There are thousands who have more

interest in their business affairs than they have in the affairs of God's kingdom.

This is the way some of the king's servants treated his son's marriage and the invitation to it which they received. They made light of it, paid no respect whatever to it and went on with their business as if they had never received an invitation to the royal marriage. Then there was another class of the king's servants who rose up in anger against the messengers, laid hold upon them and treated them shamefully and killed them. There are those who are not content with ignoring Christ and His messengers, but become open enemies and violent rejecters.

The king turned to others when the first invited had refused. "They that were bidden were not worthy." This does not mean that those who had been invited were too wicked to be saved, for the Gospel is offered for the worst. Their unworthiness was shown in their refusal to accept. The final responsibility when men are shut out of heaven cannot be laid on God—his part is fully and faithfully done. The feast is ready, even at infinite cost. The invitations are given in all sincerity and pressed with Divine urgency. But if men will not accept the mercy, there the matter must end. They will not be compelled to come to the feast. The weakest sinner can refuse the greatest honour of Divine love. The final responsibility rests upon the rejecters. "They would not come" is the reason that they are shut out. The king then bade his

servants to go into the partings of the highways—that is, among the Gentiles, and in a little while the tables were filled.

The king came to see his guests, to know whether they had fulfilled the conditions of their invitation. “The framework of the parable presupposes the Oriental custom of providing garments for the guests who are invited to a royal feast.” When the king made his inspection he “saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment.” The man came to the feast, but came in his own way, refusing to accept the conditions and to wear the garment prescribed by the king. The man may represent those who enter the Church but do not accept the garment which is the invariable mark of all Christ’s true followers. Church membership is not this garment—one may have this honour and not have on a wedding garment. Nor is it baptism or the Lord’s Supper—one may observe these sacraments and yet lack the essential mark of true discipleship. The wedding garment is the righteousness of Christ. We do not become Christians merely by associating ourselves with Christians, by adopting the forms of religion. We must have in us the mind of Christ, conformity to God, an abhorrence of that which is evil, a love for that which is good, a sincere desire to honour God and do His will.

Notice also that this garment is an individual matter. One man in all that great company lacked the required dress, and was excluded. Each one must have the garment for himself. God looks at

us as individuals, not in companies. Being in a good family, or among holy persons, or in a Church of saintly members, will not excuse the lack in the one of us who may lack the prescribed garment.

When the king asked the man why he had come to the feast without the wedding garment, he had nothing to answer. "He was speechless." He had no excuse to offer. He knew that he alone was to blame for this want of preparation, since he had rejected what was freely offered to him. So will it be with any who refuse the grace of God. They are not speechless now; they find many excuses when they are urged to accept Christ. But when they stand at length before the Judge, they will be speechless; they will have nothing to say for themselves.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### THREE QUESTIONS

*Read Matthew XXII., 15-22; 34-46*

THE Pharisees, on those last days in the temple, were in continual and bitter controversy with Jesus. They sought to trouble Him, to ensnare or entangle Him in His talk. We may be glad, however, for the questions they asked, because they drew from Him great utterances which are of priceless value to us.

First, they took counsel together and prepared a question which they thought would entrap Him whichever way He answered it. They began by praising His sincerity and truthfulness, as if to flatter Him. Then they asked, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?" They thought He could not possibly avoid being ensnared. If He should answer Yes, He would be denounced as lacking in patriotism. If He should answer No, He would be denounced as disloyal to Rome. But He was not ensnared by their question. He knows men's thoughts. He knew their hypocrisy and falseness, and easily baffled them. His answer lays down

a great principle. "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's." The use of the coinage of Cæsar by the people was an admission of his sovereignty. But there was something higher than that. God was over all, and no duty to Him must be neglected. They must be good citizens of Rome, but there was a higher citizenship and they must also be good citizens of heaven.

The Sadducees came next with their question about the resurrection. They did not believe in the resurrection nor in the existence of spirits, and they thought their question would completely puzzle Him. "In the resurrection . . . whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her." They thought to make the doctrine of resurrection ridiculous. The answer was wonderfully wise. They were thinking only of the earthly life, but in the immortal life all will be different. In the resurrection there will be no marriage. Christ does not mean that the love which binds husband and wife together and grows into such sacredness and beauty in true marriage shall perish in death and have no existence in the resurrection life. Love never dies—it is immortal. It is only the incidents of birth, death and marriage that have no existence beyond the grave.

Then a lawyer had a question to ask Jesus—"trying Him," the record says. "Which is the great commandment in the law?" The question was a theological one that was discussed much among

Jewish teachers, who were proverbially fond of splitting hairs. However, it is an important question for us, too. It is well for us to know which are the first things in life. Jesus answered promptly, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." God comes first. Nothing else in all the universe can be put before Him in true living. The first words of the Bible are, "In the beginning God." God was at the beginning, before anything—a grain of sand, the tiniest flower, the smallest thing—was created. There was nothing before God. There is nothing which God did not create. But He is also at the beginning of everything of good and beauty. The same is true in every true heart. We cannot get a blessing until we have God first. Not God first in order, merely, but God first in love, in the place of confidence and trust. He must have the chief place—we must love Him with all our being. It is idle to think of any other religious act or effort until we have begun to love God. This is the beginning of all true religion. Not to love God is not to have taken the first step in a true and holy life.

Then something else follows. "A second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Love for our neighbour is second, in two ways. It must be second in place and in degree. God must be loved supremely. To love any being or any thing more than God is idolatry. It will not do to preach a religion of humanitarianism and not have first "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God."



Love to man is second also in the sense that it must spring out of love for God. There must be a first before there can be a second. There can be no love for our neighbour if there is not first love for God. "We love, because He first loved us." We love our neighbour because God loves us and we love God and because this love warms our heart toward others. But when we truly love God we will love our brother also.

There has been altogether too little stress put by the Christian Church in the past on this commandment of love to our neighbour. A careful study of the teachings of Christ will show that He Himself insisted continually on love as the very proof and test of Christian life. We cannot get God's forgiveness until we forgive our fellowmen. We are to love our enemies if we would be the children of our Father. By this shall all men know that we are Christ's disciples, because we love one another. The epistles, too, are full of teachings concerning the duty of love. St. Paul's wonderful thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians shows how essential love is, and then shows us the way we must live if we are indeed Christ's. St. John also makes it plain to us that if we love God we will love our brother also. The claim that we love God cannot be true if it appears that we do not love our brother. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen."<sup>a</sup>

Jesus asked the Pharisees a question, too. "What think ye of the Christ?" It was not an easy question to answer. They had very mistaken ideas about their Messiah. Many stumbled at the Messiahship of Jesus because it was not what they were expecting. Even Christ's own disciples did not understand the matter. The Jews were looking for a king who would reign on David's throne—an earthly monarch, a universal conqueror. The Pharisees said the Messiah was to be David's son. Jesus then asked them another hard question. "How then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord?" But they had not thought about the particular Scripture to which Jesus referred. If they had, they would have had different ideas of the character and reign of their Messiah.

Jesus then asked them again, "If David then calleth Him Lord, how is He his son?" No wonder that no one was able to answer Him a word after hearing this question. The question was simply unanswerable on any theory that made the Messiah only an earthly monarch. It is unanswerable also on any conception of the character of Jesus which considers Him as no more than a man. If David called the Messiah his Lord, the Messiah must be Divine, the Son of God. We may worship Him, therefore, and give Him the supreme place in all our lives.

It is thus, indeed, that Christ offers Himself to us in the Scriptures. He claims the supreme individual love of His followers. He who loves father

or mother more than Him is not worthy of Him. He claims the place of absolute Master in the life of every man who would be His. We must obey implicitly, unquestioningly, wholly. We cannot take Christ merely as Saviour, trusting in Him as our Redeemer, without at the same time taking Him as Lord, as Master, and obeying Him. What David did in calling the Messiah his Lord is what every one who accepts Him must do. St. Paul put his whole creed in a single sentence when he said of Christ, "Whose I am, whom also I serve." The confession of Thomas should be the confession of every one who receives Christ and believes in Him, "My Lord and my God."

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE LESSON OF WATCHFULNESS

*Read Matthew XXIV., 32-51*

It was Tuesday evening. Jesus had left the temple to return to it no more. His last words to the people had been spoken. On the way His disciples called His attention to the temple, perhaps suggesting its magnificence and its solidity. It was indeed a wonderful building. But Jesus said, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

The little company moved out to the Mount of Olives and sat down. A deep solemnity filled their hearts. The disciples asked Him to tell them when the things He had foretold should come to pass. They had in mind three events—the destruction of the temple, the Lord's final coming and the end of the world. He warned them first against being led astray by impostors. He bade them to be in readiness for whatever might come. The parable of the fig tree taught them to expect tribulations. The precise day and hour "knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father

only." The stupendous events would come unheralded. It would be as in Noah's days. The flood came suddenly. Those who were ready entered the ark and were saved, but the rest perished. "So shall be the coming of the Son of man."

The great lesson Jesus taught His disciples was in the word "Watch!" which sounds in ever-recurring strokes in His discourse like a great bell. Questions as to when or how are discouraged, but they are always to watch. "Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh."

We must be always watching—watching ourselves, lest we do wrong; watching our Guide, that we may follow Him closely and carefully; watching our duty, that we may always know it and do it; watching for danger, for on every hand danger lurks. It is not a safe world to live in—that is, it is not safe unless we watch, and unless we are in Divine keeping. Satan is so wary, his approaches are so insidious and stealthy, and sin is so alluring and deceptive, that only sleepless vigilance can insure safety.

In this passage, however, the watching is for the coming of Christ, for which we are commanded to be always in readiness. He will surely come, and His coming will be sudden and unannounced. There will be a great final coming of Christ, but really He is always coming. The only way, therefore, to be prepared for Him at any most sudden moment is to be ready all the time. If there is one

hour when we relax our vigilance and cease to watch, that may be the hour when He will come.

There is an old legend of a man who waited a thousand years before the gates of paradise, watching for them to open, that he might enter in. At last, yielding to weariness, he slept for just one hour. And during that hour the gates opened for a few moments and closed again. Thus by being off his guard a little while he missed his opportunity. The coming of Christ will be so sudden that no preparation can be made for it after He appears. We must learn to live so that there will not be a moment, day or night, when we would be afraid or ashamed to have Him come into our house or place of business and find us as we are. There is no day which may not be our last. Therefore, we should keep our work done up to the moment, finishing it every evening as if we were never to come back to it any more.

Christ illustrates His teaching to make it more emphatic. "If the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched." Thieves do not send a notification of the hour when they will break into the house; they make their coming as stealthy as possible. They come when they will be the least expected and when the master of the house is least likely to be watching. If one would be prepared against them when they come, he must always be prepared. Christ will come as a thief in the night. That means that His coming will be without warning, without any token

to indicate His approach. All efforts of wise men to compute the time and settle upon a year or a day when He will come are useless, for Jesus Himself said, "Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven."

What is it to be ready for the coming of Christ? For one thing, it is to be at peace with God, reconciled to Him, saved. In a sense, death is a coming of Christ to individuals, for it ends their probation and ushers them into the presence of God. What is it to be prepared for death? No one is prepared who has not accepted Christ as Saviour and Lord, finding forgiveness of sins and new life and love in Him. Nothing could be more terrible than the sudden coming of death to one whose sins are not forgiven and who is thus unprepared to meet his God.

But forgiveness is not the only thing in preparation for death. One's work should be well done. There is a story of a man who had wasted his life and who at last, near the end, found peace in believing. A friend said to him, "Are you afraid to die?" He answered, "No, I am not afraid to die; but I am ashamed to die." He meant that while his salvation was assured in Christ, he was ashamed to go home, having wasted all his years and having done nothing for the honour of his Master. We should do our best possible work every day, that we should never be ashamed to have Christ come.

Jesus sought to make the meaning of His words very clear. "Who then is the faithful and wise servant," He asked, "whom his lord hath set over

his household?" The answer is implied in the form of the words used. He is both faithful and wise. Then comes the assurance of reward—"Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." Doing how? Doing his work with fidelity. The watching that Christ wants is not sitting at the window and looking out to see Him approach, but diligence in all duty. If a man went away, leaving a servant in charge of a certain work, fixing no time for his return, what should the servant do? Stand in the door, gazing down the road, watching to get the first glimpse of the master's return? No, that is not the kind of watching that would please his master. The way to be ready for Christ's coming is not to sit down in idleness to wait and watch for His appearance, but to keep at one's work with unceasing diligence, so that when He comes He may not find us in the midst of unfinished tasks, away behind with our work.

There can be no better rule in life than to make every day of life complete, to finish everything each night before retiring, so that if we should never come back to our work again, nothing would suffer. A Christian woman was told by her physician that she could not live a great while, and that she might die any hour. She did not, however, drop her work and shut herself away to prepare for death. She went on with all her usual duties, only with more earnestness and greater diligence, knowing now that the time must be short. Some people would suppose that in a case like this one should give up



all active work and spend the short and uncertain time in praying and reading the Bible; but this Christian woman's way was the better way. Long before she had made her peace with God, and all her life had lived in readiness for eternity. When the warning came that the time was growing short, she was not flustered. Thus far she had done her duty as well as she could, and all she had to do now was the work of the few remaining days and hours. This she did with love and faith, and with diligence, and when the Master came she quietly went away home with Him.

While there is reward for the servant who is faithful, there is punishment for the evil servant who fails in his duty. Judgment will come upon him suddenly. "The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he expecteth not." That is, the lord of the unfaithful servant. There are several things said here about this unfaithful servant. He is unbelieving. The delay of his lord leads him to conclude that he is not going to return at all. His unbelief leads him to abuse his position—he becomes tyrannical and despotic in his treatment of those placed under his care. Then his own habits become unworthy; we find him eating and drinking with drunken men. These are characteristics of those who reject Christ through unbelief and become unfaithful.

The punishment of the unfaithful servant is vividly described. It is a fearful thing to live regardless of life's sacred trusts and solemn respon-

sibilities. It is a terrible thing to die after having lived thus. We should compare these two pictures—the faithful and the unfaithful servant—and know positively which one of the two is our own portrait.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS

*Read Matthew XXV., 1-13*

THE three parables in this chapter teach great lessons. They are based on the promise of Christ's return. He is surely coming again, when, no one can know. But we should live always so as to be ready for His most sudden coming any moment.

The ten virgins were alike in some ways. An on-looker in the early evening could not have told which were the wise and which the foolish. Each had her lamp. In any Christian congregation the members may all seem alike true friends of Christ as they sit in their pews in common worship or at the Lord's table. The testing comes in other ways.

All the virgins slept while the bridegroom tarried. There was nothing wrong in this. We all have to sleep some time. We should be sure that we are safe against any surprise while we are asleep, that no duty has been omitted before we slept which is essential to a complete life. The wise virgins were ready for the coming of the wedding party at any hour, however long the delay might be. We are not required to wake and watch

every moment for the coming of Christ; we are to be ready for the event so that we cannot be surprised. For example, we are not to think every moment of death, but we are so to live always that whenever death may come, however suddenly, it will not find us unprepared. "Not what death finds us doing, but how death finds us furnished, is the important question."

The lamps of the foolish virgins were filled, but they did not hold much oil and would soon burn out, and these maidens had no oil in reserve to refill their lamps when they became empty. This was their folly. The difference in the other virgins was that besides having their lamps filled, they had oil in reserve with which they could quickly refill them when they had burned out.

This is plain enough as regards these virgins. Applied to human lives, the teaching is also clear. The wise Christian is the one who is not content with a mere profession or with external marks of godliness. These may seem to be satisfactory in the easy days when there is no stress, but in the hour of trial they will not stand the test. The essential thing in Christian life is not good morality—the lamps of the foolish virgins represent that. The essential thing is the grace of God in the heart, or real union with Christ. This is represented in the parable by the supply of oil by which the wise virgins were made ready for the need which the midnight brought. If we have only the little lamp of our own life, we may get along while there is no

great stress, but in the hour of trial, we shall fail. But if we have Christ with His Divine fulness we can draw from Him for any sorrow, struggle or hard duty.

Midnight came and brought great commotion. The virgins were all sleeping, waiting until they should be summoned to go out to meet the bridegroom. Life is full of emergencies which come so suddenly that there is not time to prepare for them. If we are not ready at the moment of need we cannot become ready. Now it was that the watchfulness of all the virgins was tested. The delay had been so long that all the lamps were burning low. Now appeared the wisdom of the five who had oil in reserve. Their lamps were quickly filled, and they were ready to go with the bridegroom. Now was brought out also the folly of the other virgins. Their lamps were going out and they had no oil to refill them.

It is such occasions as these that test character. They show what is in us. No one is ready for life's sudden emergencies unless he has made preparation in advance for anything that may happen. One who has missed his lessons and trifled in school days will by and by find the doors of opportunity shut to him, because he is not ready to go in. Many a man fails in life because through early neglect he has not the training for his place or business, the reason being that he wasted the time when it was his duty to make the preparation. Many a woman fails in her homemaking and wrecks her own hap-

piness and that of her family, because at the right time she did not learn the simple household arts which fit a girl for being a good wife. The foolish virgins missed the wedding joy and were shut out in the darkness because earlier in the evening they had not laid up a reserve of oil. Many people's religion fails them in times of need, because they have not really the word of God laid up in their heart. "A man has only as much religion as he can command in trial."

It was a natural request that these distressed virgins made: "Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out." At first thought, too, we would say that the wise virgins should have granted this pathetic request of their sisters. If you were very hungry and I had even a crust of bread, it would not be right for me to eat all of my crust myself. We are taught that we should bear one another's burdens and that the strong should help the weak. Yet the refusal of the wise is reasonable and right when we look at it thoughtfully. "If you and your neighbour have each signed a note for a certain sum, to fall due on a certain date, and you by dint of economy and perseverance have been able to lay by just enough to meet your obligation, while your neighbour, wasting his hours on trifles, has made no provision for the day of settlement; and if on the morning when the note falls due he should come beseeching you to give him some of your money to help him pay his debt, would you give it to him?" Does the law of love require that you should?

There is also an important spiritual lesson which the parable is meant to teach—that the gifts and blessings of grace are not transferable. No matter how eagerly one may wish to impart them, he cannot do it. If one woman has improved her opportunities and grown into refined and disciplined character, while her sister has missed her chance and has grown up into weak and uncultured womanhood, the first cannot give of her strength, self-control, and noble spirit to the other, to help her through some special emergency. If one man has studied diligently and learned every lesson, at last reaching a position of eminence and power, he cannot give of his trained ability to his brother, who has trifled through years, to help to make his life a success. A brave soldier in the battle cannot share his discipline and courage with a trembling comrade by his side. In temptation, one who is victorious cannot give part of his strength to a friend by his side who is about to fall. We cannot share our forgiveness of sin with our dearest friend. Each one must live his own life, bear his own burden, and have the grace of the Holy Spirit for himself. No one can give another these gifts.

It was a tragic moment when the foolish virgins got back to the house and found themselves too late: "The door was shut." It had stood open long enough for all who were ready to enter. Then it was closed and could not be opened again. This teaches us the meaning of opportunity. We may apply it to the matter of personal salvation. There

is a time to be saved, and when that time is past the door is shut. Life is full of opportunities. There is a time when we can enter God's family, finding all blessing. Then there is a time when the door is closed and all the powers of the universe could not open it again.

To the young people every door stands open. They can get an education and a training to fit them for noble, beautiful and worthy life. They can make good friends, friends whose companionship and help would enrich their whole life. They can form good habits which would build up fine character in them and make them respected and influential in the community. They can read good books which will fill their mind and heart with noble thoughts and upward inspirations. They can win victory over their own life and become self-controlled and kingly among men. But the doors stand open only a reasonable time—there is not a moment to lose. By and by they will be shut. Then no imploring cry will open them again.

The lesson for all is, "Watch therefore." We know not the day nor the hour. That is true of our Lord's coming. It is true of death. But it is true also of nearly every other experience of life. We go on, not knowing. The future is closed to our eyes. We know not what awaits us at any turning of a street corner, or what we shall have to meet any moment as we go. The only way to be ready for the unknown events of to-morrow is to improve every opportunity of to-day.



## CHAPTER XXXIX

### THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

*Read Matthew XXV., 14-30*

THE particular teaching of this parable is not the same as that of the parable of the virgins. That was the duty of preparation, this is the duty of working—using one's powers and capacities.

Every one of us has received a talent or talents, some portion of our Lord's goods. The Master has gone away, leaving us to use what of His He has intrusted to us until He returns. Then we shall have to give account to Him. It is not a voluntary matter with us, nor is it a matter of indifference, whether we will be Christ's servants or not. Christ is the rightful Lord of every man. Declining to accept Him and to enter His service does not exempt any one from the responsibility.

When the lord of these servants went away he left his property in the hands of his upper servants as stewards or trustees. He "delivered unto them his goods." Perhaps we do not realise how entirely Christ has intrusted His affairs and His interests in this world to His followers. This puts a

serious responsibility on us. If the Gospel is to get to men, we must proclaim it. If the work of the Church is to be done, we must do it. The only hands Christ has for work in this world are our hands. If the sorrowing are to receive comfort, we must give it. If the world is to see the beauty—the gentleness, the patience, the compassion, the helpfulness—of God, we must be the interpreters of these Divine affections. Christ has delivered His goods to us.

We notice also that in the distribution of talents the same is not given to all. “Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability.” Each person received what he was able to care for. This principle is observed in all Divine endowments. No one has duties allotted to him which he has not the ability to perform. Nothing impossible is ever asked of any person. Men differ in their ability to manage their Lord’s affairs, and the talents given into their hands vary accordingly. The merchant does not take the man with capacity only for lifting heavy bales and put him in the counting-room—he makes him a porter. When a woman wants a fine dress made, she does not give the costly materials to a washerwoman, a hairdresser, or to a teacher of German or music, but to a skilful dressmaker. Our Master gives each particular disciple the duties he has ability to do. We need never say, therefore, that we cannot do the things that seem to be required of us. We can do whatever we are given

by our Master to do. He makes no mistakes in the allotment of tasks.

The story then tells what the servants did with their share of their master's goods. "He that received five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents." This man used faithfully what had been put into his hands, and the result was that it was doubled—his five talents became ten. He used his gifts—"traded with them," and in the trading came the increase.

This is the Divine law in all life. God gives one a gift of music, but it is only in its possibilities as yet. It must be cultivated, developed, disciplined, or it never will become of any practical value. Love must be exercised if it is to grow. It is only a capacity at first. The same is true of all human powers, whether of body, mind or heart. The trouble with too many people is that they are indolent and do nothing with their natural gifts, and then these gifts never increase. Talents that are exercised, put to work, traded with, always multiply. "The hand of the diligent maketh rich." The boy who is so shy and diffident that he can scarcely speak a word in public, by using his small abilities becomes a great orator, able to sway a vast multitude. The girl whose voice is sweet but undeveloped, puts her talents to use, and by and by sings so as to thrill countless hearts.

The man with the two talents was faithful, too. "He also that received the two gained other two." Not many of us would claim, or at least our more

modest friends and neighbours would not claim for us, that we have five talents. This is the distinction of only a few. Many of us would not be quite willing to say we have only one talent. That would seem to put us low in the scale. Perhaps, however, some of us would admit that we have about two talents. It is the great middle class that does most for the world.

It would not do for all to be great—to be five-talented. If all the soldiers were fit for generals, who would make up the rank and file? If all Church members were eloquent preachers, who would do the countless little, quiet services that need to be done? If all men and women were great poets, who would write the prose? There is need for far more common people than great brilliant ones. One Niagara is enough for a continent, but there is need for thousands of little springs and rivulets. A few great men are enough for a generation, but there is work for millions of common folks. So this diversity of gifts is part of the Divine plan. The world needs more people of average ability than it needs of the extraordinary sort, and so we are sure always of being in good company. Lincoln said God must love the common people, for He made so many of them. People who are very great must feel lonesome, for there are so very few of them.

In the case of this two-talented servant, as with that of the five-talented, it was diligent work that redeemed the mediocre man from the obscurity of

the commonplace and gave him distinction. Presently he had four talents. The practical lesson in all the parable is the using of our gifts, that, if we really have only two talents, we should not vex ourselves, but should go to work with what we have, and it will grow by and by into something worthy. Dr. William J. Dawson speaks in one of his sermons of the commonness and pitiableness of "contented insignificance." There is no dishonour in one's being lowly and obscure, but it is dishonourable for a man with fine natural gifts, through indolence and lack of earnestness, to remain contented in his insignificance.

The talents were not given to the servants; they were only committed to them to be used. Then there would be an accounting. "After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them." There is an important suggestion in this "long time." We are given plenty of time to make use of our talents. It takes time to learn to work well and to develop and train our faculties to their best. Even if we have buried our talents for a season, there is still time to dig them up and try to put them to better use. We owe far more than we can tell to God's patience in waiting so long for us. But we must never forget that the Lord will come, and we shall have to reckon with Him for whatever of His we have.

The character of the reward should be noticed. The successful man was not given a year's vacation that he might take a long rest. He was not given

an easier position where he would have less care and less work. The reward for doing his work well was more work. Because he had done well with the little that had been entrusted to him, more was put into his hands. That is the way of honourable promotion among men—not rest and luxury, but a higher position with harder work, increased burden. “Joy” is promised, too—“the joy of thy Lord,” the joy which comes of serving, of doing the Lord’s work. The deepest joy experienced in this world is the joy which comes of serving.

But one of the servants had failed to do his best with his talent. “He also that had received the one talent came.” The story of the one-talented man is pathetic, and yet it has its startling lesson. If only he, too, had been faithful, doing his best with his little gift, he also would have multiplied his talent. Many who have done the most for the world had only one talent to begin with. The discovery that we have only one talent never should discourage us. We should accept what we have, however small it may be, and set about making the most of it and doing the most with it. The last thing to do with our gift or ability is to despair about it and then hide it away.

The gifts that are not used are lost. “Take ye away therefore the talent from him.” In all life it is the same—faculties unused are lost, become extinct. Natural eyes would lose the power of sight if one lived in darkness continually and never

used them. The eye that is never turned toward God by and by loses even the power to look Godward. The capacity for believing, which never believes, at length ceases to be able to believe. "Capacity is extirpated by disuse." The lesson comes with tremendous force to the young. If they will not use the spiritual powers God has bestowed upon them, these powers will be taken away from them.

## CHAPTER XL

### THE LAST JUDGMENT

*Read Matthew XXV., 31-46*

THIS passage gives us a wonderful picture of the last judgment. It is not a parable, but a prophetic presentation of the great scene. The sheep and goats are used as representing the good and the evil.

Christ will be the Judge. He will appear as the Son of man, that is, in His humanity. It is a comfort to think of this, that it will be our Brother whom we shall see on the throne of glory. Christ came first in lowly form. He was born in a stable and cradled in a manger. No retinue of angels then attended Him except the host that sang their song in the shepherds' ears. In His first coming He was lowly and despised. He was so poor that oftentimes He had nowhere to lay His head. He had but few followers and made but little name for Himself on the earth. But not thus will He come the second time. He will appear in glory and will be attended by hosts of angels.

For once the whole human family will be together. "Before Him shall be gathered all the na-



tions." Yet in our thought of the grandeur of this scene we must not lose sight of the individuality of the judgment. We shall be there, but none of us will be lost in the crowd; each one shall have a personal judgment. During a war the telegraphic reports from the field say that in a great battle ten thousand men were slain. Not knowing any of them personally, we think only of the vast aggregate number. But suppose some friend of ours—brother or father—was among the slain; we think no more then of the ten thousand, but of the one. And every one of the ten thousand is mourned in some home—is somebody's father, husband, brother, son, friend. From that battlefield ten thousand cords stretch to ten thousand homes. The heaps of slain are simply ten thousand individuals. So in that countless throng on judgment day, not one person will be lost in the multitude. "Every one must bear his own burden."

There will be a division that day—the whole human family will not be as one. "He shall separate them one from another." Our Lord's teachings are full of this thought of final separation. The tares and the wheat will grow together until the harvest; but then there will be an infallible separation—not a tare will be gathered into the barn with the wheat. The net draws good and bad fish to the shore, but there the two classes are separated. The ten virgins were together during the time of waiting, but the midnight cry caused an instant, final and irrevocable separation, as the door opened for

those who were ready to enter and shut upon those who were unprepared. Nothing is more plainly taught in the word of God than that the evil and the good, the believing and the rejecting, the righteous and the unrighteous shall be separated at the last day, each going to his own place. These separations will cut very close in many cases. "Then shall two men be in the field; one is taken, and one is left: two women shall be grinding at the mill; one is taken, and one is left." When we are sure of our place on Christ's right hand, we should never rest until we are sure also that all those whom we love shall be in the same company.

The King speaks to the people as if He had personally lived among them, "I was hungry, and ye gave Me to eat." It seems from this picture of the judgment that the eternal destiny of men shall be settled by their works. Feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty are mentioned as reasons for the favour shown to those upon the right hand. But a careful study of the passage shows that in the judgment all will turn upon one question—how men have treated Jesus Christ. If they have believed on Him, loved Him, honoured Him, and lived for Him, they will be honoured by Him, gathered at His right hand and admitted to His kingdom of glory. But if they have not believed on Him, have not honoured Him, have not lived for Him in this world, they will be rejected by Him at the last and shut out of the heavenly kingdom. In

other words, all will depend upon whether men believe or do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

But believing in Christ means more than giving assent to a correct creed—it means also a life of obedience and service. The whole of Christian life is love, not only love for Christ, but love for Christ's own. If we love God, we will love our brother also, says the beloved disciple. If we do not love our brother, it is evident that we do not love God. If we have the love of Christ in our heart, it will show itself to all those who belong to Christ. While there is love for all the world, there should be a special love for those who belong to the Master.

The King speaks as if He had come to the people in the great company in many attitudes and experiences of personal suffering and need. "I was a stranger, and ye took Me in; naked, and ye clothed Me; I was sick, and ye visited Me; I was in prison, and ye came unto Me." There is something very pathetic in this thought of Jesus as a stranger, as hungry, or as sick, coming to our doors in those whose appeals are made to us. If we allowed it to enter our heart and exercise its proper effect upon us, it would inspire in us sympathy and love, and would make us very gentle to all who are in need. Mr. Wesley, one winter day, met a poor girl in one of the schools under his care. She seemed almost frozen. He asked her if she had no clothing but the thin garments she was wearing. She said she had not. His hand was in his pocket in an instant, but there was no money there. He went to his room, but the

pictures on the wall seemed to upbraid him. He took them down, saying to himself: "How can the Master say to thee, 'Well done, good and faithful servant'? Thou hast adorned thy walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the bitter cold! O justice! O mercy! Are not these pictures the blood of the poor maid?" So he sold the pictures to get money to relieve the girl's distress.

Those to whom the King spoke could not understand what He meant. "When saw we Thee hungry, sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee?" Their surprise need not seem remarkable. The truest greatness is not conscious of itself. Moses wist not that his face shone. The best Christians put the lowest value upon their own good works. No doubt many of the commendations and rewards of the righteous in the judgment will indeed be surprises to them. They keep no record of their good deeds. Their sense of personal unworthiness hinders them from seeing anything worthy in what they do. We do not dream of the real value and helpfulness of the things we do. Besides, we do not indeed see Christ in the lowly and suffering ones who come before us, needing love and help—we see only poor, sick, unfortunate people, with no marks of glory, no hints of nobility, no traces of heavenly beauty. We do not see things as they are. Jesus Himself is ever before us in lowly guise. We are unconsciously serving the Master whenever we do in His name the holy things

of love. Every lowly, faithful Christian is preparing for himself many a blessed surprise in glory.

Jesus is still in this world. Once He was here in human form, as the Son of man. Now He is here in His Church. "Ye are the body of Christ," said the apostle. The smallest kindness shown to a Christian, even the least, Christ accepts as done to Himself. Parents understand this. Any honour shown to a child, a father receives as shown to himself. If a son is in a strange land and meets with some misfortune, or is sick, and some one finding him there as a stranger in trouble shows him kindness, no greater act done to the parents at home would be as pleasing to them as is that little ministry to their child in a foreign land. Christ loves His people so much that whatever is done to any of them He accepts as if He Himself had been the recipient of the kindness.

The same is true, on the other hand, of any unkindness or any lack of kindness shown to another. "I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in; naked, and ye clothed Me not. . . . Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto Me." We must beware how we treat the lowliest Christian, for if we neglect him in his need it is as if Christ were in the same need and we had neglected Him.

"Hush, I pray you!

What if this friend should happen to be—God!"

We must learn that we are judged not only by the things we do, but by the things we fail to do.

These persons had not been cruel or unkind to any of Christ's little ones—no such charge is made against them; they had not done the kindnesses which they ought to have done. In the parable of the Good Samaritan neither the priest nor the Levite did any harm to the wounded man, and yet they are severely condemned. They sinned against him grievously by not doing the things of love which he needed to have done for him.

## CHAPTER XLI

### THE ANOINTING OF JESUS

*Read Matthew XXVI., 1-16*

WE enter now upon the last events of our Lord's life. We are within two days of the passover. We have a glimpse of the plotting of the priests and elders, and their desire to take Jesus by subtlety to kill Him. They wished, however, to wait until after the feast, fearing excitement and tumult, and had so determined. The culmination of the plot was hastened, however, by the unexpected treachery of Judas.

The incident of the anointing is given here apparently out of its proper order, probably because of its influence on the treason of Judas. The incident occurred, according to John's Gospel, six days before the passover. Judas was offended by Christ's rebuke of his criticism of Mary's anointing, and under the sting of this went to the priest, offering to betray Christ.

Bethany was a sacred place to Jesus. There He found a home of love where His heart was rested many a time after the conflicts and controversies of the day in the temple. There His greatest miracle was wrought—the raising of Lazarus. We

know Martha and Mary well. They differed in their dispositions, but they were alike in their warm and loyal friendship for Jesus.

These two sisters had each her own way of expressing her love for her Friend. The other evangelists tell us that Martha served—Martha always served. There are certain people that we never fail to recognise by some unmistakable feature. We always know Peter by his impulsiveness. We know John by his lying upon the Saviour's breast at the last supper. We know Thomas as the man who doubted. We know Felix as the man who trembled, and then sent the preacher away for a more convenient season. We recognise Martha wherever we see her by her serving. She represents those whose love for Christ takes the practical form rather than the form of meditation and devotion.

Some people like to criticise Martha and find fault with her; but after all, her type of piety is important in this world where there is so much need for service and ministry. Beautiful as the Mary spirit is, it would not do if all were Marys, for who then would do the work of serving that needs so much to be done? A wife and mother, for instance, who would spend all her time in Bible reading and prayer, giving no thought to her household duties, would not make a very happy home.

“Yes, Lord! Yet some must serve;  
Not all with tranquil heart,  
Even at Thy dear feet,  
Wrapped in devotion sweet,  
May sit apart!”



The picture of Mary is also familiar. We see her three times in the Gospels, and each time she is in the same posture—at Jesus' feet. When we have our first glimpse within the Bethany home, we find Martha in her characteristic attitude—serving; and Mary we see sitting at the Master's feet, eagerly listening to His words. Our next view of Mary is when Jesus came back to Bethany after the death of Lazarus, and the sisters came out to meet Him. Again, she is at the feet of Christ, this time in deep sorrow, seeking comfort. And here again we find her at the Master's feet, and now it is in an act of honour and an expression of love and gratitude to Him.

We think of Mary, therefore, as a woman who was always at Christ's feet. In the bright, happy days, she sat there as a learner. When grief was in the house and Jesus came, she went to His feet for comfort. Then when the trouble was over, we find her again in her wonted place, honouring Him with her heart's richest and best gifts. There is no fitter place for the redeemed life than at the Master's feet.

Mary came in during the feast and anointed Jesus. We must distinguish this anointing from another by a woman who was a sinner. That anointing was an expression of penitence; this was an outburst of grateful love. Mary brought the best she had, the richest gift in all her possession. Her ointment was very costly. We should bring our best to Christ. No ointment in the world is

half so precious to Him as the love of a human heart; we should bring Him our best love, giving Him the first place in our affection. We should give Him the best of our life, the best of our time, the best of our service.

It seems a sad pity that any occasion so sacred as this should be marred by human littleness and meanness. The disciples had indignation. "To what purpose is this waste?" they asked. John tells us that Judas led in the criticism, and when we know this, we are not surprised. Judas thought it was waste when the ointment was poured out on the feet and head of Jesus. There still are many people who think everything wasted that is not coined into dollars, or that does not show in direct practical usefulness. But the truth is, that much of the richest and sweetest blessing scattered in this world is the odour from the breaking of alabaster boxes. It is well to give food and clothing to the poor, but sometimes love and sympathy are better.

One of the most beautiful ministries of modern Christian love is that of the flower missions in many King's Daughters' circles and Christian Endeavour Societies. The little bouquets of flowers that are sent out carry the fragrance of the love of Christ into many hearts and homes and leave untold benedictions there. Yet these flowers are very much like Mary's alabaster box, and some people would call the money wasted that is spent in this way. But the truth is, the odour of love always

carries a blessing wherever it reaches. Besides, Christ looks into the heart and is pleased with love there, whether the expression of the emotion take the form of garments for the poor or flowers for the sick room.

It is beautiful to read how promptly Jesus came to Mary's relief when she was blamed. "Why trouble ye the woman?" He asked. It was a shame for big, strong men like the apostles to pounce with such ill manners and cowardly rudeness on a timid young girl like Mary. They ought to have been gallant enough to encourage and praise her deed of love.

"She hath wrought a good work upon Me," said Jesus. This was what gave her act distinction and honour—it was wrought for the Master. Anything done for Christ is lifted up to honour. It is this that makes all lowly Christian service beautiful—it is something done for Jesus. Judas had said the money ought to have been given to the poor. But Jesus said they could always do good to the poor, but they could not show kindness to Him much longer.

Then Jesus said further that this ointment had been poured on His body to prepare Him for burial. Mary probably did not know He was so near death, but Jesus knew it and accepted the honour as for His funeral. We do not know half the real meaning of our lowliest deeds of love. In Mark's Gospel we read that Jesus said: "She hath anointed My body beforehand for the burying." Many peo-

ple would have kept that box sealed up, to anoint His cold body. When a man dies, there is never any lack of kind words about him, nor of flowers for his coffin. This is all well in its place, but Mary's way is better. Let us not wait until our friends are gone before we show our love for them, but rather, let us bring our ointment while they are alive to enjoy its fragrance. Fill the lives of your friends with sweetness; speak approving, cheering words, while their ears can hear them and while their hearts can be blessed by them. The flowers you mean to send for their coffins, send to brighten and sweeten their homes before they leave them. Let us learn the lesson to-day—to anoint our friends beforehand for their burying.

## CHAPTER XLII

### THE LAST SUPPER

*Read Matthew XXVI., 17-30*

JESUS left the temple for the last time on Tuesday evening and spent Wednesday in retirement. He gave instructions to two of His disciples on Thursday morning, concerning preparations for the passover. They were to go to a certain man and tell him, "The Teacher saith, My time is at hand; I keep the passover at thy house." The man was to be known by a certain sign—he would be carrying a pitcher of water. As women carried the burdens in those days, the sight of a man carrying water was uncommon. Hence the identification would be easy. Evidently secrecy was intended in the choosing of the place for the passover. It is thought that the reason for this secrecy was to keep from Judas the knowledge of the place, as he was watching for an opportunity to betray Jesus. The Master is always coming to people and saying, "I keep the passover at thy house." He wants to be a guest in every family. Blessed is the home that opens to Him and gives Him its upper room as His guest chamber.

It was a sad announcement that Jesus made to the disciples that night when they had gathered about the table. "Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me." Judas himself was at the table, and possibly one reason why Jesus made this announcement was to give him an opportunity to repent even at the last moment. It is remarkable that not one of the disciples seems to have suspected any one as the traitor to whom Jesus had referred. They did not begin to say: "I wonder which of us it is? Do you think it can be Andrew? Do you suppose it can be Peter?" Instead of suspicion, each one shuddered at the possibility that he himself might, after all, be the one. "Is it I, Lord?" they all began to say. "Surely not I!" is the more accurate rendering. We should examine ourselves rather than look at others for sins we find condemned.

It is very much easier to see faults in our neighbours than in ourselves, and to think others capable of doing evil things rather than suppose it possible that we should do them. But our business is with ourselves alone. We do not have to answer for the sins of our neighbours. Then it is not enough to ask merely whether we have done such and such things; we should ask also whether we are in danger of committing them. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." We do not know the dark possibilities of evil which lurk in our hearts. We dare not say, when we learn of some one who has fallen into terrible sin, that it would

have been impossible for us to have done the same thing. What man has done, man may do.

The answer of Jesus, "He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me," was not meant to point out any individual as the traitor. He merely meant to indicate the greatness of the crime—that one of those who had eaten at His table, and enjoyed the familiarity of closest friendship—and they all had—was now to betray Him. In the East, those who ate together, by that very act pledged to each other loyal friendship and protection. This made the crime of Judas all the darker and blacker.

What Jesus said about the traitor is very suggestive. He said, "Good were it for that man if he had not been born." It is a great privilege to live. It is a great thing to be able to stay in this world for a certain number of years and leave our impress upon other lives. It is a great thing to sow seeds which may bring multiplied harvests of blessing in the future. But there are those that live who would better never have been born. Judas had a magnificent opportunity. He was chosen to be an apostle. He would not have been thus chosen if it had not been possible for him to be a faithful and worthy apostle. He might have gone forth to help bring the world to Christ's feet, and his name might then have been written in heaven. Now, however, the face of Judas is turned to the wall and the place is blank which might have been filled with a story of noble deeds. He wrecked all the possibilities of

his life by rejecting the Divine will. He left only a black shadow and then passed to his own place in the other world. It would indeed have been better for him if he had not been born.

The story of the Lord's Supper is told very briefly in Matthew. We may notice, however, that Jesus sets aside the ancient passover and substitutes in its place for Christian observance this memorial supper. "Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it; and He gave to the disciples." Bread is a fit emblem of Christ's body. By it our bodies are nourished and strengthened. Christ is food to our spiritual life. Unless we feed upon Him we must perish. The giving of the bread to the disciples signified the offer to each one, by Christ Himself, of all the benefits and blessings of His love and sacrifice. Thus Christ ever stands with outstretched hands holding out to every human soul all the precious things of His salvation.

The use of the words, "This is My body," "This is My blood," ought not to occasion any difficulty. Jesus often spoke in a similar way. When He said, "I am the door," no one supposed that He meant He was changed into a literal door, or when He said, "I am the vine," no one ever thought that He meant to say He had become an actual vine. Here it is just as plain that He spoke figuratively, meaning that the bread was an emblem of His body.

We should notice also that the disciples themselves had a part in this supper. Jesus offered Himself to them as bread, but they must voluntar-



ily accept His gift. "Take, eat; this is My body." It is not enough that God loved the world and gave His Son for its redemption. It is not enough that Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for men. These stupendous acts of love and grace alone will not save any one. We have a responsibility in the matter. We must reach out our hands and take what is graciously offered to us. Bread must be eaten before it can become sustenance, so Christ, as the bread of life, must be received into our lives before it can become the food of our souls. Much of the failure of Christian life is at this very point—we do not take what Christ offers and even presses upon us. We pray for blessing, while all the time the blessing is close beside us, waiting only to be received and appropriated.

After giving them bread, Jesus took a cup from the table and gave it to them, too. "He took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it." A little later that same evening Jesus Himself took a cup from the hands of the Father and drank it to its bitter dregs. Into that cup there had been poured, as it were, all the world's sorrow. Yet full as it was of the very gall and bitterness of human guilt, He pressed it to His lips and drank it, saying, "The cup which the Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?"

This cup, however, which Jesus handed to His disciples was a cup of blessing. Into it He Himself poured, as it were, the concentration of all heaven's joy and glory. Again, however, we must notice the

words, "Drink ye all of it." It is not enough that the cup shall be prepared and then offered to us. Unless we accept the blessing of Christ's atonement, we shall not be helped.

Jesus said that this cup represented the covenant. "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins." In ancient times covenants were sealed by the blood of animals. The covenant of redemption was sealed by Christ's own blood. Christ's dying was not an accident—it was part of the great purpose of His life, that for which, above all else, He came into the world. We are saved, not merely by being helped over the hard places, not merely by being taught how to live, not only by having a perfect example set before us, but by having our sins remitted. No one can be saved until he is forgiven, and no man's sin is put away except through the blood of Christ.

Jesus announced to the disciples that this was the last time He would eat with them at an earthly table. "I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." In telling them this, He gave them great comfort in the assurance that He would sit down with them again, by and by, in the heavenly kingdom. The earthly supper was only a symbol; the heavenly would be a glorious reality.

Jesus left the upper room with a song on His lips. "When they had sung a hymn, they went out

into the mount of Olives." He knew where He was going and to what. Just before Him was Gethsemane, with its agony. Beyond this experience would come His trial, and next day His death. Yet He went to these terrible experiences with a song of praise.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### PETER'S DENIAL

*Read Matthew XXVI., 31-35; 69-75*

AS JESUS walked with his disciples from the upper room on the way to Gethsemane, He warned them of the peril into which they were about to enter. "All ye shall be offended in Me this night." Their trial would be very great. He quoted from an Old Testament prophet a word which described the situation as it was about to be: "I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." He knew what was coming. He would be smitten. He was the shepherd and had kept His sheep in safe protection thus far. Now He was to be smitten and they would be exposed to the power of their enemies and His.

Yet even in the shadows of the gathering night He saw the breaking of the morning. "But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee." He was to be killed, but He would be raised again from the dead. He was not to be finally torn away from them. Death would not be defeat to Him. He was to lie in the grave, but He would come again

and lead them once more, away beyond the grave. Hope never failed in the heart of Christ. He was never discouraged.

Peter was always the first of the disciples to speak. The most holy occasion could not awe or quiet him. He had heard the Master's warning, but he resented it. There was no need to fear for him, whatever others might do. "Peter answered and said unto Him, If all shall be offended in Thee, I will never be offended." His self-confidence was very strong. It was not possible, he said, for him to be untrue to his Lord. It was Peter's rash boldness that made him weak. Jesus repeated His warning, making it personal. "Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice." Still Peter resented the warning. "Peter saith unto Him, Even if I must die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee." We would say that such solemn words spoken by the Master could never be forgotten, and that it would be actually impossible for a disciple so forewarned to commit such a sin against his Master that same night. Yet the fact that Peter actually denied Him with such positiveness, and so repeatedly, shows how terrible the temptation was and how weak the strongest friend of Christ is in such an hour.

Gethsemane came next with its hour of anguish. Then came the arrest, on the edge of the Garden, when Jesus was betrayed by one of His disciples and led away to the palace of the high priest. It

was far on in the night. "Now Peter was sitting without in the court." There are several steps leading to Peter's present position in the court that we must recall in order to understand his denial. It began farther back. Earlier in the evening he disregarded, even resented, the warning that he would deny his Lord that night. That was a serious mistake. We would better listen when God speaks to us in this way. Peter was not a hypocrite. He was sincere, he loved Christ, but he was too self-confident. He lacked that distrust of self which should lead the best and holiest to know that only in Christ are they safe. Peter was weak that night because he sought no Divine help.

Next we find him sleeping when he ought to have been watching. That hour in the Garden was given in order that the disciples might be prepared for temptation. Peter did not improve it and was found unready. He failed in love's duty to the Master. Next was his rashness in drawing his sword. This act made him liable to arrest and led him to try to hide his identity and his connection with Christ, lest he might be seized by the officers. Again we find him following Jesus "afar off." This showed timidity and failing faith. His courage was going. Following at a distance is always perilous. It shows a weakening love and a trembling loyalty. It is in itself a partial denial. The only really safe place is close up to Christ.

Another fatal step was taken by Peter when he went in and sat down among the servants in the

court. He was in bad company. He had seated himself among Christ's enemies. His object was to conceal his discipleship. He wanted to be thought one of their company when he sat down among mockers and revilers. He hoped thus to escape detection. Thus he acted denial before he spoke it. Had he been altogether loyal and faithful he would have kept out of such company and as near his Master as possible. The only true and safe thing to do when among Christ's enemies is to take one's right place quietly and firmly at the beginning. Starting wrong puts one in a false position, in which it is almost impossible to be faithful afterward. Peter was in a bad place for a disciple when "sitting without in the court." He was ready to fall. We must guard against taking the steps that lead to denial of Christ.

Peter's denial was not premeditated, as was the betrayal by Judas. He was caught in the entanglement of circumstances. His first denial was partly owing to the suddenness of the assault and his previous false steps. He was not false at heart, but loved his Master even when denying Him. We must remember that when all the other disciples forsook Jesus, Peter was the only one, save John, who followed Him when in the hands of His enemies. True, he followed Him afar off, timidly, yet he followed. We must keep in mind his character also—impulsive, impetuous, always doing rash things, yet withal bold and loyal. These considerations palliate though they do not excuse

Peter's denial. After all, this is one of the saddest chapters in the Bible. This favoured disciple, at the twitting of a slave girl, denies his Lord, and then goes on denying Him, with increasing earnestness and with oaths and curses.

There are several things that made Peter's denial peculiarly sad and sinful. One was that he had received so many marks of special favour from his Master. He was not a disciple only, but an apostle. He was one of the three who had been chosen as the Master's particular friends. He has been honoured, too, by the Lord on several occasions, even that very night in the Garden when he was chosen to be with Him. He had made the boldest confession of Christ and had also loudly professed his allegiance.

Another aggravation of Peter's denial was that he had been so earnestly forewarned. Even that night he had been told that he would deny Christ and had utterly disregarded the Lord's words, declaring that he could not possibly do such a thing. No railroad engineer runs past a red light. Forewarning makes sin worse because it leaves it inexcusable.

Another thing that made the sin worse was that it was in the Lord's hour of sorest need that Peter had denied Him. If it had been on the Transfiguration Mount, or during the triumphal entry, it would not have been one-hundredth part so bad. But it was when Jesus was deserted and in the hands of enemies. Was that a time for the bravest



disciple, the most highly favoured friend, the noblest confessor, to turn his back upon his Lord? When the shadow falls on your friend, when the tide turns against him, when others have forsaken him, is that the time for you, his long-time bosom companion, the recipient of his favours, to turn craven and leave him alone? How much Peter might have comforted Jesus in His trial! Instead, however, the only words the Master heard from His friend's lips, as he stood amid enemies and revilers, were words of denial, which cut like sword-thrusts into His heart.

A simple lie becomes a lie sworn to, and then a lie sworn to with imprecations and curses. Simple denial is bad enough, but this apostle even went so far as to invoke curses upon himself if he were a disciple, if he ever knew the man, and to utter oaths to emphasise his denial. How this aggravated his sin!

But how could an apostle who had been with Jesus so long, hearing and using only pure speech, curse and swear in this way? The answer is, that it must have been an old habit with Simon the fisherman, which now cropped out in the excitement. This is a way old evil habits have. It is impossible to root them out so that they will never give trouble again. They are like weeds; you may dig them out and think there is not a root left in the ground, and for a while none may be seen; but some day they will reappear. Bad habits of any kind formed in early life always leave weak points in the character.

It is very easy to fall again in sudden temptation where one has fallen before. It is always easy to take old paths on which the feet were once accustomed to go. One who drank in his youth, though he becomes a total abstainer and is true for years, is never as safe at that point as one who never acquired the habit. It is so with lying, swearing, obscenity, dishonesty and all vices.

At last Peter came to himself. "Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said . . . And he went out, and wept bitterly." The cock crew, and then Jesus turned and looked upon Peter, who, glancing up at that moment, caught his Lord's eye. The cock-crow and the look aroused him to a sense of what he had done. An incident, a remembering, a look, were the means by which the sinning apostle was brought to repentance. We can think of that look. Jesus was in the hands of mocking enemies, and while they were scoffing and beating Him, there fell on His ear the voice of His favoured disciple, denying Him with curses and imprecations. Surely this was the bitterest drop in the bitter cup of that terrible night. What pain and sorrow there were in the look that fell upon Peter! But, thank God, the look broke his heart and saved him. He went out into the night, but not like Judas, to despair. He went out into the night, but the angel of mercy went with him and pointed him to hope. He wept bitterly, but the memory of that look—grieved, chiding, yet full of love—told him that he had not

yet lost his place in the Master's heart. He repented of his sin and was saved to become one of the noblest of our Lord's apostles. So we may thank God for this sad story, because it shows us such a door of hope when we have sinned.

## CHAPTER XLIV

### JESUS IN GETHSEMANE

*Read Matthew XXVI., 36-56*

THERE was something strangely significant even in the name of the place where Jesus endured His midnight agony. Gethsemane means oil press. It was the place where oil was crushed out of the olives. Olive oil was very valuable. It was used chiefly for food and for lighting. The sufferings of Christ have yielded the highest blessings to the world—food for men's souls, and light to shine in darkness.

We cannot begin to understand the anguish of Christ that night. He said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." We should take off our shoes as we stand by the edge of the scene. Some of the elements of His suffering, however, may be suggested. Before Him lay the betrayal, the arrest, the trial, then death on the cross. By His prevision He saw all these cruelties and tortures. Another element of His suffering lay in the falseness of the human hearts about Him. There were the traitorous kiss of Judas, the denial of

Peter, the desertion by the other disciples, the rejection and crucifixion by the people He had come to save. All this He saw from Gethsemane. But that which made the essence of the anguish that night was that He died for sin. "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." What that meant we never can know. He was dying, the just for the unjust. He bore our sin in His own body on the tree. We may not try to fathom the mystery, but the fact we should never allow to be forgotten.

The humanness of Jesus also appears in the Garden. He craved the sympathy of His friends in His suffering. While they could not lessen the anguish nor bear any part of it for Him, the consciousness that they were close by and were thinking of Him, feeling with Him, would make Him stronger to endure. There is a picture which shows two women seated side by side. One is in deep sorrow. Some great grief has fallen upon her heart and crushed it. Her face tells of deepest affliction. The other woman has come in from without. She is sitting beside the sufferer, in silence, holding her hand, while her face expresses deep sympathy. The near presence of one we love when we are in any trial makes us stronger to endure. This suggests one way in which we may do good. True sympathy with those in trouble is oft-times the best service we can render them.

No longer does Jesus Himself need that we should watch with Him, but in the persons of his

little ones He is ever saying to us, "Abide ye here, and watch with Me." While Jesus wanted His friends near to Him, yet they could not share the actual experience of that hour. "He went forward a little, and fell on His face, and prayed." We, too, must meet all our deepest experiences alone. Even our tenderest human friends we must leave back a little way. In sorrow others may hold our hands and we may lean upon their strong arm for support; but that is all—the sorrow itself we must endure without companionship. No one can take our pain and bear it, or our sorrow and endure it.

The prayer which Jesus offered in the Garden was very intense, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me." Without attempting to fathom the mystery of His experience as He prayed this prayer, we get some suggestions from it for ourselves. For one thing, in all our troubles we should seek refuge in prayer. There is no other place to go. "Being in agony He prayed." He let His heart cries go out in pleadings and supplications. Whatever our trial may be, it is a comfort to know that we may take it to God in prayer.

Another lesson is that however earnest we may be in our pleading, we must always submit our requests to the will of God. "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." How can we know what is best? Even Jesus in His anguish would not trust His own judgment, but said, "If it be possible—as Thou wilt." Our prayers should always be modeled on our Master's. Anything but God's will

would be a mistake. It may be that the sorrow from which we implore God to save us is bringing blessings we could not afford to miss. So we can only safely leave all to Him.

It was a bitter disappointment to Jesus when, after His first great struggle, He returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He had longed for their sympathy. He felt that if they were waking and watching He would be stronger to endure the anguish. He came back seeking refreshment and renewal of strength from their sympathy. Instead of watching, however, the disciples were sleeping. We may not chide them, however. How is it with ourselves? Jesus is ever setting us to watch with Him and for Him. Does He always find us awake when He comes? Is He never disappointed in us? Do we never lose interest in His service?

He showed the pain of His disappointment in the way He spoke to the disciples. "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?" It was to Peter He said this specially, because Peter was the one who had boasted but a little while before that whatever others might do he would be loyal. The time they were expected to watch was short—only "one hour." It is very sad that the help Jesus craved that night from His own disciples they failed to give Him. He is calling us to watch with Him. Even in His Divine glory He still craves human affection, trust and faithfulness. We still may grieve His heart by lack of fidelity. We have con-

stant opportunity of watching with Christ. There always are those that need our sympathy, our cheer, our encouragement, our help. The disciples that night lost an opportunity of lightening their Master's load in His darkest hour. Let us not fail Christ in loyalty, in affection, in service.

Even in the midst of His own anguish He thought of His disciples in their danger, and sought their safety. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." It is not enough to pray without watching. An army in the enemy's country never rests a moment without its encircling line of pickets, keeping watch at every point against danger, and reporting instantly every indication of a hostile movement. We are living in the enemy's country, and we dare not pass an hour without watching. But watching is not enough, for we are not able to guard ourselves in danger. Hence we need also to pray continually, asking God to protect us. God means us to keep our wits about us as we pray, as well as call to Him for help. "Watch and pray."

When Jesus prayed the second time the form of His pleading was modified. "My Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it, Thy will be done." While the prayer was not answered directly, the Suppliant was growing stronger, and His will was coming more and more into acquiescence with the Father's will. This is oftentimes the way our prayers are answered. The things we ask



for are not given to us, but we are strengthened so as to accept the pain and endure it.

Very sad was the word which Jesus spoke when He returned to His disciples the last time—"Sleep on now, and take your rest." Their opportunity for watching with Him was now gone. He did not need them any more, because the struggle was over. Waking now would do no good, and they might as well sleep on. There is a time for each duty, and the time soon passes. The time to show sympathy with a suffering friend or neighbour is while the suffering is being endured. There is no use in our coming next day when the need is past. The time to watch against a danger is when the danger is impending; there is no use to wake up when its work is done. Watching then will not undo the evil. We may almost as well then sleep on and take our rest.

The betrayal of Jesus is graphically described in Matthew's Gospel. It was "one of the twelve" who did it. This makes it terribly sad. It was a strange place to see an apostle—one who had lived with Jesus in such close relations, eating with Him, enjoying all the confidences of His friendship—acting now as guide to those who came to arrest his Master. The kiss, which was the honoured token of affection and the sacred seal of friendship, became in this case the token of disloyalty and the sign of treason. The last word Jesus spoke to Judas shows love, ready even then to accept the

recreant disciple. "Friend, do that for which thou art come."

There was a bewildered attempt by the disciples to defend their Lord against those who had laid hands upon Him. But they did not know what they were doing. They were loyal and devoted, but powerless in their fright and confusion. Quickly Jesus bade them put up their swords. He was not dependent on human force. He could by a word have had legions of angels sent to His defense. But that was not God's way. His hour had come.

"Then all the disciples left Him, and fled." Shall we call them cowards and chide them with abandoning their Lord? Yes, but their Lord was infinitely patient with them.

## CHAPTER XLV.

### THE TRIAL OF JESUS

*Read Matthew XXVI., 57-68*

WE speak of the trial of Jesus, but really it was not a trial. There was no intention of giving Him a fair and just hearing. The Sanhedrin had firmly made up its mind to condemn Jesus, and they went through the form of a trial, not to discover the truth about Him, but to endeavour to get some pretext for what they had determined to do. When we think who Jesus was, looking at Him in the light of our belief in Him as the Son of God, the scenes of His trial reveal His enemies in strange character indeed. Think of men arresting the Son of God, binding His hands, and putting Him on trial in their courts!

Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, just after the close of His anguish there. The effect of His arrest on the disciples was to cause them to scatter and leave Him. While they all fled, John seems to have returned very soon, and we think of him as following close behind his Master on the way to the palace of the high priest. Peter

also followed, but "afar off." This was the beginning of his denial.

The rulers had no difficulty in getting men to testify against Jesus. There always are men who can be bribed to do anything. "The chief priests and the whole council sought false witness against Jesus," that they might put Him to death. Their intention was not to bring out the truth about Him, but to get such testimony as would seem to justify their determination to kill Him. It was false witness they sought—no other kind of witness against Him could be found, for there was none. In all the land there was not a man, woman or child who could truthfully say a word against Jesus. His was the one life in all the world's history in which there was no flaw, no blemish. No wonder the question was asked by Pilate, when the Jews clamoured for the condemnation of Jesus, "Why, what evil hath He done?" The rulers could have found thousands of witnesses to tell of the good things He had done, but they could not find even one to testify of any evil against Him. Hence they deliberately sought false witnesses.

But even this testimony was not of any use, for one witness swept away what another had said. "They found it not, though many false witnesses came." There are many in these days, too, who are willing and eager to witness against the Bible and against Christianity, but there is no agreement among them. One man, for example, goes about with his hammer, breaking off bits of rock and

studying ancient fossils, saying that his deductions demolish the statements of the Bible. But another man, also hostile to Christianity, follows, with his little hammer, and reports other deductions which sweep away the theories and conclusions of the first. So it is with all opposition to Christianity. One witness antagonises another. Amid enmities and assaults, the New Testament stands really unassailable, an impregnable rock, and Christ Himself abides, the same yesterday, and to-day, yea, and forever.

At length, however, two men were found who seemed to agree in their testimony, saying the same thing. Probably they had been drilled and taught just what to say. "Afterward came two, and said, This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." Really Jesus never said this. What He did say was, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," referring to the temple of His body. The Jews taught that any word spoken against the temple was blasphemy. Jesus had not said, however, that He would destroy the temple, but that if they destroyed it—meaning His body—He would restore it, foretelling His own resurrection. The witnesses perverted His words, however, so as to give the impression that Jesus had actually spoken blasphemy against the temple. There always are those who insist upon garbling and misrepresenting what Jesus said in order to bolster up their own peculiar opinions.

Jesus remained silent before all that the false witnesses said. "Jesus held His peace." There was no reason why He should speak, for there were no charges to answer. His calmness angered the high priest, and he stood up and fiercely demanded, "Answerest Thou nothing? what is it which these witness against Thee?" Still He answered nothing. There is a time to keep silence. When others say false or bitter things of us or to us, it is usually better not to answer again. Answering does no good when enemies are in such mood. It only irritates them the more—it does not convince them or soften their hearts.

There is something very majestic in our Lord's silence at this time. There He stood, pale and suffering, yet meek, patient, undisturbed, showing no bitterness, no resentment, no anxiety concerning the outcome of His trial. "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." The lesson is for us and we should not fail to get it—when we are wronged or hurt, when others say false things of us or bitter things to us, we should keep love in our hearts, and say no unloving word and cherish no unloving thought, committing all the wrong, the injustice into the hands of our Father, who judgeth righteously.

But as there is a time to keep silence, there is also a time to speak. Despairing of getting any real ground of charge from the false witnesses, the high

priest determined to make Jesus convict Himself. He demanded of Him whether He were indeed the Christ. "I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou art the Christ, the Son of God." Instantly the silence was broken. Not to have spoken now would have been to deny His own Messiahship. To answer would cost Him His life, but He paused not a moment to think of the cost. There come times in every one's experience when silence would be disloyalty to Christ. We should have courage then to speak the truth regardless of consequences.

Not only did Jesus answer the high priest's question, but He went farther and gave him and his fellow-judges a glimpse of the glory of His power. "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." Recall this scene before the council—the pale, meek One, standing there as a prisoner, bound, mocked, spit upon, smitten. Then go forward and think of the other scene which His own words bring up, when this same Holy One shall sit on the throne of His glory, wearing the crown of universal power, and when the priests, scribes and elders of that ancient court shall stand before Him, and recognise Him as the very prisoner on whom they looked with such contempt that night of His trial. Who can conceive of the shame, the remorse, the anguish, of that moment? The rulers supposed that Jesus was on trial before them; really they were on trial before Him.

There are many who are now treating Christ with contempt, rejecting His mercy, despising His love, refusing to believe His words. There are those who flippantly deny the deity of Christ and laugh at the claims made by His followers for Him. These, too, will be compelled to see Him when He comes in glory to judge the earth. "Every eye shall see Him, and they that pierced Him." How are we treating Jesus Christ? Are we looking on Him in love, believing on Him as our personal Saviour, following Him as our Master, cleaving to Him as our Friend; or are we spurning Him from our doors, insulting Him, mocking Him? We must read ourselves and our own relation to Christ into the scene before us.

The last item in the passage is the formal vote of the Sanhedrin on the question of Christ's guilt. When Jesus had answered, the high priest rent his garments, saying, "He hath spoken blasphemy: what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye?" Instantly came the answer, "He is worthy of death." Thus the vote of the court condemned Jesus as a blasphemer, condemned Him to death, because He claimed to be the Messiah, the Son of God. This was the signal for the beginning of mocking and insult. They spit in His face and buffeted Him. They blindfolded Him and smote Him and bade Him prophesy who it was that struck Him.



## CHAPTER XLVI

### THE CRUCIFIXION

*Read Matthew XXVII., 33-50*

THE story of the crucifixion has the most sacred and tender interest for every one who loves Jesus Christ. It is not merely an account of the tragic death of a good man—He who was crucified was the world's Redeemer, our Redeemer, suffering for us. Some of the old preachers used to say that our sins drove the nails in the hands and feet of Jesus. He died for us. St. Paul speaks also of being crucified with Christ. He means that Christ's death was instead of his death. No other death in all history means to the world what the dying of Jesus means.

They led Jesus out to Golgotha. There He was met by those who offered Him "wine to drink mingled with gall." It is supposed that the act was one of kindness, that the mixture was intended to stupefy Him so as to deaden in some measure the awful suffering of crucifixion. But Jesus refused the drink. He would not have His senses dulled as He entered upon His great work of death for the

world, nor would He have His sufferings as Redeemer lessened in any degree.

The garments of men who were crucified were by custom the perquisites of the soldiers in charge of the crucifixion. "They parted His garments among them, casting lots." We love to think of the garments which Jesus had worn. Perhaps they had been made by His mother's hands or else by the hands of some of the other women who followed Him and ministered unto Him of their substance. They were the garments the sick woman and other sufferers had touched with reverent faith, receiving instant healing. What desecration it seems when these heartless Roman soldiers take these garments and divide them among themselves! Then what sacrilege it is when the soldiers throw dice and gamble for His seamless robe under the very cross where the Saviour is dying!

"They sat and watched Him there." Roman soldiers kept guard, but they were not the only watchers. There was the careless, heartless watch of the soldiers. They knew nothing about Jesus. They saw three poor Jews on three crosses, and had no conception of the character of Him who hung on the middle cross. It is possible yet and always to look at Christ on the cross and see nothing more than these soldiers saw. We all need to pray to have our eyes opened when we look at Christ crucified, that we may see in the lowly sufferer the Son of God, bearing the sin of the world.

There were also jealous watchers, the enemies of Jesus, so full of hatred that they even hurled scoffs at Him who hung in silence upon that central cross. Then there were loving watchers—the women and John, Christ's friends, with hearts broken as they looked at their Lord dying in shame and anguish. Then there were wondering watchers—angels, who hovered unseen above the cross and looked in amazement upon the suffering Son of God, eagerly desiring to know what this mystery meant.

All the words that Jesus spoke on the cross were full of meaning. One, the very first, was a prayer for His murderers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." The words seem to have come from His lips just as the nails were being driven through His hands and feet. The torture was excruciating, but there was no cry of pain, no execration of those who were causing Him such bitter anguish; only an intercession. Dora Greenwell in one of her poems illustrates the story in a striking way. There was a youth who had blotted from his soul every grace of goodness, who one day, in defiance of God, flung up into the air a dagger meant for God's own heart. Out of the sky came a hand that caught the dagger's hilt, and presently there fell from the wound five drops of Christ's dear blood, freely spilt for human guilt. Then a little leaf came floating through the air and fell at the youth's feet. On the leaf was written a prayer for mercy. Overwhelmed by this Divine answer to his

terrible defiance, the youth sank upon his knees, looked up to heaven and cried :

“Have mercy, mercy, Lord, on me  
For His dear sake, who on a tree  
Shed forth those drops and died.”

This legend is a beautiful parable of the meaning of the death of Christ. The answer to the world's daring defiance of God was the hands of Christ stretched out to be pierced with nails for the world's redemption.

It was the custom to fasten on the cross a board bearing the name and the crimes of the sufferer. “They set up over His head an accusation written, **THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**” It was only in mockery that Pilate wrote this superscription. He did it to vex the Jews. Yet never were truer words written. Jesus was indeed the King of the Jews. They had looked forward to the coming of their Messiah with expectations of great blessings from Him. “He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not.” This was the way they were treating their King. But He is our King, too. The crown He wore that day was a crown of thorns. Thorns were part of the curse of sin, and the crown of Jesus was woven of sin's curse. We have the promise of crowns of glory in heaven, because on Christ's brow rested that day the crown of shame.

“He saved others; Himself He cannot save.” Unwittingly in their mockery they spoke a deep truth. Jesus had saved others, and even now He was sav-

ing others in the most wonderful way of all—by dying for them. He could have saved Himself, however, from the cross if He had desired. His offering was voluntary. He said, "I lay down my life. . . . No one taketh it away from Me." He said He could have summoned twelve legions of angels to deliver Him. He could have saved Himself, but then He would not have saved others. The soldier cannot save himself and save his country. Jesus could not save Himself and redeem the world. So He gave His own life a willing sacrifice to redeem lost men.

It was a strange scene that came on at noon-day. "From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour." A yet deeper darkness hung round the Redeemer's soul those hours. It was so dark that He even thought Himself forsaken of God.

We never can understand the mystery of it, and we can know only that He wrapped the gloom of death about Himself that we might be clothed in garments of light. He died in darkness that when we walk in the valley of the shadow of death, the light of glory may shine about us. His head wore a matted crown of thorns, that under our heads may be the pillow of peace. He drank the cup of woe that we may drink the cup of blessing.

Mrs. Browning, in one of her poems, has pictured with rare beauty the effect of Christ's death upon two seraphim who lingered a little behind the hosts of heaven who had gathered that day round the

cross. One of them, as he thinks of the meaning of the wonderful sacrifice, is troubled by the thought that men will now have more reason to love God than even the angels have. The other remonstrates, saying, "Do we love not?" "Yes, but not as man shall," he answered:

"Oh! not with this blood on us—and this face,  
Still, haply, pale with sorrow that it bore  
In our behalf, and tender evermore  
With nature all our own, upon us gazing—  
Nor yet with these forgiving hands upraising  
Their reproachful wounds, alone to bless!  
Alas, Creator! shall we love Thee less  
Than mortals shall?"

"Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit." His loud cry, "It is finished," which John records, was a shout of victory. His work was completed. The atonement was made. Then followed the word, given by Luke, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." The shadows were lifted. There was no longer any feeling of forsakenness. Again we hear the sweet name, "Father," showing that the joy had been restored. We see also in this word what death was to Jesus—only the breathing out of His spirit into His Father's hands. We cannot see into the life beyond, but revelation assures us of the Divine presence close beside us. Dying is but fleeing from the body into the arms of the Father. All this is ours because Jesus tasted death for us. Because He had the darkness, we have the light.

## CHAPTER XLVII

### THE RESURRECTION

*Read Matthew XXVIII., 1-20*

WE think of death ordinarily as the end of a man's life. He can do no more work in this world. Only his influence remains. But it was not the end of the life of Jesus Christ. He came again from the grave after a brief rest and took up once more His work of redemption.

The women watched beside the grave after the burial of the body there until they were compelled to hasten into the city before the gates would be shut upon them. Meanwhile they were in deep grief. The sabbath was a sad and dark day for them. They were eager to get back to the grave to honour their Lord's dead body. So at the very dawn, after the sabbath, as soon as the gates would be opened, they left their home and hastened away to His grave, carrying spices and ointments to anoint His dead body.

No one saw the resurrection. We are told something, however, of what took place. "There was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord de-

scended from heaven, and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it." The rulers thought they had the sepulchre well secured. The stone had been sealed with Pilate's seal, so that to meddle with it would be a high crime. Besides, they had procured a guard of Roman soldiers to watch by the grave. They seem to have expected thus to keep Jesus from rising. When they asked for the guard, they gave this as the reason—"After three days I rise again." They pretended to suspect that the disciples would try to carry away the body by night, to give the impression that their Master had risen. But we see how useless were all their precautions. There was no power in the universe that could keep the body of Jesus in that rock-prison.

The effect of the resurrection and its attendant circumstances upon the Roman soldiers who kept watch was startling. The angel's "appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the watchers did quake, and became as dead men." The soldiers were hardened to all sorts of danger. They never quailed in the presence of any enemy. But when an angel of God stood before them, with shining face and shining garments, they were in great terror.

But the angel who caused such dread in the Roman soldiers spoke with all gentleness to the women who stood before the grave in great sorrow. "The angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who



hath been crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, even as He said." This was the first announcement of the Resurrection. It was made by an angel to the Lord's women friends. They had ample proofs of the fact thereafter.

No event in all history is more incontestably sure than that Jesus rose again from the dead. Nor can the importance of the fact be overestimated. Everything depends upon Christ's Resurrection. All the hopes of redemption waited outside that sealed sepulchre. Jesus had said that He would rise; His Messiahship therefore depended for confirmation on His rising. He had made promises to His disciples that He would come again from death and live forever. Indeed, His kingdom depended altogether upon His rising. If He had remained under the power of death, no soul that trusted in Him could have been saved. For a Saviour vanquished and held as a prisoner could not be a deliverer of others. A Saviour locked in a grave could not appear before God to intercede for men, could not walk with His people in their trials and sorrows, could not lead the dying safely through the valley which He had not Himself been able to pass through victoriously, could not bring believers from death's prison from which He had not Himself been able to come.

These are hints of what depended upon Christ's rising from the dead. Thus we see something of the tremendous importance of the fact which was announced by the angel to the women that early

morning. "He is not here; for He is risen." We have a living Christ, therefore, for our Saviour. He was victorious over all enemies then, over death, the last enemy. Therefore, He is able to deliver us from all our enemies and from death's power at the last. He stands before God for us, and also walks with us on the earth in all our experiences, a living Friend, to love, to help, to comfort, to deliver, to keep, all who have committed themselves to Him in trusting faith.

The angel sent the women on an errand to the disciples to bear to them the glorious news. "Go quickly, and tell His disciples." They obeyed promptly and with joy. "They departed quickly." On their way Jesus Himself appeared to them. "Behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail." Notice that it was as they were hastening in the path of obedience that they met their Lord. It is always and only in the way of duty that we ever meet Christ, and find blessing and joy. Had the women loitered by the grave instead of hastening away as they were bidden, Jesus would not have appeared to them. It is only in the way of obedience, in the service of love, that Jesus meets us. There are Christian mourners who never go away from the grave where they have laid their loved ones. They hear the words of hope which the Gospel brings, but sit still in their grief, and no comfort reaches their sad hearts. Jesus does not meet them. If they would rise and hasten on errands of love to the living, the Divine comfort would come to them. They

would meet Jesus Himself in the way, and receive His "All hail!" Grief is often selfish. It forgets the living in its sorrow for the dead. To such mourners true comfort never comes. Rise up and go on errands of service, and Jesus will meet you.

The women worshipped their Master, rejoicing that they had Him back again from the grave. He then Himself sent them on an errand to the disciples. "Go tell My brethren that they depart into Galilee, and there shall they see Me." Whenever Jesus makes an appointment with His friends, He will keep it, He will be present, and will have blessings to bestow upon those who meet Him there. Suppose that some of our Lord's disciples had stayed away from the appointed meeting in Galilee, not quite believing His promise, or having other things to do instead, what would they have missed? Or they might have said, "It is a long distance to the place;" or, "The mountain is steep, and I do not like to climb it;" or, "I fear it will rain or be stormy;" or, "Perhaps He will not be there at all—I cannot understand how He can indeed be risen." For any of these reasons or for any other reason some might have been absent that wonderful day. But they would then have missed the glorious sight of the risen Jesus, and would not have received His commission and promise. To the end of their lives they would have regretted that they had not kept their Lord's appointment that day.

Jesus makes appointments with us to meet us at times of prayer in Church services, at the holy

communion, at some holy trysting place. Sometimes we do not think these appointments very important and are easily influenced to omit them. We never can know what we lose by these failures or neglects. Jesus always comes where He asks us to meet Him, and gives blessings there to those who have been faithful in gathering to wait for Him. We do not know what we may miss by staying away from any appointment with our Master.

The risen Lord's promise to His disciples when He sent them forth is one of great comfort. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." If Jesus had given His commission without adding His promise, His disciples might well have shrunk from going forth to the work to which He assigned them. But having His promise, they could not hesitate.

This assurance was not for the first disciples only; He says to us also, "I am with you always." In what sense is Christ with us always? It is not merely as our departed human friends are with us—in the sweet memories of their lives. It is a real and personal presence. He is present with us as He was with Mary and Martha when He came to them that day after their brother had died. He is present with each one of us, not only on the bright days but on the dark days. Let us believe in the actual presence of Christ with us, and then let us act as if we believed that He is with us. This is the secret of Christian power and Christian peace.