

DEVOTIONAL HOURS WITH THE BIBLE

STUDIES IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS
ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST

BY
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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

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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.

PREFACE TO THIS VOLUME

THE readings in this volume are from the Synoptic Gospels, following the story of the Life of Christ. In the space of a single volume only a small number of selections could be given.

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CHAPTER I

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST FORETOLD

Read Luke I., 5-23

THERE was a wonderful preparation of the world for Christ before He came. There was the Jewish expectation of the Messiah. This hope had been diffused throughout the nations by the wide dispersion of the Jewish people, who carried their religion with them and had synagogues in every city, where also their holy books were read. It is wonderful to think what the world owes to the influence of the Jewish people. Amid the hills of Palestine were written a few little books or tracts whose teachings, like leaven, permeated the great nations of Asia and Europe in the time before Christ was born and prepared the world to receive Him. Rome also had done much to prepare the world for Christianity. It had brought all lands under one government. It had built roads everywhere, which became highways for the messengers of Christ. The Greek language was spoken everywhere, thus giving a medium for the carrying of the gospel to all the nations. These and other conditions were favourable to the

dissemination of Christianity. This preparation was not accidental, a mere coincidence of events. There is evidence that the preparation was divine. The hand of God was in it.

We have a picture here of the godly home. Yet the time was not propitious to pity. It is not hard to live a beautiful life amid kindly and favouring circumstances. If a child has a sweet home with only gentle influences about it—an atmosphere of love and prayer—it is not strange that the child's life grows up into beauty. On the other hand, if the home is cold and unkindly, without love and prayer and godliness, it seems to us almost a miracle if a child grows up in it loving God and with a true and beautiful character. The "days of Herod" were not days when it was easy to be godly. The times were ungodly and the prevailing spirit was unrighteous. The holy lives which we find here in this story are like lamps shining in the darkness. Amid the almost universal corruption of the priesthood, and the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, this old priest and his wife lived in piety and godly simplicity. The lesson is that we may be good and may live saintly lives, though all about us is evil. We need not be like those among whom we live. No matter how corrupt the times or how unholy the influences, we ought always to strive to be holy and pure.

It is important to know the name and the character of the woman who helps to make the home. "Her name was Elisabeth." A great many Elisa-

beths will study this lesson. It is pleasant even by a name to be reminded continually of some other one who has lived a noble and beautiful life in the past. No thoughtful Mary can be altogether forgetful of the Marys of the New Testament, especially the Mary who was the mother of our Lord, "blessed among women," and the other Mary whom Jesus loved so tenderly, who sat at His feet as a learner and then anointed His feet with her ointment. There is ever an aroma of sacredness about this name. So the Elisabeths may catch an inspiration from the Elisabeth of this story. We are not told much about her. We know, however, that she was a good woman, one who walked in God's commandments in times when such godliness was rare.

In these days we are hearing a great deal about the "new woman." Some people think that woman heretofore has been living in a kind of darkness, not making much of herself, not realizing the possibilities of her life and her position. She has not understood herself and her power, and has been content to stay in obscurity when she might have stood forth in splendour. Now, however, she has come to a time when she may make more of her life in many ways. No doubt some phases of the thought of the "new woman" are excellent. The last quarter century has been a wonderful era in woman's history. In all ways woman has moved forward with tremendous strides. Our women's colleges have given her op-

portunities for acquiring an education she could not get before. In church life and work she has advanced to marvelous power and usefulness. In associated work in benevolence she has shown great energy and wisdom. All this is very beautiful. But the new woman is not in all things so lovely as this. There are some things in her of which the better women do not approve. She discards some of the most gentle refinements of the truest type of womanhood. "She tramples on the traditions of the mother who kissed her in the cradle and made a woman of her," says Mrs. Ballington Booth. "Such a woman could never be Christlike, because she is not tender enough. Her mind is too strong to bow down to God." Let the new woman be as beautiful as she can make herself with the help of Christ, but let her be always a woman. Woman needs God to make her life what it may be, to give her the beauty and the glory which are her true heritage. Woman owes everything to Christ, who has redeemed her, and she needs Christ as her Teacher, her Master, her Friend, that she may reach the only worthy possibilities of womanhood.

They were truly mated, this goodly pair. "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." It is a beautiful thing when both husband and wife are godly. Then they can bow together in prayer and together read God's Word, and together go to the church and sit to-

gether at the Lord's table. Too often only one of the wedded pair is a Christian. Sometimes it is the husband, and the wife does not enter into his religious life. Far oftener, however, it is the wife only that loves Christ, while her husband leaves her to walk alone in all her inner spiritual life. In either case the marriage lacks one of its holiest and sacredest bonds. The union of wedded life may yield much joy and very sweet happiness where the two enter together into the holy of holies of prayer. But the union means far more when they are one in trusting God and in communing with Him in all the great hours of life. When both are Christians and walk side by side in all obedience, service, and worship, praying together, heaven's sweetest benediction rests over the home.

It is a beautiful thing, also, that we read of this good old couple, that they were "righteous before God." Some people appear to men to be righteous who before God have no such record. Our real character is what our hearts are. So we ought not to be satisfied with doing well the things that men can see us do; we ought to work and live ever for God's eye. Sometimes we say it is no matter how we do certain things, because no one will see them; but God will see them, and we should never do careless, faulty work for His eye.

The word "commandments" suggests that the holiness of these people was of a very practical

kind. Some people's religion is chiefly emotional and sentimental. They talk about loving God, but they pay little heed to the commandments. They may worship together in formal ways, but they are not careful to do the things that are right, that please God. There are too many whose religion is of this kind—all devout feelings, the observance of forms of worship, but little practical religious living. They go from fervent services to practice selfishness, greed, dishonesties, and inhumanities. God is pleased with ardent devotions, but he wants us to prove our religion by obediences, by doing the things He gives us to do, by fidelity in all duty.

Another beautiful word in the description of these good people is the word "blameless." Of course, this does not mean sinless, absolutely faultless, but only that their lives were so beautiful, so sincere, and faithful that there was nothing in them to blame or rebuke. It is in this way that God wants all His children to live. He wants them to be unrebukable. "That we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." "That ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord." "That ye may be blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish." "May your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." These are a few of the words of Holy Scripture which indicate the kind of life we are expected as Christians to live in this world.

There was one lack in this godly home. "They had no child." They were not young. They had been married many years, but no child had come to gladden them. Children are a great blessing in a family. They give much joy to their parents. They brighten the home into which they come. They cost much care and toil; but no true parent ever counts such cost, for love rejoices in making sacrifices. And the hearts of parents are made glad by the presence of a little child in their home.

The old priest was in his place in the temple that day, and his particular duty was to burn incense on the golden altar. Incense was a symbol of prayer. While the priest was offering it on the altar the people were standing without, engaged in prayer. The prayers arose to God purified and sweetened by the holy offering. It is a beautiful thought that prayers rise up to God as perfume from earth's altars, that true prayer is fragrance in heaven. Readers of Longfellow will remember his poem founded on the old Talmudic legend of Sandalphon. The legend is that the angel of prayer stands at the gate of heaven listening to the sounds that ascend from earth—

“ From the spirits of earth that adore,
From the souls that entreat and implore
 In the fervor and passion of prayer ;
From the hearts that are broken with losses,
And weary from dragging the crosses
 Too heavy for mortals to bear.

“And he gathers the prayers as he stands
And they change into flowers in his hands—
 Into garlands of purple and red ;
And beneath the great arch of the portal,
Through the streets of the City Immortal,
 Is wafted the fragrance they shed.”

This old legend does not overstate the acceptableness of prayer as it goes up to God. This symbol of incense teaches the same thing. There is another thing that we should remember, however, in this connection. The burnt offering was offered at the same time that the incense was burning, and the incense itself was kindled by fire brought from the altar of burnt offering. Prayer needs the efficacy of Christ's atonement to make it acceptable. We can pray only in Christ's name and in dependence on His sacrifice.

The vision of the angel that Zacharias saw awed him. We do not know in what form the angel appeared. He was a messenger from God, however, and had come to announce to the priest that he was to have the high honour of being the father of the forerunner of the Messiah.

Sometimes God seems to wait a long time before He gives us what we ask for. One reason is to teach us faith and patience. Another reason is because He has a time for giving us blessing. John could not be born until the date fixed in God's plan, for he was to be the forerunner of the Messiah. We always see in the end that God's time for blessing us is the right time. We may

be sure that when God puts it into our heart to pray for something He means to give us that thing in due time.

“The very prayer to thee was given,
Itself a messenger from heaven.”

The angel told Zacharias that now a son was about to be born to him, and he should have joy and gladness. It makes great joy in any true home when a child is born. In this case the joy was unusual, since the birth of John was the token of the speedy coming of the long-promised Messiah. It was like the rising of the morning star which heralds the approach of the day. Not only would the parents rejoice, but many would mingle in the rejoicing. Every child should seek to be a joy to parents, not only in its infancy, but always. Children hold in their hands the happiness of their parents. It is in their power, too, to give them great grief and sorrow. Many children do indeed break the hearts of their parents. Many do it by their bad conduct, their wrong actions. Then there are many children who make great joy for their parents. They do it by their gratitude and love, and by lives that are full of beauty and honour, of which their parents can not but be proud. All children should seek to live in this way. Then it should be the aim, too, to live so that others shall have occasion to rejoice over their birth, because they are blessings in the world.

The angel said further that John should be great in the sight of the Lord. There are people who are great in their own eyes or in the eyes of their friends, who in God's sight are very small. It is well to have people's approval of us and our work, but it is incalculably better to have God's approval. We should strive always to be and to do what Christ would have us to be and to do. It is well to ask ourselves quite often what God thinks of us. We like to please men; let us seek to please God.

Zacharias asked for a sign to prove to him that this astonishing thing should be fulfilled. His request was granted, and the sign given to him was that he should be dumb until the child was born. God wants us to believe His promises without a shadow of doubt, no matter how strange they may be. We should trust God implicitly. Unquestioning faith is not presumptuous; it honours God and brings fullest blessing.

CHAPTER II

THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Read Luke I., 57-80

It is a stupendous moment when a great man is born. The birth of few men through the centuries has meant more to the world than John the Baptist's. Jesus said of him that of all born of woman there was none greater. The beloved disciple thus describes his coming into the world: "There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John." It was a great moment in history when this man was born.

The neighbours of Elisabeth and her kinfolk came and rejoiced with her. The child was circumcised the eighth day, according to the law of the Jews. At that time his name was given to him. The friends who were present would have named him Zacharias, after his father. His mother objected, however, saying that he should be called John. The friends insisted that this was not a family name and that he ought to be named after his father. They appealed to Zacharias to decide the matter. He asked for a writing slate and wrote, "His name is John." Then his

dumb tongue was loosed and he spoke in praise to God.

The people were amazed at what had happened. Surely this was no ordinary child, they said. He would be a great man. "What, then, shall this child be?" they asked. They saw that the hand of the Lord was with him. Zacharias, too, the father, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke under the Spirit's power the words of the great hymn we are now to study. In this song he breathed the holy thoughts which had been pent up in his heart during his months of silence. This hymn is called the Benedictus.

The hymn begins with an ascription of praise to God: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel." Then it gives the reason for praise: "He hath visited . . . His people." The thought of God paying visits to people in this world is a very beautiful one. There are pleasant stories or traditions of Queen Victoria's visits to peasants' homes in her summer jaunts. But the Bible tells us of stranger things—visits of God Himself to lowly homes on earth. He visited our first parents in the garden of Eden. He visited Abraham and was entertained by him. He visited Jacob at Bethel and at Penuel. He visited Moses in Horeb and at the burning bush. He visited Joshua by the walls of Jericho. But the most wonderful visit that the Lord ever made to this earth was when Christ came and stayed here more than thirty years.

We must not think, however, that God never comes any more to visit people. Every time any of His children are in trouble He comes to help them. They do not see Him, and oftentimes do not even know that He has come, for He comes softly and invisibly. When we are in danger He comes to deliver us. He always comes on gracious and loving errands, and always brings blessing with Him. It is said here that He wrought redemption for His people. They had been long in low estate, and now He was about to visit them with deliverance. The birth of John was the harbinger of all the blessings of redemption which Jesus Christ was to bring.

So He visits us with marvelous good, though too often we refuse to receive Him or the gracious things He brings to our doors. A Scotch minister heard one day that a poor woman, one of his parishioners, was in great trouble. She could not pay her rent, and the landlord was about to seize her goods. The good pastor hurried away with money to relieve her wants. He knocked at her door, but there was no answer. He went around the little house and knocked at every door, but there was no response from within. Next day he met the woman and told her of his visit. "Why, was it you that knocked so long?" she asked, with a look of grieved shame on her face; "I thought it was the officer come to take my goods, and I had all the doors and windows barred." So God comes to visit us and bring us

relief and blessing, and ofttimes we refuse to let Him in. When God visits us it is always to do us good. We rob ourselves when we shut Him out.

The Bible from first to last is a book of redemption. The Old Testament is a long story of divine calls preparatory to the gospel which came at length through Jesus Christ. No sooner were our first parents driven out of Eden than the promise of redemption was made to them. Then all along the centuries the promise was repeated, each time becoming a little clearer and fuller. In Noah's family it was fixed in Shem's line. Later it fell in Abraham's posterity, and Isaac became the child of promise. Of Isaac's sons Jacob was the one in whom the covenant blessing inhered. In Jacob's family of twelve Judah was pointed out as the Messianic tribe. Later still in Judah the seed of David was designated as that of which the Christ should come. The Twenty-second Psalm, the fifty-third of Isaiah, and many other passages, foretell the sufferings of the Messiah. Other prophecies delineate His character and life and foretell the victories. Thus on down to Malachi the prophets all point forward to the coming of the Christ and tell of the blessings He is to bring.

We have the summing up of the work of redemption expressed in a few great phrases. One is, salvation from our enemies. The sweetest child, in the most loving home, has enemies who

are secretly plotting its destruction. There are people, too, who are enemies of our souls, though meaning us no bodily harm. There are enemies, also, that hide in our hearts—evil thoughts, feelings, tempers, dispositions, passions, and desires. We all have our enemies who hate us and seek our ruin. We need a deliverer, one who will take care of us, shelter us from the assaults of our foes, and fight our battles for us. In any moment of danger we may flee to Him for refuge. Once, when Gustavus Adolphus was marching at the head of his army, a bird was seen in the air, chased by a hawk. The little thing flew lower and lower, the hawk gaining meanwhile, and at last, as the soldiers watched it, it darted down and took refuge in the commander's bosom. So when we are pursued by any enemy we should always fly into Christ's bosom.

We are set free by Christ's redemption, and are then to serve Him, without fear, in holiness and righteousness. Salvation is not merely deliverance from enemies. That is one side of it. We are to serve Christ. He is our Lord and Master as well as our Saviour. True Christian life is obedience, service. The service is to be "without fear." We are not slaves. Our Saviour is not a hard, stern master. He loves us with infinite love, and we are to serve Him in love; not driven by fear, but impelled by affection. It is to be "in holiness and righteousness." We must be holy, keeping our hearts pure, our hands clean, our lives

unspotted from the world. Then we are to serve Him "all our days." It is not an enlistment for a time merely, but forever, when we enter into covenant with Christ.

The greatest thing we who have been redeemed can do is to tell others, who are not saved, what God has done for us—"to give knowledge of salvation unto His people in the remission of their sins." Forgiveness of sins is the heart of salvation. It is sin that has made all the trouble in this world. It is sin that separates between us and God. Had it not been for sin, there would not have been any need for Christ to die. And we never can be saved until our sins are remitted. Some people talk about salvation as if they needed only to stop their bad habits and become respectable. But there is no use to do this while our sins still remain unforgiven. The dwellers on the slopes of Vesuvius make their gardens and build their cottages, set up their homes and try to be happy, forgetting that the fires are only sleeping in the great mountain's heart, and any hour may awake and sweep away all that they have builded and gathered. That is a picture of the false peace and delusive hope of those who talk about salvation while their sins are not forgiven. They are building over slumbering fires that will surely some day burst out. Let us not rest until we get our sins forever out of the way; and there is no way of doing this but by laying them all on Jesus the

Lamb of God. If we do this in reality, by simple faith in Him, they will never trouble us again.

Everywhere in the Bible, in every picture of God, mercy shines. Mercy is the divine quality that gives hope to sinful souls. We could never find salvation in the justice of God alone, nor in His holiness, nor in His power. All hope and all grace is "because of the tender mercy of our God." There is a story of a man who dreams that he is out in an open field, in a fierce, driving storm. He is wildly seeking a refuge. He sees one gate, over which "Holiness" is written. There seems to be shelter inside, and he knocks. The door is opened by one in white garments, but none save the holy can be admitted, and he is not holy. He sees another gate, and tries that; but "Truth" is inscribed above it, and he is not fit to enter. He hastens to a third, which is the palace of "Justice"; but armed sentinels keep the door, and only the righteous can be received. At last, when he is almost in despair, he sees a light shining some distance away and hastens toward it. The door stands wide open, and beautiful angels meet him with welcomes of joy. It is the house of "Mercy," and he is taken in and finds refuge from the storm, with all the joys of love and fellowship. Not one of us can ever find a refuge at any door save the door of mercy. But here the vilest can find eternal shelter.

The coming of the knowledge of the love and

mercy of God is beautifully represented in the dawning of every day. "The dayspring from on high shall visit us." Conceive of a world without sun, moon, or stars, and we have a picture of the moral world without the divine love and mercy. "Darkness and the shadow of death"—no light to guide, to cheer, to produce joy and beauty. Then Christ comes. He comes as the dayspring. There were glimmerings of light on the horizon long before He came. The Old Testament times had their gleams of coming day. Like the day, too, this light came from above, down out of the heavens. Then, like the day, His coming changed everything into beauty. Light blesses the world in many ways. It produces all the life of earth. There would not be a bud, a flower, a leaf, but for the sun. Nor would there be any beauty, for every lovely thing in nature the sun paints. Think of Christ as light. His love brooding over us causes us to live, and nourishes in us every spiritual grace. Every beam of hope is a ray of His light. What the coming of light is to a prisoner in a darkened dungeon, is the bursting of mercy over a guilty soul. Light gives cheer; and what cheer the gospel gives to the mourner, to the poor, to the troubled! Is it not strange that any will refuse the light? If any would persist in living in a dark cave, far away from the light of the sun, with only dim candles of his own making to pour a few poor flickering gleams upon the gloom, we should consider him insane. What shall we say

of those who persist in living in the darkness of sin, with no light but the candles of earth's false hopes to shine upon their souls? There are many such, too. They turn to every "will-o'-the-wisp" that flashes a little beam, anywhere, rather than to Christ. It is like preferring a tallow candle to the sun.

The ultimate mission of light is to show us the way through the world of darkness and "to guide our feet into the way of peace." This is a most beautiful description of what Christ wants to do for us. He first prepared the way of peace. All this world's paths are full of trouble and lead to despair, but Christ built a high-way beautiful and safe, which leads to eternal blessedness. It was a most costly road-making; He Himself dies in preparing the way for our feet. Now He comes to us and wants to be our guide and lead us into this way of peace. We never can find our own way, and if we thrust away this blessed guidance we must go on in darkness forever. The Christian's way is indeed a "way of peace." It gives peace with God, peace in our own heart because sin is forgiven, and then we have peace amid all this world's trials. Some people think a Christian life is hard and unpleasant. But really it is the way of sweetest peace. The only truly, deeply, and permanently happy people are those whose sins are forgiven and who are going with Christ through this world, home.

CHAPTER III

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Read Luke II., 1-20

NOT much is told in profane history about the period in which the event of the birth of Jesus belongs. It is said, however, that there are distinct traces that such a census as Luke describes took place. The great emperor commanded that an enrollment of all the world should be made. The emperor did not know, when he issued this decree, that long before he was born there had gone forth another decree from a more glorious King, which unwittingly he was now helping to execute. It had been written by the prophet under divine inspiration that the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem. But Joseph and Mary were living at Nazareth, a long distance from Bethlehem. How should they be brought to Bethlehem so as to fulfill the prophecy? They had no errand there. Now comes the emperor's decree which requires them to appear in the town of David to be enrolled.

The birth of this King did not have about it the glamour which usually marks the birth of

earthly royalty. He was born in a stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes, after the fashion of the children of poverty, and slept His first sleep in a manger. It is pleasant for us to think that our Saviour knows all the phases of human life by experience. He looks upon the baby in the mother's arms with a peculiar interest, for He Himself was once a baby. Many children are born in poverty, and sometimes they think their lot is hard, that they have not a fair chance in this world. But here is Jesus, the Son of God, beginning His life in poverty, and therefore He can sympathize with them.

The shepherds out in the fields were specially favoured that night. While they were keeping watch over their flock, an angel stood by them and a divine splendour shone about them. Their occupation was lowly, but they were faithful in it, and thus honour came to them. If we would have angels visit us we must stay at our post of duty, no matter how lowly it is. Angels never come to people who are ashamed of their calling or too indolent to be diligent at their proper tasks. The shepherds did not seem to have an easy way of living. They were poor, and had to stay out of doors all night, guarding their sheep. The people in the fine houses, no doubt, if they thought at all of these poor men, thought they had a hard time of it, and pitied them because of their poverty and hardship. The shepherds themselves, it may be, envied the people who lived in the big

houses and did not have to work and stay out nights. At least some people in these days whose lot is in the lowly places are envious of those who are rich. But we may be sure that the Bethlehem shepherds were never sorry afterwards that they had to be out in the field that night. Think what they would have missed if, because of discontent or of self-indulgence, any of them had stayed away from their post. They would not have seen the angels, nor would they have heard the good tidings that came, nor have looked upon the wonderful Child in the manger. We need to watch lest sometimes we miss blessings by being absent from our place of duty. Then sometimes the place of blessing may not be in a prayer meeting, but in a field or in a shop or at home, doing some lowly taskwork. We do not know where the place of honour and privilege in this world may be. We may be sure, however, that it will always be in the place of duty.

The message the angel brought was a glad one. "I bring you good tidings of great joy." Never before had such tidings come to this world. Wherever the gospel now goes it bears the good news. To the soul struggling with temptation it whispers the assurance of victory. To those crushed in defeat it speaks of hope, saying, "You may rise again, and yet attain a beautiful and noble life." To those who are sitting in sorrow it brings comfort, telling of the compassion of God.

The good tidings was indeed wonderful. "There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." This was the announcement of the most marvelous fact in all the world's history. It was not an unusual thing for a baby to be born—thousands of infants were born that same night throughout the world. It was not a strange thing that the baby was born in a stable—in the East such occurrence was not unusual. The wonderful thing was that this child was the Son of God. He was the anointed Messiah—He was divine. That the glorious God should thus enter human life as a little child was the marvelous thing.

The angel told the shepherds how they would know the Child when they found Him. "Ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger." They would not find the Baby robed in purple garments, like the child of a prince, but wrapped in swaddling clothes, a child of poverty. They would not find Him sleeping in a palace, but in a stable. Thus the very authentications of the divine character and mission of this Child were the tokens of poverty and humiliation. We see what empty things are the world's marks of greatness. When Christ came He disregarded all the emblems of rank by which men indicate greatness, and wore the insignia of poverty and humiliation. Yet, was He less great because He bore not the world's stamp of greatness? Greatness is in the character, never in the dress or the

circumstances. No matter about wearing a crown—make sure that you are worthy of a crown. This mark of the infant Messiah shows us also how Christ touched the lowliest places of life, began among the poorest and plainest of the people. He went down and started at the foot of the ladder, that He might understand our life and know how to help us in the best way.

Earth paid small heed to the advent of the glorious King, but heaven failed not to honour Him even in His humiliation. His birth made no stir in the world's high places, but heaven's angels came and sang their songs of praise. These holy messengers were intensely interested in the great work of redemption on which the Messiah was then entering. We are told that the angels "desire to look into" the strange mystery of redeeming love. We know that there is joy in the presence of the angels when one sinner is saved. We are told further that the angels are as "ministering spirits, sent forth to do service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation." The glimpses we have in the Bible of angels at their everyday work show them always busy in services on behalf of God's children. This ministry has not ceased. Angels' visits are not "rare," as we sometimes say.

The coming of Christ brought peace—"On earth peace." Peace is one of the great words in the Bible. The coming of Christ to this world to live and suffer and die for our redemption

was one of God's thoughts of peace toward us, the most wonderful of them all. It shows how much God loves us, that He is willing to do and to sacrifice in order to make peace for us. Christ made peace for us first by bearing our sins, putting them away, that we might come to God and find forgiveness. Then from the cross went forth the proclamation, offering peace to all who would accept it. St. Paul says, "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

If we study the conduct of the shepherds we shall find an illustration of very simple faith. They said one to another, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing." They did not propose to go to see if what the angel had told them was true, but to see the thing which the angel told them they should see. They were so sure that they would find the Babe in the manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes, that they at once went into the town to begin their search. It would be well for us if we had faith as simple, expecting always to find just what God tells us we shall find.

We might suppose, after seeing all that the shepherds saw that night—the vision of the angels and the infant Messiah—they would be too full of ecstasy to think of returning to their own lowly taskwork at once, at least. We would have been disposed to excuse them if they had not returned to their sheep. Even Peter was once so enrap-

tered with the splendour of the Transfiguration that he begged to be allowed to stay there, beholding the wondrous vision of the mountain. At that very moment, however, human sorrow was waiting at the mountain's foot for the Master's coming, and the rapture of communion must be exchanged for the commonplace of duty. The highest, holiest place for us is always the place of duty. Where their task waited for them these shepherds must go.

There is a legend of a monk at his devotions, to whom was granted a blessed vision of the Christ. The convent bell rang while he bowed before the vision. It was the hour when the blind, the halt, the lame, and all the beggars of the parish came to receive their dole, and this monk on his knees before the vision was almoner that day. Should he go? or should he stay? Then the vision said:

"Do thy duty, that is best ;
Leave unto thy Lord the rest."

Instantly he arose, hastened away, did his work among the poor, then came again, and found the vision waiting where he had left it. Then a voice said, "Hadst thou stayed, I must have fled." The joy of communion with God must never detain us from life's common taskwork. We can not keep the rapture of devotion if we neglect the routine of lowly service. Worship was meant to fit us for better work, not to make us less ready for our lowly tasks.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE

Read Luke II., 22-39

THE first Jewish rite which was observed in the case of a child was circumcision. Jesus was circumcised. The time was when He was eight days old. At that time, also, He received His name, Jesus, as the angel had directed. The next religious observance was His presentation in the temple. This was forty days after His birth. An offering was required in connection with this ceremony. The usual offering was a lamb; but when the mother was too poor to give this she might bring a pigeon or a dove. This was what Mary gave, showing the poverty of her family.

It was while the child was in the temple that this beautiful incident of Simeon occurred. "This man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Spirit was upon him." Old age is not always beautiful. Sometimes the old seem to outstay their usefulness in this world. Sometimes they lose their sweetness of disposition and grow fretful, sour,

and discontented. Christian old age should be beautiful to the very close. It should be useful, peaceful, rich in experience, wise in counsel, patient and loving, the harvest of the life, full of ripe, mellow fruit. Simeon is an illustration of such an old age. There are four things said about him here. First he was a righteous man. This means that he was honest and upright in all his dealings with others. Everybody trusted Simeon, or everybody knew that he was good and faithful. If he was a carpenter, he did honest work and charged only honest prices. If he was a merchant, his customers were sure always of getting the kind of goods he represented them to be, and of getting full measure and full weight at honest prices. The times were corrupt and many men were dishonest and there was a great deal of sharp dealing, but Simeon never swerved from the strictest righteousness in his dealings with men.

Second, he was devout. He was not merely a moralist. There are some people who boast of their scrupulous honesty and uprightness, while they never bend a knee to God, never speak a word to Him in prayer, never acknowledge Him as their Lord, never think of pleasing Him. Simeon was not that kind of man. He was a righteous man, because he was a God-fearing man.

Third, he looked for Christ. He believed that the Messiah was to come because God had so

promised. He did not neglect his duties, however, in watching for the Messiah, but continued diligent and faithful all the while. We need to learn this lesson. Expectation sometimes draws us away from our duty. When Christ comes He wants to find us watching, in the sense of being ready to welcome Him, but He does not want to find us idly gazing into heaven, looking for Him.

A fourth thing about Simeon was that the Holy Spirit was on him. That is the secret of all true spiritual life. The truly beautiful character is one that is built up by the Holy Spirit. Tennyson was asked what Jesus Christ was to him. It was in a garden, and, pointing to a lovely rosebush, the poet replied, "What the sun is to that bush, Jesus Christ is to my soul." Such is Christ to every believing life. His Spirit enters into the heart and gives it whatever beauty it acquires.

"It had been revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ." So he had a great hope in his heart all along his years. He had had many years to wait—we are not told how many—but he believed in God and was sure he would live till he had seen the Christ. It will be a sad thing for any of us if we die before we have seen Christ. We may have seen many great men in our days, but if we have not seen Christ we are not ready to die in peace. We may have traveled over the world, looking upon

the wonderful things of nature and beholding great works of art; yet, if we have not looked upon Christ we are not prepared for death. But when we have seen Him we are ready to depart, for condemnation is gone from our souls, our admission to heaven is sure, and we have divine companionship for the valley of shadows.

“The parents brought in the child Jesus.” It was a beautiful custom among the Jews, this, of bringing their babies to the temple to give them to God. That is what Christian parents do when they dedicate their children to God. They say their little ones belong to God, and therefore they consecrate them to Him, so that as long as they live they shall belong to Him. When children have been given to God, parents should always remember that they really belong to God and should bring them up as God’s own. They should teach them that they are God’s and that they ought to live for God and do His will.

When a young woman was about to go as a foreign missionary, some one asked her mother if it was not hard to have her go. The mother replied: “When she was a little child I gave her to God. I did not know till now what God wanted her for, but surely I have no right to complain of any use He may choose to make of her life.”

“He received Him into his arms.” The picture is very beautiful—this old man receiving into his arms from the mother the infant Messiah. Jesus had not yet wrought any miracle to mani-

fest His Deity. He had not yet spoken a single word of wisdom. He was but a helpless infant, six weeks old, held in the mother's arms. Artists, it is true, paint a circle of brightness round the head of the Child Jesus in their pictures, or show a soft light streaming from Him; but there was no such brightness about Him in reality. He was not different from other children in His infancy, and there was nothing remarkable about His appearance. Yet the Lord had told this old man that this Child was to be the Messiah, and he believed it without any proofs. It was a beautiful faith. We see much more in Jesus than Simeon saw. We see all His beautiful, spotless, gentle, pure life. We see His wonderful works, manifesting Deity. We hear His marvelous words of wisdom. We behold Him on the cross. We come after His resurrection and look into His empty grave. We follow Him with our eyes as He ascends into heaven. We see the evidences of His power in the world since He ascended. If Simeon believed when he saw the Christ as a helpless babe, how much more reason have we to believe! Surely we, too, should receive Christ into our arms, opening our whole heart to Him.

“Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart . . . in peace: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.” No one is ready to depart in peace until he has seen God's salvation. But when we have taken Christ into our heart we are prepared for whatever may come. The penitent thief on the cross

had time for only one look at Christ, but one look was enough; he was ready then to enter paradise with his Lord. A young man, who died recently, had not accepted Christ until in his last sickness. There was a picture in his room—some representation of Christian peace. The young man said, "There is something in that picture which I do not understand, of which I have no experience." His friends sought to explain to him the Christian's secret of peace, and before the end came he understood it and could say, "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart . . . in peace; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." When our heart has seen Christ, nothing has dread or terror for us.

Simeon's words to Mary suggested the importance of Jesus in the world. "This Child is set for the falling and the rising of many." Every one to whom Christ is offered is affected by Him in some way, and carries away some mark on his life from having touched Christ. A stone in one's path may serve as a step to lift one's feet upward, or one may stumble over it and be hurt, bruised, broken, by it. If we accept Christ as our Saviour and Lord, He will lift us up to noble, blessed, eternal life. He said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself." There is in Christ a wondrous lifting power. He took His apostles from their lowly life and exalted them to earthly honour and immortality and to heavenly blessedness and glory. So it is with

all who accept Christ. But those who reject Him are like men who stumble over the stone which is meant to lift them upward. To those who believe on Christ He is the savour of life unto life. To those who do not believe on Him He becomes the savour of death unto death. Christ is before each one of us. Whether He is set for our falling or rising depends upon what we do with Him.

“A sword shall pierce through thine own soul.” The Bodenhausen “Madonna” shows the mother and Child, and then away in the distance, in very dim outline, the forms of three crosses. The suggestion is that even when the mother of Jesus clasped her Child in her arms she had some intimation of the end to which He would come. These words of Simeon to the mother are proof enough that this was the truth. The shadow of the cross fell across the young mother, with the Babe in her arms. “A sword shall pierce through thine own soul.” We know, too, how soon this word began to come true. It was but a little time till the mother had to flee to Egypt with her Child to save Him from the sword of Herod.

There is another picture which represents the same truth, though at a later period. The Boy Jesus is represented at the age of thirteen in the carpenter shop, and as He stretches out His arms at the close of the day, the western sun casts His shadow in the form of a cross, on which the mother looks with pained face as prophetic of His end. Many times also in the years of His public min-

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istry the mother's heart must have been pierced when the sword of human hate struck at Jesus. Then, when she stood below His cross there came the worst of all the thrustings here foreshadowed. Whenever a child suffers in any way, the mother's heart is pierced.

CHAPTER V

THE WISE-MEN LED BY THE STAR

Read Matthew II

MATTHEW does not tell us much of the infancy of Jesus. There is something very beautiful, however, in the little we have in this first Gospel. It gives us a glimpse of the way the world, outside of His own country, received Him. There was no room for Him in the inn, and He was born in a stable; but Matthew shows the far East waiting for Him and honouring Him. A little later, too, it shows Egypt sheltering Him. Jerusalem was the place where naturally the Messiah should have been first and most highly honoured, but Jerusalem heard of the great event of His coming from the East.

The coming of the Wise-men to the cradle of Jesus is an intensely interesting incident. The time was probably soon after the presentation in the temple. Paintings often represent the Wise-men and the shepherds together in the cave-stable, adoring the Christ-child. As the flight into Egypt came immediately after the visit of the Wise-men, and the Holy Child was probably kept for many

months away from the country, it is evident that their appearance was not at the beginning of the life of Jesus, and that they could not have been present with the shepherds.

Who the Wise-men were we do not certainly know. The historian speaks of the Magi as a priestly caste of the Medes. They were known as interpreters of dreams. They were also reputed to be observers of the heavens, students of the secret things of nature. Whatever the place of these Magi or Wise-men was, they were highly honoured of God in this reception of Jesus Christ.

The birth of Jesus took place at Bethlehem. This was the most wonderful event of human history—the coming of the Son of God in human flesh into the 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 fact 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.”

The Wise-men came many hundreds of miles to find the newborn King. The journey was long, difficult, perilous, and very costly. If these men endured so much toil and danger in seeking Jesus,

we should count no obstacle too great to overcome in our quest of Him. We should be ready to go thousands of miles, if need be, in seeking for Him. No search for Christ, however costly, will be without avail. He is the pearl of great price, and we shall be well paid for our search, though it cost us the sacrifice of all other things, and though we even have to lay down our life to find Him.

This greatest event of history made little stir in the world. A few humble shepherds came to look with wonder on the newborn Babe that lay in the young mother's arms—but that was all. The Jews had been looking for their Messiah, but did not recognize Him when He came. Their books foretold His coming; but when He came, it was not known by His people that He had appeared. 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 without observation. 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 shining in their faces, go daily about their work for their Master. For another thing, we do not always know when Christ actually comes to us. He had been born many months, had been welcomed by angels, had been presented in the temple and received with joy there; but Jerusalem had not

known that He was there. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, but the world knew Him not. We speak severely of the treatment accorded to Him by His own people, who were so indifferent to the coming of their Messiah. Yet, why should we complain so of the Jews? Our King is in our midst these very days—do we recognize Him?

We can not understand just how the Wise-men were led to Palestine. They said they saw a star in the east, the star of the newborn King, and were led by it. There has been a great deal of speculation as to the nature of the star, whether it was a natural or supernatural appearance. But no matter—whatever it was, it led these men unmistakably to the feet of the 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 become brighter and we shall see more and more of Him, see Him more and more clearly, 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. Their hands are stained with

crime. When this Herod, Herod the Great, heard the inquiries of the Wise-men he was much troubled. He thought that he was king of the Jews, and it terrified him to hear of another King of the Jews, whom these strangers from the East had come so far to see. 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. His name makes bad men think of their sins and then of the judgment. It is only when we love 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. There is nothing to fear, but everything to give joy and confidence to those whose trust is in Him.

Herod, himself unable to answer the question of the Wise-men, turned to the scribes. The Wise-men wanted to know where they could find the King who had been born in Judæa. "We have seen His star," they said. Whatever it was that led them, we know that there was no illusion, and they were not deceived. They had been led, and they had come to the right place.

Herod could not answer their question, but he could easily learn what the Jewish books said about where the Christ should be born, so he called the priests and scribes and asked them where their Messiah should be born. It did not

take them long to give the answer. They knew their Bible well. They could even give chapter and verse, and could tell the 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 had made any use of their knowledge. They could tell the Wise-men where the Christ was to be born, but they had not themselves taken one step toward Bethlehem to seek for Him, nor did they become eager to see their King, when they were so close to Him. We must be careful not to repeat the mistake of these ancient teachers. Most of us know our Bible fairly well, and can tell others glibly enough where and how to find the Christ. But have we 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 were very glad. They saw now the Child-king they had journeyed so far to find. They did not doubt for a moment that this was the object of their quest. When they saw Him they fell down and worshiped Him. They saw only a 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 worshiped Him. Think how much more we know

about the Christ than they did. We see Him in all the glory of His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. We see Him sitting at the right hand of God as King of kings, wearing many crowns. 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 the 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 for us to sing praise to Christ and give Him an homage that costs nothing. He asks for our gifts the offerings of our love, our service, the consecration of our lives. We need to guard against the worship that is only mere sentiment. Love that will not give and sacrifice is not deep or true. Giving is the test of loving—the measure of our love is what we are willing to give and sacrifice. Some people sing missionary hymns with great zest, and when the collection plate is passed they have nothing for it. The Wise-men not only gave gifts, but gifts that were rich and costly. Some people give, but with such pitiful niggardliness that it must pain the Master to receive their offerings. These Magi gave with gladness.

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. Then we may give to Christ also in ministering to His needy ones. The latter part of the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew reveals to us this wonderful truth, that those who serve the needy, the suffering, the troubled, in Christ's name, are serving Him.

CHAPTER VI

THE BOY JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

Read Luke II., 40-52

AFTER the presentation in the temple came the incident of the visit of the Magi, recorded only in the Gospel according to Matthew, followed by the massacre of the children and the flight into Egypt. When Mary and Joseph and the Holy Child returned from Egypt they went to Nazareth, where they remained till Jesus was thirty years of age. Of these years we have no record, excepting this single incident of the visit to Jerusalem. The life at Nazareth was quiet and uneventful. Each year Mary and Joseph went to the Passover, but until He was twelve Jesus did not leave His home.

It brings Jesus very near to children to have them remember that once He was a child, and now in heaven has not forgotten the experiences of His earthly infancy and childhood years. He was a schoolboy and no doubt found His lessons hard sometimes. His family was poor, and He had not the luxuries which many boys enjoy in these days. He had not the opportunities that we have. There were no books, magazines, or news-

papers. He heard the Scriptures read every Sabbath in the synagogue, and in His home He was taught the words of God. When thirteen years of age He began to learn the carpenter's trade, and from that time until His baptism we can think of Him as working in the carpenter shop every day. It is a comfort now to those who have to work hard to remember that Jesus wrought at a common trade, no doubt with long hours and small pay.

The words that describe the growth of the boy Jesus show us that there was nothing remarkable or unusual in His life at that time, so far as people saw. There was nothing precocious about His childhood. Artists put halos about His face in their pictures, but there was no halo there as He lay in His mother's arms. When the shepherds came to seek for the newborn Baby they recognized Him not by any marks of divinity; but by His being wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger. In His infancy He was as helpless as any other infant. There were months before He could talk, and when He began to speak it was only with a baby's prattling at first, as His mother taught Him. His lessons did not come to Him without study—He had to work hard to learn them.

The nearer we keep to the way of nature in trying to think of the beautiful infancy of Jesus, the better shall we realize the truth about it. The things that happen to boys in our days, happened

to Him. An artist painted a picture of Jesus in the home at Nazareth as a little boy in a carpenter shop. He has cut His finger and comes to His mother to have it tied up. No doubt the picture was true of Him more than once. The chief difference between the boy Jesus and other boys was that he always did what he was told to do, was never rude, insolent, or sullen, but had ever a sweet, smiling, shining face, always keeping love in His heart.

Luke tells us that He grew and waxed strong, filled with wisdom; and that the grace of God was upon Him. Most children grow well enough in body, but Jesus grew correspondingly in wisdom. In this respect every child should be like Him. It is a shame to grow up in ignorance. Boys and girls should study their lessons thoroughly, taking every opportunity to acquire wisdom by observation, by reading, and by thought. An oriental proverb says, "Spread wide thy skirts when heaven is raining gold." Heaven is indeed raining gold in the school days of children who have the opportunities which most children in Christian countries have. It is said further that the grace of God—that is, the divine favour and blessing—was upon Jesus. God loves children and is willing always to give them His grace. "Heaven lies about us in our infancy," says the poet.

The account of the first Passover of Jesus is very beautiful. He was twelve years of age. Mary and Joseph had gone to the feast every year,

but until now Jesus had remained at home. His going this year was a great event in His life. The incident has been beautifully described as "the solitary floweret out of the wonderful enclosed garden of the thirty years."

The incident of the losing of Jesus by His mother is very interesting. We can readily understand how she did not miss Him until the evening came, thinking that He was somewhere in the caravan. People often lose Christ. Sometimes, like Mary, they do not know that they have lost Him until they have gone quite a distance on their way. There are homes where Christ was once the guest, but in which He no longer abides. He did not leave the home—He was grieved and driven out of it either by indifference, by unbelief, or by sin. There are persons who once walked in close intimacy and friendship with Christ, but who now have him no more with them. They have lost him on the way—perhaps through business cares or household anxieties, or through worldly pleasures. In whatever way Christ may have been lost out of our lives, we should not rest until we have found Him again.

At last the mother found Jesus in the temple, in the midst of the teachers. He was deeply absorbed in what these men were saying to Him, listening to their words and eagerly asking them questions. There was nothing unnatural in this talking of the Child with the rabbis. A room in the temple was set apart as a kind of open free school. There

the learned teachers sat and taught those who desired instruction. The older students would sit on low benches, and the younger ones on the ground. The teaching was simple and informal. The pupil would ask questions and the teacher would try to answer them. It was in one of these temple schools that the child Jesus was found that day. A new world was opening to Him. Perhaps He was learning about the Messianic promises and hopes of His people. The lesson for young people is that they, too, should be deeply interested in the Bible, eager to learn all they can in every way of its truths.

The mother of Jesus chided Him with His having wandered away from her. "Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? behold, Thy father and I sought Thee sorrowing." His answer was very simple, and yet it showed that He was passing into a new phase of His life. "How is it that ye sought Me? knew ye not that I must be in My Father's house?" Our Common Version puts it the "Father's business," and this is very beautiful, too. He was now beginning to recognize His relation to the Heavenly Father and His higher obligation to obey Him. The Revised Version, however, renders it "My Father's house." They need not have wondered where He was. Did they not know that He would certainly be in the Father's house? It is a good thing when a young person's heart draws him to places of instruction or of worship, to where he finds uplifting, helpful

companionship. We grow like the things we love. If we love pure things, we will grow pure. If we love heavenly things, we will grow heavenly-minded. If we love the Bible, its words will sink into our hearts and permeate all our life, transforming it. If we love the Father's house in this world, we will be prepared for the Father's house in the other world.

Joseph and Mary did not understand the Child that God had given them to train. With all His beauty and simplicity of character, something appeared in Him now which amazed them. Neither could they understand His words. It was so all through His life—His friends did not understand Him. They were bewildered as they saw His life and listened to His words. They thought His dying was defeat and failure, and all their hopes of the Messiahship perished that day at the cross. Not until He rose did they begin to understand the meaning and mystery of His death. Even now Christ's friends oftentimes fail to understand Him. They can not see how the trials, the disappointments, the sorrows of their lives can have divine love in them. Some day they will know.

We have here a beautiful glimpse of the home-life of Jesus from His twelfth year until His thirtieth. He turned quietly away from the temple and went back to Nazareth with Joseph and His mother, and there took and kept the place of a child, obeying His parents and proving in all ways dutiful, reverent, and helpful. He

found childhood in a lowly home a place large enough for the exercise of His blessed life. Browning, in one of his poems, represents Gabriel taking the place of a poor boy and working for him at his lowly trade as contentedly as if he had been engaged in the highest service of heaven. But here is something sublimer than even the poet's fancy: the Son of God Himself working for eighteen years as a carpenter, patiently, sweetly, simply, and without discontent.

Should any true-hearted child, however great his gifts, consider the child-place in the home unworthy, or a place too lowly, or too small for use of his gifts? Canon Farrar says: "A life spent in brushing clothes and washing crockery and sweeping floors—a life which the proud of the earth would have treated as dust under their feet—a life spent at the clerk's desk, a life spent in the narrow shop, a life spent in the labourer's hut, may yet be so ennobled by God's loving mercy that for the sake of it a king might gladly yield his crown."

CHAPTER VII

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Read Mark I., 1-8; Luke III., 1-20

MARK'S Gospel opens with the title of the book, "The beginning of the Gospel." It was not a very promising beginning from an earthly point of view. As we look at the gospel now, it is a great river, whose streams run through all Christian lands and into many portions of heathendom. For centuries men sought in vain for the source of the Nile, at last finding it in the heart of Africa. If we trace back the streams of the gospel to their source, where will our quest lead us? Back to the heart of God we must go, if we would find the real beginning. It began in the love of God. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." The gospel was, first of all, a thought in the Father's heart, a stirring of the divine compassion. Then it grew into a purpose. All great achievements are first thoughts, then purposes, before they become acts. The gospel was first a feeling of love and pity in the divine breast. This was away back in eternity. Far

back in the story of creation, when there was only chaos, we are told that the Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the waters. The words indicate that even then God was thinking of His children yet to be, as He was planning and preparing for their good. His love had no beginning.

John the Baptist was a great character. He had been foretold and his work described by the ancient prophets. Evidently John's life was "a plan of God." He was thought about and his mission mapped out long before he was born. He came as God's messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah. He is spoken of as "a man sent from God." Every man is a man sent from God. Many forget that God has anything to do with their lives, that He thought of them before they came, or that He had any purpose in making them and sending them into the world. But we do not drift into this world in any accidental way. God thought about us before we were born, then made us, and sent us to do what He had planned for us to do. If only we realized this truth, it would give a new meaning to our life and a new glory to our work.

God's plan for every one is noble and beautiful. He never made any one to live a marred and stained life. He never sent any man into this world to be a curse, to hurt other lives, to poison the springs from which people drink, or to scatter ruin and devastation. He made every one for a beautiful character and a worthy career.

But it is possible for us to spoil God's plan for our own lives. We can carry out the divine purpose for us only by doing God's will day by day as it comes to us.

John was a very humble man. He shrank from human praise and commendation. When they asked him if he were the Messiah, he said he was only "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." He did not care to have his name blazoned. All he wished to be was a voice proclaiming the divine message. The message was:

**"Make ye ready the way of the Lord,
Make His paths straight."**

There is a picture which shows a hand holding up a cross. The person is not seen—only the hand. It is good to be a hand that holds up the cross. It is good to be a voice that proclaims the Christ. We would all do well to keep ourselves out of sight and get people to look upon Christ. Too many of us want people to see us, and so project our own personality that we hide the vision of the Christ that we ought to exalt and honour. We want people to see us, to hear and admire what we say, to love us and honour us. But what can we do for them? What can the teacher do for her scholars in their sinfulness and need? What can the preacher do for those who are in penitence and sorrow? We would better hide ourselves away and get people to see Christ. It is enough for us to seek to be only a voice, speaking

out clearly to tell men of Christ, while we ourselves remain unseen and unknown. It is enough for us to speak our word or sing our song and pass out of sight, while the word we speak and the song we sing live to bless the world.

The mission of John is described in the words which "the voice" proclaimed: "Make ye ready the way of the Lord." Christ wants a way to be made for Him. He wants a way into people's hearts, our own hearts, first of all. Is the guest-chamber ready? He wants to walk with us; but He will accompany us only on paths of holiness and righteousness, in the way of obedience. He will never go with us in any crooked way. If we expect His company with us, we must see that the paths are straight. Enoch walked with God, because He walked in the same way in which God walked. Then Christ wants us to make ready the way for Him to other hearts and lives. If we can open a door for Christ into people's lives, we have brought them heaven's best blessing.

One great word summed up the substance of the Baptist's preaching. He preached repentance. Our first duty is repentance. We can not take one step after Christ until we give up our sins. It is serious business, too. Repentance is not merely a little twinge of remorse after some wrong thing done. It is not simply a gush of tears at the thought of a wicked deed. It is not just a blush of shame at being found out in some evil thing. It is a great deal deeper experience

than any of these. It is something radical and revolutionary. Sins wept over must be abandoned. Repentance is a change of heart, a turning of the face the other way. It is well to make diligent quest to know whether we have really ceased doing the wrong thing that we deplore, whether we have actually quit the evil course that we regret, whether we have really turned away from the sin that we have confessed. A faith that does not lead to instant, genuine, and thorough repentance is not the faith that saves. He who bewails a sin and confesses it, secretly intending to return to it again, need not think that he is forgiven.

John taught that those who repented must be baptized; but he made it very clear that his baptism did not cleanse the heart, and that those who were baptized with water must be baptized also with the Holy Spirit. Water is a fitting emblem. It implies that there are stains which need to be cleansed. Yet we know well that water can not wash off sin's stains. The spot that sin leaves on the little white hand can not be removed by any amount of washing. All the water of the ocean would not make it white. Only the Holy Spirit has power to remove sin's stains. If we truly accept Christ as our Saviour He will wash us in the water of regeneration. We ought to be baptized with water—the Master instituted this ordinance and sacrament—but we need also to submit to the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

John's tribute to Jesus as he announced His coming was very beautiful. He said that he himself was not worthy to perform this meanest of all ministries for the Messiah. As we read these words and think of John's spirit of humility, we must not forget that one night, at the ending of His life, Jesus Himself took water in a basin, and a towel, and washed and wiped the feet of His own disciples. Thus He himself condescended to the place and the task of the lowliest servant. Surely this should rebuke our pride, when we stop to ask whether we are required to perform this or that lowly service for some little one of His.

John's words to those who came to be baptized were searching. We like to say pleasant things to people, sometimes complimentary things. John had little time for flowers or compliments. He told the people frankly that they were terribly wrong and must get right if they would be saved. We talk to people about their splendid ancestry and about the advantages of heredity; John told his hearers that their fine ancestry would amount to nothing unless their own lives were right. Personal character was the test, he said.

It was solemn warning he gave in the picture of the ax lying at the root of the tree. An ax meant judgment. The business of an ax is to cut down. The doom of sin was clearly told. But the ax was not active. It was lying quietly beside

the tree. There was mercy in the delay. Judgment was waiting that the people might have time to repent. God is patient. He does not wish to destroy. He wishes men to repent and be saved. He is slow to wrath. He waits to be gracious.

It is encouraging to see how the people seem to have been affected by John's stern preaching. "What then must we do?" they asked. They seem to have confessed their sinfulness and to have desired to turn from their evil ways. This should always be the attitude of those who hear voices of warning and calls to repentance. John's answer to the questions of penitence were plain and simple. The man who had two coats should give one of them to the man beside him who had none. This is the great lesson of love which Jesus taught so often. The publicans who were proverbially unjust, extorting from the people more as taxes than they ought to collect, were touched by the preacher's stern words and asked what they should do. "Just begin to be just," he answered. "Extort no more than that which is appointed you."

These words of John's impress the truth that God wants nothing unreasonable. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION OF JESUS

Read Mark I., 9-13; Matthew IV., 1-11

FOR thirty years the beautiful life of Jesus had gone on in Nazareth. He differed not from the other children with whom He played and attended school, save in the stainlessness and sinlessness of His life. He grew up among plain people. The village where He lived was small, and every one knew all His neighbours. Jesus was a carpenter, as Joseph had been. We may be sure that His work in the shop was always well done. He never did it carelessly. A man's religion is shown in the way he does the tasks of his trade or business or other occupation, quite as unmistakably as in his church attendance, his devotions, and his Sunday duties. Jesus did His carpentering conscientiously, honestly, skillfully. He put in good lumber. He was prompt and did not break His promises nor fail to finish His work at the time He said He would.

But one day He went away from His shop for the last time, closed it up, and left Nazareth. He had a call to higher and larger work. The

time had come for Him to take up His mission as the Messiah. We are not told how this call came to Him, or anything of the spirit in which He answered it. But no doubt He knew what the call meant, and went eagerly to take up its tasks. Miss S. Alice Ranlett, in a little poem, "The Carpenter," published in *Forward* in 1897, has put in striking way her conception of the feelings of the Master the morning He left His shop:

"That evening when the Carpenter swept out
 The fragrant shavings from the workshop floor,
 And placed the tools in order and shut to
 And barred for the last time the humble door,
 And, going on His way to save the world,
 Turned from the laborer's lot for evermore,
 I wonder, was He glad?"

"That evening when the Carpenter walked forth
 From Joseph's cottage, in the glimmering light,
 And bade His holy mother long farewell;
 And through the skies of dawn, all pearly bright,
 Saw glooming the dark shadow of a cross,
 Yet, seeing, set His feet toward Calvary's height,
 I wonder, was he sad?"

"Ah! when the Carpenter went on His way,
 He thought not for Himself of good or ill.
 His path was one through shop or thronging men
 Craving His help, e'en to the cross-crowned hill,
 In toiling, healing, loving, suffering—all
 His joy and His life to do the Father's will,
 And earth and heaven are glad!"

It seems strange to us that Jesus should need to be baptized. The use of water implied symbolically that the person baptized was sinful and needed cleansing; but Jesus was without sin. John recognized the apparent unfitness of performing the rite upon Him which he was performing upon those who came confessing sin and repenting of it. John would have hindered Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" Yet Jesus bade John to perform the rite on Him: "Suffer it now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." So John baptized Him.

When we ask the reason for this insisting of Jesus that John should baptize Him, several answers suggest themselves. Jesus' baptism was the consecration of Himself to His Messianic mission. He had come all the way from Nazareth to the Jordan expressly to make this consecration. Shall we then say that there is no necessity for public confession, for declaring ourselves on Christ's side and taking our place among His people? The baptism of Jesus was His public confession. He accepted the divine call and before all the world declared His acceptance of the mission to be the world's Redeemer. We are called to follow Christ, and we should not hesitate to obey the call.

Another meaning of Christ's baptism was that He was now taking His place as one with us, to be our Redeemer. He had no sin of His own,

and yet He stood there that day in the place of sinners. His baptism with water was the shadow of that other baptism into which He entered as our Saviour. Then His baptism was His consecration to His public ministry. From the bank of the Jordan He saw through to the end. The shadow of the cross fell on the flowing water, fell also across the gentle and holy soul of Jesus as He stood there. Baptism for us implies also the consecration and devotement of our lives to God, whatever that consecration may include.

The divine manifestations which attended the baptism of Jesus were wonderful. "He saw the heavens rent asunder, and the Spirit as a dove descending upon Him: and a voice came out of the heavens, Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased." The descending of the Spirit upon Him was the anointing of Jesus for His Messiahship. Then the Voice from heaven clearly declared His Messiahship. The Father testified that this was His beloved Son, in whom all the promises of grace were given. Jesus thus entered upon His mission as the Messiah, to be the world's Redeemer.

At once Jesus disappeared from the Jordan. "Straightway the Spirit driveth Him forth into the wilderness." There seems to have been haste—the word "straightway" indicates this. His going from the Jordan into the wilderness was not merely a pleasant saunter of his own for recreation, or to get away from the crowd. The Spirit

of God put the impulse into His heart. Notice, too, the strength and urgency of the impulse—"the Spirit driveth Him forth," away from the Jordan and into the wilderness. The word "driveth" shows the tremendous divine pressure that was on Jesus as He hastened from His baptism and the Father's declaration of His Messiahship. He must pass now instantly to the first step in His preparation.

"He was in the wilderness forty days tempted of Satan." Why must He be tempted? The answer seems clear. He had come into the world that He might destroy the works of the devil. He must meet the leader of the works of darkness, first of all, and enter upon His conflict with him. If He could not overcome Satan, He could not be the world's Redeemer. The conflict was fierce and terrible. All the power of evil was marshaled for the great battle. Matthew tells in fuller form the story of the method of the temptation and describes the complete victory which Jesus won. Mark gives details which the other Gospel writers do not give. One is that Jesus was with the wild beasts. It was in the wilderness that He spent the forty days and nights, and the wilderness was the home of wild beasts. This fact added to the terrors of the temptation. No doubt Jesus was kept in perfect safety in the midst of the wild beasts. Not one of them would harm Him.

Mark also makes special note of the ministry

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of angels to Jesus. His words would seem to indicate that the angels attended Him through all the forty days. Matthew in his account of the temptation puts the ministering of angels at the close, after the period of tempting. But the words imply repeated ministrations, as if they had come to strengthen Him at different times, between the several assaults of the tempter. This agrees with Mark's statement, which implies continuous ministry throughout the forty days. Heaven's eye was upon Jesus during all the time of His trial, and help was sent in every time of stress. It is the same with us when we are in any struggle or any need. God watches that we shall never be tempted above what we can bear, and that help shall always come at the right moment. We are never left alone in any need or danger.

CHAPTER IX

THE CALL OF THE FIRST DISCIPLES

Read Luke V., 1-11

THE scene of this lesson is the Lake of Gennesaret. "Although God has created seven seas," said the rabbis, "yet He has chosen this one as His special delight." No body of water on the earth is so sacred to the hearts of Christians as this little inland sea. Along its shores Jesus walked, wrought, and talked. At that time its shore was a garden, without break, covered with pleasant towns and villages. Desolation now reigns about it. In our Lord's time it was covered with fishing-boats and vessels of all kinds. A great population then crowded its shores. Now the towns have disappeared, and the boats no longer ply on the beautiful waters. Yet everywhere in the sands are the footprints of Him who came to save us. "It is the gem of Palestine, a sapphire fairly set in its framework of hills, but more fairly set in the golden words and works of the Son of God."

In the story of our passage we have one of the experiences of our Master on this beautiful sea. The people thronged about Him to hear Him

speak. The crowd became very great, and that He might speak to the people more satisfactorily, He entered one of the fishing-boats that were moored by the shore. The fishermen had left their boats and were washing their nets. Using this fishing-boat as a pulpit, Jesus spoke to the people. That little boat had done good service many times before in other ways. It had carried people across the lake, it had been used in fishing, but it never had been put to such a use as it was that day, when the Lord preached from its deck to the throngs on the beach. We can find pulpits every day from which we can preach to the people about us. The boy can speak at school, or from his place of duty, or in the office where he works. The girl can find a pulpit among her friends, at her daily tasks, in the social group of which she is a member. No one ever yet lacked opportunities to speak for the Master. Ofttimes the little sermons we speak on the way, as we walk, or as we ride on the street cars or on the railroad train, have more effect, a wider reach of influence, than if we stood up in a church pulpit and made a fine address.

After Jesus had spoken to the people, He asked Simon, the owner of the boat, to push out from the shore into the deep water, and to let down his nets. It seemed to Simon that there could be no use in doing this. He had spent the whole preceding night on the sea, dropping the nets and drawing them up again, each time empty. "We

toiled all night, and took nothing," was Simon's discouraged answer. This is true of very much of the work that many of us do. We toil hard, but come home weary and empty-handed. We drag our nets all night, and in the morning we have only weeds and a few bits of rubbish in our nets. This is true of what we do in worldly business. The majority of men die poor, with nothing in their hands to show for their toil. Many do the same in their intellectual life. With countless opportunities for learning, they at last die in ignorance. Many persons have the same experience in spiritual work. Pastors toil for years, and seem to have no souls in their nets. Teachers work with their classes, and seem to have no results. There is often a sad pathos in the Christian's life and work. Many of us are like children trying to carry water in buckets with holes. It runs away as fast as we dip it up.

Peter's obedience at this time was very noble and beautiful. According to the rules of fishing, nothing would come of the Master's command. Yet Peter did not think of that. The word of Jesus had supreme authority with him. It was not his to ask why, or what good could come of casting the net again. No appeal against the Master's word was to be considered for a moment. So Peter answered without hesitation, "At Thy word I will." Many of the things our Master calls us to do or to endure do not seem best to us at the time. Yet we may always say to Christ,

whatever His bidding may be, whatever He asks us to do or to suffer, into whatsoever mystery of trial or pain He leads us, "At Thy word I will." There need never be the smallest exception to this obedience. Though to our limited vision it seems that only loss can come out of it, still we should heed the Voice that commands, assured that in spite of all seeming ill there must be good in the end.

The result of the obedience proved the wisdom of the command. "When they had done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes." Obeying the Master, though it had seemed nothing could come of it, brought its rich reward. Not always do the results come so soon. But obedience to Christ's word always brings good in the end.

We have here an illustration of two kinds of work—that done without Christ's direction, and that done in obedience to His word. The one came to nothing: the other yielded bountiful results. The disciples had toiled all night in their own effort and taken nothing. They dropped their nets at the Master's bidding and drew them up full. In a wider sense, all that we do without Christ's direction comes to naught, while all that we do in His name yields blessing. Somewhere and in some way everything we do for Christ brings blessing. "Your labor is not vain in the Lord." "In due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

The effect of this miracle on Peter was remarkable. He fell down at the feet of Jesus and said, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." This is a strange scene—Peter imploring Jesus to leave his boat. Yet it was Peter's very love for Jesus that made him say this. In the miracle he had had a glimpse of Christ's power. A vision of divine glory always humbles a true heart. A room may be filthy; floor, walls, and furniture stained; but in the darkness one does not see the foulness. Let the light flash in, and every speck of stain is revealed. We are not conscious of the evil in our own hearts. But when the divine holiness is revealed and flashes its radiance upon us, we see our condition and loathe ourselves. We should seek to see God, for the vision will show us our unworthiness, and then will lead to the cleansing of our lives, to make them more worthy of Him. We never can enter heaven until heaven has first entered into us and filled our whole being with its holiness and purity.

Peter saw in these wonderful words of Christ the unveiling of divine power. "He was amazed . . . at the draught of the fishes." Every day divine works are wrought before our eyes, and we fail to be impressed. Mrs. Browning tells us that while some people see the glory of God in the burning bush and take off their shoes, others only stand by and pick blackberries. We should teach ourselves to behold God in even the com-

monest events in our commonest days. Daily life is full of goodness and the evidences of our Father's thoughtfulness and care. He made the flowers, the hills, the trees, the fields, the rivers, the stars. Are there no manifestations of divine power in these works of God? Then the life of the individual is full of love and power. No person can fail to see in every day's providences the evidences of God's presence and thought. He provides for us. He sends us countless blessings, and supplies all our needs. He brings friends to us with love, with sympathy, with comfort. In the life of each one of us there are frequent occurrences just as remarkable as the miracles of the fishes. Yet, how few of us take off our shoes and fall down before Christ in wonder!

It is delightful to notice how the fishermen responded to the call of the Master. The call had reached their hearts, and they were not a moment in deciding. They had known Jesus for some time and were most glad to go with Him. We do not know how much He told them of His plans, of what He wanted them to do. Jesus does not usually give us the details of the life to which He calls us. He only asks us to go with Him; and then, as we go on, He shows us the way, step by step. Each day prepares us for the next. One duty done leads to another.

Jesus is always looking for men. The work of saving the world is still filling His heart and His thought. He wants men who will believe His

message. He saw that day in these fishermen just the kind of men He wanted to go with Him and be trained for the great work He had in hand. They had had a training in their old occupation which had done much to prepare them for the new work to which they were now called. They had learned patience, persistence, quiet waiting, and diligence in their daily and nightly work on the sea, and these qualities would be of use in waiting, watching, and fishing for men. The words of Jesus about fishing contain a little parable. The sea is the world, and men are the fish that are to be caught and taken from it. The net is the Church of Christ. The figure is found in one of the old prophets, but in a different sense. A very early Christian hymn dwells on the thought:

“Fishers of men, the blest,
Out of the world’s unrest,
Out of sin’s troubled sea
Taking us, Lord, to Thee;
Out of the waves of strife,
With bait of blissful life,
Drawing thy nets to shore
With choicest fish, good store.”

The Master’s answer to Simon showed what we should do with our amazement and adoration. Instead of being paralyzed by the revealing of glory, Simon was to find in it a new call to service. “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.” Idle wonder is profitless. Divine reveal-

ings should drive us to a fuller consecration and service. The one thing after feelings is to put them into acts. We should all want to catch men and to save them from their sin, for eternal life and glory. We should all want to be fishers of men. The boys and girls should seek to draw their companions out of the black sea of sin, that they may be saved for heaven.

The response of Simon and of his friends was instantaneous. "They left all, and followed Him." They do not seem to have had much to leave—they had only an old boat or two, and some well-worn nets; yet these things were all they had, and by these things they made their living, so that their leaving all was no small matter. This is just what Jesus asked the rich young ruler to do, and what he would not do. Christ may not ask us to give up all in the sense of leaving all; but He does ask us to give up all to Him. He does ask us to believe, to give up body, soul, and property, to go wherever He may send us, and to do whatever He wants us to do. Nothing will be lost to us, however, for He will return to us, a hundredfold increase, all that we give up or lose in His cause.

CHAPTER X

THE PARALYTIC FORGIVEN AND HEALED

Read Mark II., 1-12

JESUS seems to have entered Capernaum quietly, to escape notice. Perhaps He was weary after His incessant labours, and desired to have rest. So He came quietly, perhaps by night, that His coming might not be known. But it soon became noised about that He was in the house. "He could not be hid." It was impossible for Him to be long anywhere without His presence becoming known. The people were too eager to get to Him with their needs and their sorrows to allow Him to remain quiet even for a little while. They were even rude and unmannerly in their crowding upon Him. But really it never can be kept quiet when Jesus enters any house or any life. There is a diffusiveness in Him, like a fragrance, which can not be constrained.

A young woman tells of being on an excursion in the woods, when she picked up a branch of sweet-brier and put it in her bosom. She soon forgot what she had done, but all day long she smelled the spicy fragrance. Every woodland path

seemed to her to have the same odor, even if there were no sweet-brier visible. She climbed over rocks and walked through dark caves, and everywhere she detected the perfume. She would stand beside different people, with all kinds of flowers in their hands, but still she smelled only the sweet-brier. As the party went home on the boat, she remarked to a friend, "Some one is carrying home a bunch of sweet-brier." When she came to retire, the bunch of sweet-brier dropped from her dress. All day long she had been carrying it, and it had perfumed everything. She said to herself, "How good it would be if I could have such a spirit in my heart that every one I meet would seem to be carrying the fragrance!" One in whose heart Christ lives has the secret of a sweet life. The sweetness can not be hid. A little spot, at least, of the world is made better and brighter.

As soon as His presence became known the crowd gathered about the house where Jesus was. From all over the town they came. It was the kindness of Jesus to the sick, the poor, the troubled, that drew so many to Him. Among those who came that day were four men carrying a friend on a stretcher. The man was a paralytic and could not help himself, but he had friends who were ready to assist him. These four men teach us a lesson. We ought to help one another. The strong should bear the infirmities of the weak. 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, her neighbours and friends, should try to brighten her loneliness, calling on her, bringing into her sick room tokens of love and sympathy, and sharing with her their joy and gladness. Christians who have been healed by Christ should try to carry to Him their unsaved friends. It is suggestive, too, that four of this paralytic's friends united in helping to get him to Christ. One man could not have carried the burden, nor could two. But when the four men put their hands to the helpless load, it was easily carried. Four friends may unite in efforts to get a lost one to Christ, at least praying together for him.

The earnestness of these men was shown in what they did. They could not get their friend into the presence of Christ because of the crowd in the house and about the door. But they would not be discouraged. They carried him up on the roof, and, making an opening for him, let him down right into Christ's presence. In seeking the salvation of our friends, we should be very earnest. If we really care for them we will never be discouraged or balked in our efforts to get them to Christ. Too many of our efforts are feeble and transient. We should be willing to make greatest sacrifices and endure anything to get an unsaved friend to Christ.

It is said that Jesus saw their faith. How could He see faith? Faith is not something material. He saw it in what they did. Nobody said

a word, so far as we are told; but the four men showed their earnestness and their strong faith in uniting their strength and carrying their helpless burden up the outside stairs, then in breaking up the roof overhead, and in lowering the poor man into the presence of the Healer. Thus, although there was no spoken prayer, there was a prayer in the men's hearts, which found expression in what they did. It was in their determined overcoming of all obstacles that Jesus saw their faith. There are wordless prayers which our Lord hears and answers. We may notice that part, at least, of the faith which Christ saw was in the hearts of the man's friends. We do not know certainly that there was any faith in the man himself. We may exercise faith in behalf of others. Parents may bring a child to Christ, and He will see their faith. Friends may present a friend unsaved or in trouble, and Christ will see faith and send blessing. There may have been faith also in the sufferer—at least in the end. There was in the man's very helplessness, as he lay there on his mat, that which appealed to the pity of Christ. There were no words of pleading, but there was faith, and it found expression in wordless supplication, which was more eloquent than the most beautiful human liturgies. Jesus looked down upon this helpless man and saw faith. We must show our faith in our acts.

It seemed at first as if Christ had misunderstood the wish of the paralytic and his friends.

The man had come to have his palsy cured, and instead of doing this Jesus forgave his sins, leaving him still unhealed. Had the Master made a mistake? As we look more deeply, however, we see that He made no mistake. Indeed, the prayer was only over-answered. We do not always know what our deepest need is. We think it is the curing of our sickness, the lifting away of our burden, or the bettering of our worldly condition, when our deepest, realest need is the saving of our soul, the lifting away of our sin, the changing of our relation to God. This man's dumb prayer was for healing—he wanted to be able to walk about again, to use his hands and feet, to become active. The Master looked at the paralyzed limbs and quivering frame and saw deeper, and answered another prayer first, because that was what the poor man needed most to have done. There are a great many troubles we would like to have removed, but which we can keep and still be noble and useful; but our sin we must get clear of, or we shall perish forever. Therefore Christ oftentimes does for us the things we need, though we do not ask to have them done, instead of the things we should like to have done. He answers our heart's needs before He gratifies our mere wishes. Oftentimes when we cry for comfort and ease He looks deeper than we can see 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 seek for the curing of the

deadly heart-trouble first. Nothing else that God can give us would be a blessing while our sins are still unforgiven.

Then, after Jesus had forgiven the man's sins, He performed the other healing also. He made the man rise, take up his bed, and go to his house. He first answered the deepest need, and then, when peace had filled the man's soul and he was willing now to go home even with his palsy, if that were God's will, since heaven had come into his heart, then Christ gave him the other boon—healing. The palsy had a mission—it brought the man to the Healer and Saviour. When its mission was accomplished it was dismissed as a servant no longer needed. Jesus never causes pain or suffering without some purpose of love. He is not pleased to see us suffer. Every pang of ours goes to His heart. In all our affliction He is afflicted. But He is far too kind to call away the angel of pain before His beneficent work in us is fully wrought. The surgeon would be 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 gentle to cause us pain and to leave us to suffer unrelieved, even for years, when suffering has yet a mission uncompleted in us. Yet the moment pain's work is finished God sends the messenger away. When this man's soul was saved Jesus healed the sickness which had been the mes-

senger of blessing to him and whose ministry was now completed.

Here again the man was called upon for an exercise of faith. Jesus bade him rise, and straightway he took up his bed and walked away before all the people. The command to rise seemed a strange one to give to a paralyzed man. He could not lift his head nor walk home. But as we look at the helpless form, he does rise and obey that impossible command. The lesson is that when Christ gives a command He always gives strength to do it. We have no power in ourselves to do Christ's will, but as we strive to obey His commands the needed grace flows into our soul. Whatever Christ bids us do, He will by His grace enable us to do, if we simply go forward in unwavering faith and unquestioning obedience.

CHAPTER XI

FEASTING AND FASTING

Read Mark II., 13-22

THE first year of Christ's public ministry was a year of obscurity. He was not yet well known. Then, as He spoke and wrought, His fame grew. We are now in His year of popular favour—His second year. One scene of enthusiasm follows another. After the healing of the paralytic the people were amazed, and glorified God, saying, "We never saw it on this fashion." Then the record goes on without a break, telling of the Master's going out from the house where He had been hiding, and that all the multitude resorted unto Him. Then He taught them.

In going along the road, Jesus came to a little office or booth by the wayside and stopped by the door. He had an errand there. He was looking for a man whom He might send forth as an apostle, to carry the blessings of the gospel to others. Jesus is always looking for men He can trust to do His errands. If we would have Him choose for us important and responsible work we should be faithful in our present service, however lowly it may be. We are being tested continually to

show whether we will be faithful. He is looking always for those who are diligent and may be depended on. He never chooses an idle man to entrust with any important duty. He wants men who have capacity and who are eager and busy. Then He wants messengers whom nothing can tempt to be unfaithful.

He saw sitting in this little office the man He was looking for. He was sitting at the place of toll, the place where the people passing by with goods stopped to pay the taxes on the things they were carrying. That seemed a strange place for Jesus to find a man for His work, especially a man who should become an apostle. Those who were engaged in this business of collecting customs were not reputable men. They were hated by their people because their work was to gather taxes for the Romans. Usually they were dishonest, or extortionate, taking all they could get. The publicans were regarded as mean and unpatriotic. However, Jesus can take even a bad and disreputable life and out of it make an apostle.

One day Michael Angelo saw a soiled and cast-away block of marble lying among rubbish in an outhouse. Once it was a magnificent block, with great possibilities. But it had been cut and hacked by an incompetent hand, and seemed to be utterly ruined, so that nothing ever could be done with it, nothing beautiful ever made of it. But to the eye of the artist, as he looked upon the stone, a vision of beauty rose, and from the soiled

block he carved the wonderful statue of young David, one of the masterpieces of art which the visitor sees at Florence. Many of those who have finally reached the noblest manhood and have done most for the world have thus been rescued by Christ from what seemed hopeless ruin. Levi or Matthew, whom Jesus found that day in the tax-collector's booth, became in the great Master's hand one of the worthiest and most honoured of the apostles.

When Jesus saw the man His eye discerned the possibilities in him, and He called him to come with Him. The word went at once to the heart of the publican, and he dropped all and promptly followed Christ. Thus he set the example for all who hear the same voice. That was the way Saul did, too, when he saw the glorified form before him and recognized in it the Messiah. He made a complete surrender and asked for his work. We should learn to follow Christ whenever we hear His call. There should be no to-morrow in our answer—now is the accepted time.

Matthew made a great feast, Luke tells us, inviting his old companions, that he might honour his new Master, and that they might see Him. He set a good example of confession. He seems to have made this feast to let his friends know what he had done, and to introduce Jesus to them. A noble minister used to say he wanted everybody to fall in love with Jesus Christ, his Friend. Every one who begins to follow Christ should want

to have his companions and friends follow Him, too. The scribes and the Pharisees were always envious of the popularity of Jesus, and took every occasion to say slighting things about Him. When they saw Him that day in Levi's house, and the crowds pressing about Him, they accused Him, saying He had chosen bad company in eating with publicans and sinners. Jesus said He was like a physician, and "they that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." No one would criticise the taste of a physician because he is always going among sick people. He would be a strange physician who would drive round all day, calling only on well people, chatting and eating with them, and refusing to go among the sick. His mission is to the sick, not to the well. Jesus came as a physician. His mission in this world is to the lost. It should not have been thought a strange thing, therefore, that He went among the lost, the fallen, the outcast. These were the very persons He had come to seek. He would not have been fulfilling His mission if He had devoted Himself altogether to the good, the spiritually refined, the pure, disregarding the unholy and disreputable. The mission of the Church to-day is to sinners. None are too vile to be sought out with sympathy and love. Christians should not spend all their time in fellowship with other Christians. They must think of those who are not living right, and, like their Master, must try to save them.

Fasting was practiced in those days, not only

by the Pharisees, but also by the disciples of John the Baptist. These noticed that the followers of Jesus did not fast, and they came and asked Jesus why His disciples did not. He said that it was not the time to fast when He was with them. The Pharisees fasted by the almanac, without reference to their particular condition at the time. Jesus said that there was a time to fast. Fasting indicates penitence, sorrow for sin, humiliation. It would be thought very strange if a family, without any sorrow in their midst, all of them happy, with the circle unbroken, should go into deep mourning. There is no fitness in wearing the garb of mourning when there is joy on every hand. But when one is dead in the home, then it does not seem strange to see the family showing their sadness and wearing the tokens of grief. Jesus said that there was no reason why His disciples should be fasting and sorrowful at that particular time, for He was with them. There would be no fitness in fasting then.

The Master's words are aimed against all empty professions and meaningless forms. When there is cause for mourning, let there be mourning. But when all things are joyous, let there be gladness. Our religion should be natural and sincere, never affected or hypocritical. Over-expressions of religious emotion or feeling are condemned. Christ wants His disciples true through and through, their forms of worship filled with sincerity of heart and life.

The religion of the Pharisees was chiefly one of forms and ceremonies. The religion Jesus had come to establish was one of the heart. He had not come merely to make some little changes in the Jewish forms and ceremonies; He had come to give the world something altogether new—the gospel of God's love and grace. The Jewish forms and ceremonies in their day had a meaning. They were symbolical and typical of great spiritual truths, a sort of kindergarten teaching of God's will. But all these truths and emblems were fulfilled by Christ Himself, and now the old forms are done away, as the blossom is done away when the fruit comes. Christianity needs no other system of types and forms—it is a religion of the heart; it seeks expression in forms of its own. The danger of forms is that they shall come to be depended on instead of vital religion. Jesus did not merely attach certain new lessons and practices to the old wine skins of Judaism; rather, He put life and love and grace, the new things of the gospel, into the new and simple forms of Christian faith.

CHAPTER XII

THE USE OF THE SABBATH

Read Mark II., 23 to III., 6

ONE of the most important questions which Christian people have to consider in these days is that of the proper use of the Lord's Day. What is its purpose? What place should it occupy among the days? What should it mean to us? How should it be observed? It would be a great calamity to us if we were to lose our Sabbath altogether. We should then have no churches, no religious services, no Christian institutions, no Sunday schools, no Christian fellowship; for it is the Sabbath that is the inspirer and helper of all these institutions and blessings. Jesus loved the Sabbath. He took from it, as then observed, certain things which had grown up about it and spoiled its beauty; but He did not abolish it. He sanctified it, and then gave it back to us an institution of good and of blessing.

One Sabbath Jesus and His disciples were going through the grainfields. We may infer that they were on their way to the morning synagogue-

service—were going to church, as we would say. There are many evidences that Jesus was always regular in His attendance upon Church ordinances. We would think that He did not require the spiritual help which comes from public worship; yet He seems always to have sought it. If Jesus kept up church-going habits, surely we should not think that we can get along without them. We would do well to emphasize this particular part of Sabbath duty. Young people should feel the obligation and realize their own need of what the Church can give them. We ought to come together to worship God, to recognize Him before men as our God, and to render due homage and praise to Him from whom all our blessings come.

Then we need the help that the Lord sends from the sanctuary. We need the instruction, counsel, warning, encouragement, and comfort which come from the faithful preaching of the word. We need the fellowship of Christians, the strength that comes from human sympathy. In our thought about how to observe the Sabbath, let us not forget to get into it a healthful measure of church-going. We may be sure that Jesus and His disciples were not merely taking a walk for pleasure that morning, and that they were not merely traveling somewhere. We need to be careful how we seek our own pleasure on the Lord's day. We ought to make the Sabbath different from other days—restful, quiet, a day for receiv-

ing the divine blessings of health and renewal, as well as spiritual good and enriching.

The Pharisees were exceedingly punctilious in the observance of the letter of the law and, besides this, of the rabbinical rules which had been added from time to time to the law. They also regarded it as their duty to keep a close watch on others and to note any failure in them to follow the rules. They were especially keen in watching Jesus and His disciples. Their motive was not sincere interest in the teaching and example of Jesus, but to criticise Him, that they might accuse Him. They went along with Him, not because they loved to be with Him, but as spies upon His conduct.

We get two lessons. One is that the conduct of Christians is always watched by unfriendly eyes, eyes keen to detect the slightest apparent fault. We should live at all times most carefully, so as to give no occasion for just censure. Yet the example of our Lord's disciples here shows us that we are not to be slaves to traditional opinions which have no foundation in the Word of God. The other lesson is that we can find better business than playing the spy on the life and conduct of our fellow-men. The unfriendly espionage of these sanctimonious religionists on the actions of our Lord and His disciples, appears in our eyes very mean and contemptible. Let us remember that it is no less mean and contemptible for us to watch our fellow-Christians in order to discover

flaws. Suppose they do not live quite as they should live; are we their judges? Then perhaps our sin of uncharitableness in watching them may be as great as theirs of some other inconsistency. Here is a suggestive bit from Mohammedan books:

“Master, my six brethren are all asleep, and I alone have remained awake to worship Allah.”

“And you, too, had better been asleep, if your worship of Allah consists in accusations of your brethren.”

The scribes were always referring people to what was written. With a keen irony Jesus reminds them of an incident in their Scriptures which had a bearing on the matter which was troubling them. David was a favourite Jewish hero, and what he did ought to be taken at least as a precedent. The teaching is for us, too, and its meaning is that “works of necessity” may be done on the Sabbath. It was in the literal sense a breach of the ceremonial law for the priests to give David the shewbread; but it was not a breach of the spirit of the law, for the necessity of hunger overruled the ceremonial regulation. The work of the priests in the temple was also in a literal way a continual profanation of the Sabbath; yet they were “blameless” because their work was necessary for the maintenance of the ordained worship of God. In like manner our Lord taught that the act of His disciples in plucking and rubbing out the heads of grain to get food to satisfy their immediate hunger was a work of necessity,

and therefore was not a sin. Though the letter of the law may have been violated, there was no violation of its spirit.

So we get the principle, that "works of necessity" are excepted in the law of the Sabbath which requires the cessation of secular labour. What these works of necessity are can not be established by minute rules and regulations. This would be to repeat the error of the Jewish teachers, who added to the plain and simple law of God so many of their own traditions as to obscure and bury away the law itself and make their religion burdensome and oppressive. What these works of necessity are can be left to the enlightened conscience of the faithful followers of Christ.

Jesus went further and made a general statement concerning the purpose of the Sabbath which is very important and which we should always remember in thinking of the observance of the day. "He said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." The Sabbath is part of God's plan of love for man. It was not made for him merely as an arbitrary law, without a reason. It is as much a law of his nature, or in harmony with his nature, as is the night, which bids him cease from toil and seek rest and sleep. It was made for his physical nature. Then it was made also for his spiritual good, to give him opportunity not alone for physical rest, but for communion with God when the noise of business and of toil has ceased. It was

made for man, to promote his highest welfare in every regard.

Jesus clearly showed, both by His own example and by His teaching, that the Sabbath is never meant to be a burden or to work oppressively. Though work is forbidden on the Sabbath, it is not a violation to prepare food sufficient to meet the hunger of our bodies, to lift a beast out of a pit, or to heal a sick man. Not many people are now disposed, however, to make the Sabbath a heavy burden or a cruel yoke. The tendency is the other way. At the same time it is well to understand just what our Lord taught on this subject. Works of necessity are allowed, even though they may seem to violate the letter of the law. So also are works of mercy, works of benevolence. It will be hard, however, to get out of this great saying of our Lord's any excuse for the hundredth part of the secular goings-on that men want to bring in under the shield of Christ's teaching.

Jesus went still further, and asserted His own authority over the day. "The Son of man is lord even of the sabbath." Therefore He had a right to interpret the laws for its observance. He does not intimate any intention of abolishing the Sabbath. He had just said, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." Because the Sabbath was made for man it came under the Lordship of the Son of man. As Mediator He had all the interests of humanity committed to His hands. The Sabbath was not to be abolished, for it

was part of the very divine constitution which the loving God had ordained for His children. Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfill. He took the Sabbath, therefore, and stripped off the temporary ceremonial regulations, and set aside all the burdensome traditional rules, and then put into it its true spiritual meaning, just as He did to the other commandments in the Sermon on the Mount. Under His touch the Sabbath was made new in a sense. The bondage of the letter gave way to the liberty of the Spirit. He liberated His Church from the oppressive burdens of a rabbinical Sabbath and made the day one of joy and gladness, a type and foretaste of heaven.

“He saith unto them, Is it lawful on the sabbath day to do good, or to do harm? to save a life, or to kill?” In the account of this incident in Matthew’s Gospel we learn that Jesus gave an illustration. “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? How much then is a man of more value than a sheep! Wherefore it is lawful to do good on the sabbath day.” He appealed to simple common sense. The Jews could not but admit that a man should lift his sheep out of the pit on the Sabbath. Whatever their traditions said about such a case, the practice of the people would be on the merciful line. Now Jesus asked: “Is not a man better than a sheep? If it is right

to help a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath, it surely is right to relieve a sufferer from his malady on that day." So we get the lesson that it is right to do good on the Sabbath. It is right for physicians to attend to their patients on that day. It is right for those whose duty it naturally is, to nurse the sick and care for them on the Sabbath. It is right to visit the sick, when we can carry blessing or cheer to them; to visit the afflicted, when we can carry comfort to them; to visit the poor, when we can minister to their needs or relieve their distress; to go out among the unsaved, when we can do anything to bring them to Christ and save their souls; to gather neglected children from the streets and from Christian homes and bring them to the Sabbath school and the Church. Jesus here gives us warrant for many works of mercy on His own holy day.

When Jesus entered the synagogue there was a man there with a withered hand. The scribes watched very intently to see whether Jesus would heal this man on the Sabbath. He asked the man to stand forth, as if He would cure him; but first asked the scribes whether it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath. They were not willing to commit themselves in answering His question, and after a little while Jesus proceeded to heal the man. "He saith unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth; and his hand was restored." Jesus would not let the man suf-

fer because of the criticism of the Jews. We get a lesson here. We must not be hindered in doing good by the opposition and the fault-finding of those about us. We must do our good deeds fearlessly, serving Christ regardless of the world's sneers and hindering.

CHAPTER XIII

THE APPOINTMENT OF THE TWELVE

Read Mark III., 7-19

WE can hardly realize how wide the influence of Jesus was at this time. The multitude that followed Him came not only from Galilee, but also from Judea, from beyond the Jordan, and even from the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon and the country surrounding them. The throng was so great that Jesus with His disciples withdrew to the sea. He wished to do His work without interruption. Thus we have our Lord's example for sometimes withdrawing from opposition. It was not want of courage that led Him to do this. He knew that the conspiracy of His enemies would in the end be successful, yet He would not throw His life away. Nothing could be gained by His staying in their midst at this time. There was no testimony to be borne. Besides, His work was not yet finished. When, at last, His work was all done, the plots had all ripened, and He knew that the rulers were about to kill Him, He did not withdraw, nor did He show any fear or lack of bravery.

There are times when duty requires us to flee from danger and thus save our lives for further

service. We are certainly never to court danger, nor to be reckless in our courage. On another occasion Jesus said to His disciples, "When they persecute you in this city, flee into the next." Christian prudence is an important element in Christian courage. It often requires a higher courage to avoid danger than to rush into it; to flee away from angry enemies than to answer back and incite them to further wrath.

The report of our Lord's works of mercy and kindness went out everywhere, and multitudes were drawn to Him. One who does good to others will always have followers. The world is full of sorrow and suffering, and hearts hunger for sympathy. When one who has a gentle spirit and a hand whose touch gives blessing comes among men, people welcome him. Love always finds its mission. We are apt to criticise the motive in such following. "For the loaves and fishes," we say. But people know a friend when he comes among them; and when one suffers and has been helped, it is no wonder that other like sufferers come with their needs. Jesus loved the people—that was the secret; He loved them, and they knew it. People always know when a man truly and sincerely loves them. It was written of one of these lovers of his fellow-men:

" His magic was not far to seek,
 He was so human! Whether strong or weak,
 Far from his kind he neither sank nor soared,
 But sat an equal guest at every board.

No beggar ever felt him condescend,
No prince presume ; for still himself he bore
At manhood's simple level, and where'er
He met a stranger, there he left a friend."

The kindness of Jesus was not discouraged by the ingratitude and enmity of men. Though the plots of His enemies drove Him out of the city, they did not stop His doing good. Though some rejected His love, His heart was not closed. Capernaum lost much when He went out of its gates ; but on the throngs which followed Him the gracious blessings fell. Persecution scatters the seed which it means to destroy. When the first Christians were driven from Jerusalem, it was only to carry the word into all the countries round about to which they fled. They "went about, preaching." Opposition must never silence the lips that carry the words of life. If one rejects and scorns you, bear your message to another. You will always find some ready to receive the blessing you have to give. Especially are the people who have "plagues," who are in any misfortune or distress, ready to press upon him who comes to them with a heart of love and with power to do them good.

The people pressed up close to Him, that they might touch Him. A touch was enough. All that were touched were made whole. Life flowed from Him to them. Health went from His rich, wholesome life and expelled their sickness. So a touch is enough always. Any one who really touches

Christ is healed. But we must be sure to touch Him. It is not enough to be in the crowd that gathers about Him. Only those are healed who touch Him. It is not enough to be in the congregation that worships. One sitting or bowing next to us may receive a great blessing, while we receive none at all. It is because he reaches out his hand of faith and touches Christ; while we, physically as close to Christ as he is, do not put out our hand to touch Him, and therefore receive no blessing. We ought, as Christ's disciples, to be so full of life and love that any one who touches us shall get a blessing from us. Just to have their handshake is a benediction. Their mere presence in a sick room gives comfort. It is worth while to be such a person. Do you want to know the secret? It is love. Love people really, truly, genuinely, and there will flow from you always, to every life that touches yours, an influence of healing.

Jesus stood in the throng and called certain men to come to Him. He singled out the persons and called them individually. That is the way He is doing continually—standing and calling men to come to Him. He does not call a crowd—He calls people by name, calls them one by one. Every one who hears His voice should answer—leave the world's company, step boldly out, cross over the line, and take his place by the side of Jesus. There are several things to be said about the way these men responded to Christ's call. They did

it freely. Although He had chosen them out of a whole nation, and called them, there was no compulsion laid upon them to go with Him. They could have refused if they had chosen; Christ never makes disciples by force. Then they responded promptly. There was no hesitation. They said nothing about considering the matter for awhile. They did not talk about being unfit or unworthy; they did not tell Him that they were afraid they could not keep their word if they promised to be Christians. They did not say, "Tomorrow we will go." The moment they heard their names called they answered. Then their answer was given in a way that could be understood. Whenever they heard the call they stepped out with firm tread, and, crossing over the space between the crowd and the Master, they joined themselves to Him. It was not done secretly. They did not wait until they were alone with Him, and then tell Him quietly and timidly that they had made up their minds to accept His invitation. They did not propose to be His disciples and yet stay among their old friends and keep on at the old business. They immediately separated themselves from the people about them, and went over to Him, putting themselves absolutely into His hands, to be His and do His bidding so long as they lived. This is the way these men started in their apostleship, and the way every one should start whom Jesus calls to be His disciple.

He chose the Twelve that they might be with

Him. That is the first thing always, before preaching or teaching or working for Christ. We must be disciples ourselves before He will use us to make disciples of others or to carry His messages and blessings to others. He employs none as His servants who are not His followers. One reason why we must first be with Him is that we may be taught by Him. The apostles learned from their Master the things they themselves afterward taught. We can not do any good work for Christ until He teaches us how to do it. He teaches us by His word, by His Spirit, through the impact of His own life, through our experiences. This is one reason we should study the Bible so carefully, that we may be able to teach others by our example and by our words the things Jesus would have us teach them. Another reason why we need to be with Him before we go out to testify for Him is that we may be actual witnesses for Him. We never can impress the world by giving second-hand information about Christ, by repeating things we have heard others say, or have read in books, about Him. We must be able to tell what we have seen and learned for ourselves from personal intercourse with Him.

These men were chosen not merely to official place, but for service—"to preach, and to have authority to heal sicknesses." This authority was given to test their commission. When Moses went to the people and to Pharaoh as God's messenger,

and when they demanded evidence that God had sent him, he was to work certain signs in their presence to prove his claim. So the apostles had power given to them to perform works of wonder as their credentials. Besides, those works of mercy which they wrought were examples of what the gospel should do wherever it goes. We say there are no miracles now. Is this true? Are no sick people healed now? Are no evil spirits cast out? Are no blind eyes opened, no deaf ears unstopped, no lame made to walk, no dead raised? If miracles are not wrought in the physical realm, they surely are in the spiritual. Eyes are opened to see God and heavenly things. Ears are opened to hear the voice of the Spirit. Fevers of passion are cured. Sickesses of soul are healed. The evil spirits of greed, lust, selfishness are cast out. These are the credentials of all teaching and preaching. Power is given yet to Christ's ministers and to all His disciples—power to heal the sick and cast out demons.

One of the men chosen was known as Simon, but Jesus gave him a surname—Peter. These two names are suggestive. "Simon" shows the rude fisherman of Galilee, with all his rashness, his ignorance, his imperfectness; "Peter" shows the apostle of the Acts and the Epistles; the rock firm and secure; the man of great power, before whose Spirit-filled eloquence thousands of proud hearts bow, swayed like the

trees of the forest before the tempest; the gentle, tender soul whose words fall like a benediction; the noble martyr witnessing to the death for his Lord. Study the two names together to see what grace can do for a man. It is not hard to take roses, lilies, fuchsias, and all the rarest flowers, and with them make forms of exquisite beauty; but to take weeds, dead grasses, dried leaves trampled and torn, and faded flowers and make lovely things out of such materials, is the severest test of skill. It would not be hard to take an angel and train him into a glorious messenger; but to take such a man as Simon, or as Saul, or as John Newton, or as John Bunyan, and make out of him a holy saint and a mighty apostle—that is the test of power. Yet that is what Christ did, and has been doing ever since. He takes the poorest stuff, despised and worthless, outcast of men oftentimes, and when He has finished His gracious work we behold a saint whiter than snow.

The sculptor saw an angel in the rough, blackened stone, rejected and thrown away; and when men beheld the stone again, lo! there was the angel, cut from the block. In one of the English cathedrals is a window, the admiration of all beholders, made by a workman from the bits of glass thrown away by the master. So heaven is filling with glorified souls gathered from the despised and rejected of earth. We should never be discouraged by our unworthiness or our many faults. Christ can take us as we are, and in His

hands our life shall grow into purity and loveliness until He presents us at last before the throne faultless and perfect. There is only one thing that needs to concern us—we must make sure that we are in Christ's school, that we really put ourselves into His hands.

CHAPTER XIV

POVERTY AND RICHES

Read Luke VI., 20-26; XVI., 19-31

THE Beatitudes are glimpses of heaven; that is, the conditions they describe are qualities which belong to the heavenly life. Those who live there are lowly, are meek, are pure in heart, hunger after righteousness, are merciful. We can not think of any persons in heaven who are proud, resentful, or unmerciful, who thirst after worldly power or fame. To get the Beatitudes of the New Testament into our hearts and lives, even as beginnings, is to enter upon the heavenly life.

“Blessed are ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.” This beatitude is not pronounced on the poor in worldly circumstances; for one may be very poor and yet very proud, or one may be rich in worldly goods and yet be very lowly in spirit. Nor is it on the poor in mind; for mental poverty is not necessarily a state of blessedness, and ignorance certainly is not desirable. It is the poor in spirit, in disposition, on whom the beati-

tude is pronounced; that is, the lowly in heart, the humble, those who are conscious of their unworthiness. Humility is a spirit that bows reverently before God and then holds its divinest gifts as not too good or too fine to be used in Christ's name in the service of the lowliest of God's creatures. The Bible everywhere speaks its praises of humility. God dwells with the humble. Christ only once opens a window into His own heart, and through this window 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 those who are lowly. They may wear no earthly crown, but a real crown of glory, unseen by men, rests even here upon their head.

We are sure always of Christ's sympathy with the poor. He was Himself brought up in poverty. His mother could bring only the offering of the poor when she brought her child to present Him to the Lord. In His public ministry He said He had not where to lay His head. He rode on a borrowed beast on His triumphal entry. He slept in a borrowed grave when He was dead. He understands poverty's conditions. He is the poor man's friend. Poverty itself is not a beatitude; but the poor who love Christ and follow Him have many blessings.

“Come ye who find contentment’s very core
In the light store
And daisied path
Of poverty,
And know how more
A small thing that the righteous hath
Availleth, than the ungodly’s riches great.”

“Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled.” Hunger means dissatisfaction, craving, desire, yearning, longing. It strikes us somewhat strangely at first that there should be a beatitude for dissatisfaction. We know that peace is promised to the Christian, and peace is calm repose and satisfied restfulness. The word “hunger” appears to suggest experiences incompatible with rest and peace. But when we think a little more deeply we see that spiritual hunger must form a part of all true Christian experience. In all life 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 grow. The same is true in spiritual life; hunger is health. If we become satisfied with our faith, love, obedience, our communion with God, and our consecration to Christ, we are truly in a sad condition. We have ceased to grow. Often 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 abundance of

spiritual provision, because they have no hunger. There is nothing for which we should pray more earnestly than for spiritual longing.

“Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.” Weeping is not usually considered a blessed condition. We do not think of those having sorrow as fortunate. We pity them, and think their condition most unenviable. Here, however, is a special beatitude for mourners. Probably Jesus meant particularly those who are sorrowing on account of their sins. In all this world there is nothing so precious before God as tears of contrition; no diamonds or pearls shine with such brilliance in His sight. It was Jesus Himself who said that there is joy in the presence of God over one sinner that repents on the earth. Truly blessed, therefore, are those who grieve over their sins; a holy light shines from heaven upon all such mourners. They are comforted with God’s pardon and peace. But the beatitude refers also to those who are in sorrow. Blessing is never nearer to us than when we are in affliction. Some day we shall see 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 dim eyes see more deeply into heaven and look more fully upon God’s face than in any other way. Sorrows cleanse our heart of earthliness and fertilize our life. The days of pain really do far more for us than the days of rejoicing. We grow best when clouds

hang over us, because clouds bear rain, and rain refreshes.

“Blessed are ye, when man shall hate you.” We do not like to be hated. Nor can everybody who is hated take shelter under this beatitude. Many people deserve to be hated. It is only those who are hated for being good and doing good who can claim this blessing. If any of us are suffering in this way, here is comfort for us. There have been times in the history of the Church and in the history of almost every great reform when those who would be loyal and true could be so only at the cost of losing their friends, oftentimes at the cost of property and reputation, even of personal liberty, sometimes of life itself. We must read down to the end of the verse before we begin to congratulate ourselves that the hatred we find in our neighbours toward us is a mark of God’s favour. “For the Son of man’s sake,” the verse reads.

“Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.” Evidently it is not very safe to be rich. It is not easy to be rich and to be a good Christian. Jesus said a great many words about the rich and about riches which show that they who have wealth are in a perilous position. People would not think of a prosperous man, a man growing rich, as specially needing the prayers of a congregation. Yet perhaps this is the very man in all the community who most needs to be remembered in prayer. Those who are rich

or getting rich would better look well to their spiritual state.

“But I say unto you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you.” Somehow many of the lessons that Christ teaches are hard. This lesson certainly is not an easy one. Loving enemies is not a natural affection. Of course, we can not love enemies just as we love our friends. It is a different kind of love that is required. We can not take them into our confidence, nor can we make them our intimate companions. This is not what the law of Christ requires of us. But we can desire and seek their good. We can restrain all feelings of resentment and all wishes to return evil for evil, and seek to do them good. It has been said of a few men who seemed to reach the spirit of Christ in remarkable measure that the more men hated them, the more they loved in return, and that if any one did them a wrong or an injury they would go miles and miles to do the person a kindness.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAW OF LOVE

Read Luke VI., 27-38

THERE is a great similarity between the discourse in Luke and that given in Matthew. There are also such marked differences that many writers think they were spoken at different times. It matters not, for our purpose, whether they are the same or a different sermon.

The law of love was taught in the Old Testament. If one met his enemy's ox or ass going astray, he was to bring it back to him. But here the teaching goes much farther. "I say unto you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you." This is not an easy lesson. It is never easy to be a Christian. The easy way does not lead toward heaven. It takes a new birth to make us Christians at all. Loving enemies is not a natural affection. People talk about the Sermon on the Mount having in it all the gospel they want; but if they try to live it they will find that they need both an atoning Saviour and a sanctifying Spirit. Yet Christ wants us to make these teachings the rule of our life. Of

course we can not love enemies just as we love our friends. It is a different kind of love that is required. We can not take them into our confidence, nor can we make them our intimate companions; but we can desire and seek their good. We can restrain all feelings of resentment and all wishes to return evil for evil. We may have in our heart kindly thoughts and desires for them, and may even seek opportunities to do them favours and kindnesses. If any one hates us and seeks to do us harm, instead of repaying him "in his own coin," we may do good for evil, continuing to pour out love and blessing. This and all the other precepts of this lesson find in the life of Christ Himself their perfect illustration.

The following incident will be helpful in illustrating love for enemies: At the close of the first day of the battle of Fredericksburg, in the American Civil War, hundreds of the Union wounded were left lying on the ground. All night and most of the next day the field was swept by artillery, and no one could venture to the sufferers' relief.

Many who heard the poor soldiers' piteous appeals felt the pangs of human compassion, but stifled them under dread necessity. But at length one brave fellow behind the stone ramparts where the Southern forces lay gave way to his sympathy and rose superior to the love of life. He was a sergeant in a South Carolina regiment, and his name was Richard Kirkland. In the after-

noon he hurried to General Kershaw's headquarters and, finding the commanding officer, said to him, excitedly:

"General, I can't stand this any longer."

"What's the matter, sergeant?" asked the general.

"Those poor souls out there have been praying and crying all night and all day, and it's more than I can bear. I ask your permission to go and give them water."

The general hesitated a moment, but finally said, with emotion: "Kirkland, it is sending you to your death; but I can oppose nothing to such a motive as yours. For the sake of it, I hope God will protect you. Go!"

Furnished with a supply of water, the brave sergeant immediately stepped over the wall and applied himself to his work of Christlike mercy. Wondering eyes looked on as he knelt by the nearest sufferer and, tenderly raising his head, held the cooling cup to his parched lips. Before his first ministry of love was finished, every one in the Union lines understood the mission of the noble soldier in gray, and not a man fired a shot.

He stayed there on that terrible field an hour and a half, giving drink to the thirsty and dying, straightening their cramped and mangled limbs, pillowing their heads on their knapsacks, and spreading their army coats and blankets over them as a mother would cover her own children—and all the while he was so engaged, until his gen-

the ministry was finished, the fusillade of death was hushed. Hatred forebore its rage in a tribute of honour to a deed of pity.

The lesson of love continues, "Bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you." These counsels are intensely practical. In answer to men's cursings, revilings, and insults we are to return words of peace, kindness, and love. Those who treat us abusively we are to pray for instead of uttering threats against them and imprecations upon them. We remember how Jesus Himself lived out this law of love. There were many who cursed Him and reviled Him, but He never lost the sweetness of love out of His heart. He never on any occasion returned a word of cursing or anger or even of impatience in answer to the bitterest revilings of His enemies. "When He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." That is the example for us. We are to be silent when others speak evil of us or to us; or, if we speak, it is to be the soft answer that turneth away wrath. We need not worry ourselves about the deserts of those who treat us unjustly, feeling that we should see to their punishment. We are to leave that to God, who judges righteously and who will take care also that no real harm shall come to us from the wrongs which others inflict on us, provided we keep ourselves in His love and in obedient spirit.

The lesson has its ideal exemplification in our Lord's prayer on His cross for His murderers. His only answer to the driving of the nails through His hands and feet was, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." That is the way He wants us to answer the cruelties and injuries which others may inflict upon us.

"To him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other." Christ gave not so much rules for special cases as principles to govern all conduct. We all think of these words as presenting a very beautiful direction for life, and yet we are apt to feel that they can not be followed literally. Actually turning the other cheek to one who has smitten you in the face would most likely aggravate the person's anger. We take our Lord's example as the true exposition of His precepts. When He was on His trial, one of the officers standing by struck Him with His hand. Yet Jesus did not literally turn the other cheek to the smiter. Instead He calmly protested against the act, saying, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?" At the same time He fulfilled the spirit of His own precept, for He did not resist the wrong. St. Paul was one of the noblest of Christ's followers, and we have an example in his life. He was smitten on the mouth by the command of the high priest. He did not literally turn the other cheek, but vehemently rebuked

him who had committed the outrage. We must therefore look for the true meaning of this teaching in its spirit, and not in its letter. We must be ready to endure not one but many injuries from others. We must be unresisting like our Lord. No wrongs from others should ever turn our love to hate. Christ's own life was an illustration of this. He was treated wrongfully at every step, but His heart never lost its sweetness, its gentleness, its patience, its desire to bless others and do them good.

“Give to every one that asketh thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.” If this rule were to be literally carried out it would put us at the mercy of every idle, greedy, grasping person. The result of such indiscriminate, unregulated giving would be only evil. It would do untold harm to those to whom we might thus give, fostering idleness, pauperism, and selfishness. It is the result of the observation and experience of all thoughtful and wise philanthropists that men should give most sparingly and discriminatingly to the poor. There are many cases where money or its equivalent is really needed; but ordinarily, giving money only harms the beneficiary. Human sympathy, love, cheer, strength to rise again, encouragement and opportunity to work—such help is better far than that which merely gives temporary aid, while it makes the person no more, but less, able for going on afterward. We are indeed to “give to

every one that asketh" us, but the giving must be that which will be a real boon or blessing—never that which will do harm to a life. We are to give as God gives, generously, freely, lovingly, but always wisely, withholding that which would only hurt. The second part of the precept—"Of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again"—must also be read intelligently in the light of other Scriptures. It is not meant to place Christians at the mercy of robbers and thieves, forbidding all property rights. The whole verse teaches gentleness, generosity, unselfishness, meekness, and the reverse of grasping greed.

"As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." This Golden Rule sums up the application of the law of love. We thus carry continually in our own conscience the touchstone by which to decide how we should treat others. We are to ask what we would think they should do to or for us if our circumstances were reversed. Yet even here there must be limitations. We might conceive of ourselves as mean, greedy, selfish, grasping, unjust, and then say that if we were in the place of the other person, or he in ours, we would want a great deal. Clearly it would not be in the spirit of the Lord's teaching to bring ourselves to such an interpretation of this Golden Rule, thus stripping ourselves of our possessions to gratify men's selfish greed. We must apply the rule intelligently, considering

what would be right and just and truly good. Thus understood and applied, this rule is a wonderful help in shaping our treatment of others. Things which would appear repulsive in others, we must remember, appear no less so when seen in us by others. Things that look beautiful in our eyes when we see them in others, will look no less beautiful in us to others' eyes.

“If ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? for even sinners love those that love them.” Anybody ought to be able to love his friends, to do good to those that are good to him, and to lend to those of whom he expects to receive as much in return. Even the coldest and most calculating selfishness can go thus far in loving, doing good, and giving. It requires no regeneration, no mind of Christ, no help of the Holy Spirit, to help one to follow that sort of life creed. The veriest heathen can do it, and the commonest infidel, if not utterly devoid of shrewdness, will need no Sermon on the Mount to inspire and teach him that this is the wisest way to live. His kindness to others brings kindness to him in turn. His giving and lending put other men under obligation to show him the same favours when he may need them. But Christians must do more than sinners. They are born again, are children of God, have a new heart in them, and are to be like God Himself, loving enemies, doing and lending, hoping for no return.

“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: and

condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned." We have no right to be censorious, to criticise others, to sit in judgment on their actions, to pronounce sentence on their conduct. Who made us judges of others? Under what law are they answerable to us for what they do? Besides, we have no wisdom for such judgment of others. We do not know all the circumstances and conditions that enter into human actions. There are oft-times excellent reasons for doing certain things which to us, who do not know these reasons, seem to be unwise, or even wrong. There are elements of character which to us may appear unlovely because we see them in a certain light, but which, seen from a different point of view, in a different light, are really very lovely. In a certain Church there is a stained window which, looked at from one point, gives a blurred and very unsatisfactory representation of a scene in our Lord's life, but which, observed from another point, represents the scene in a very beautiful way. The same difference in aspect is often observable in men's conduct and character, as seen from different points by different lookers-on. Evidently, therefore, we are not qualified for judging, because of the fragmentariness of our knowledge of the circumstances and conditions of people's lives. Let us learn to be charitable and tolerant, seeking for the good things and the beautiful rather than the evil and the repulsive.

CHAPTER XVI

HEARING AND DOING

Read Luke VI., 39-49

THE Sermon on the Mount tells us the kind of persons Christians should be. The Beatitudes with which it opens show us pictures of the character that is like God. There is a legend which says that when Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden an angel broke the gates into pieces, and the fragments flew all over the earth. The gems and precious stones which are picked up now in different parts of the world are these fragments of the paradise gates. It is only a fanciful legend, but it is true that in the Beatitudes, the Commandments, and other divine revealings of heavenly character we have fragments of the image of God which was on man's soul at the beginning, but which was shattered when man fell. The Sermon on the Mount is full of these gleaming fragments. We should study them to learn God's thought for our lives. Some of these shining words we have in our present study.

The Master said, "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" It is

strange how blind we can be to our own faults and blemishes, and how clearly at the same time we can see those of other people. An old writer says, "Men are more apt to use spectacles to behold other men's faults than looking-glasses to behold their own." Our Lord's words in this verse point out this human tendency. A man can see a very small speck of dust in his neighbour's eye, while he is entirely unaware of the beam in his own eye. We would say that a beam in a man's eye would so blind him that he could not see the mote in his brother's eye. As Jesus expresses it, however, the man with the beam is the very one who sees the mote and thinks himself competent to pull it out. So it is in common life. No man is so keen in seeing faults in another as he who has some great fault of his own. A vain man is the first to detect indications of vanity in another. A bad-tempered person is most apt to be censorious toward another who displays irritability. One with a sharp, uncontrolled tongue has the least patience with another whose speech is full of poisoned arrows. A selfish man discovers little motes of selfishness in his neighbour. Rude people are the first to be hurt by rudeness in others. If we are quick to perceive blemishes and faults in others, the probability is that we have similar and perhaps far greater faults in ourselves. This truth ought to make us exceedingly careful in our judgment and modest in our expression of censure.

“How canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me cast out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” We do not know through what experiences our brother has passed to receive the hurts and scars on his life which seem so unbeautiful, so disfiguring, in our eyes. It would scarcely be in good taste for a dainty civilian, at the end of a day of battle, to criticise the soiled and torn garments and blood-stained face of the soldier just out of the struggle. We do not know through what fierce battles our brother has fought when we look critically upon his character and note peculiarities which offend us. The marks which we call faults may be but the scars received in life’s hard battles, marks of honour, decorations of bravery and loyalty, if we only knew it. If we knew the real cause of all that seems unlovely in those we meet we would have patience with them. “But is it not a kindness to a friend to take the mote out of his eye?” some one asks. If we meet a neighbour with a cinder in his eye, would it not be a brotherly thing to stop and take it out for him? Even if we have a whole lump of coal in our eye at the same time, would it not be a kindly act for us to desire to relieve our suffering fellow-man? Then is it not just as true a kindness to want to cure another’s fault, even though we have the same fault in more aggravated form in ourselves? If we did it in the right spirit it would be. But the

trouble is that we are not apt to look at our neighbour's faults in this loving and sympathetic way. It is the self-righteous spirit that our Lord is here condemning. A man holds up his hands in horror at the speck he has found in his neighbour's character, and his neighbour sees in him an immensely magnified form of the same speck. Will the neighbour be likely to be greatly benefited by the rebuke he receives in these circumstances? Suppose a bad-tempered man lectures you on the sin of giving way to temper, or a dishonest man on some apparent lack of honesty, or a liar on the wickedness of falsehood, or a rude-mannered man on some little discourtesy of yours, or a hypocrite on insincerity, what good will such lectures do you, even admitting that you are conscious of the faults?

“Each tree is known by its own fruit.” This is very clear in the matter of trees. Nature never deviates from her fixed laws. No one expects to gather grapes off a bramble bush, nor does one ever find thorns growing on an apple tree. Every tree bears its own fruit. The same is true of life. A bad heart does not make a good character, nor produce acts of beauty and holiness. It is a law of life that “as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” We have it all here in the following verse. “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth that which is evil: for out of the abun-

dance of the heart his mouth speaketh." The thoughts make the life. The temple rose in silence on Mount Moriah; no noise of hammer or ax being heard in the building all the time it was in rising, because down in the quarries under the hill, and in the shops in the valley, every stone and every piece of timber was shaped and fitted perfectly before it was brought to be laid in its place. Our hearts are the quarries and the workshops, and our thoughts are the blocks of stone and the pieces of timber which are prepared and are then brought up and laid in silence upon the temple-wall of our character. Think beautiful thoughts, and your life will be beautiful. Cherish holy impulses, unselfish feelings, gentle desires, and your conduct will show beauty, purity, and gentleness to all who see you. The picture upon the canvas is first a dream, a thought in the artist's mind; so all the lovely things we do have their birth in lovely thoughts within us. On the other hand, think unholy thoughts and your life will be unholy; think impure thoughts, and your character will be stained and blotched; think bitter, unkind thoughts, and your life will be full of unkindness, resentment, and bitterness. No wonder that we are told in the Bible to keep our heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. If we would be good and live well, we must have our heart renewed by God's grace. If Christ live in us, then all will be well.

“Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the

things which I say?" Confession of Christ is a good thing, but unless the life correspond, it is only a mockery. It is not enough to honour Christ before men, praying to Him and ascribing power and glory to Him. Jesus tells us that those alone shall enter heaven who on earth do the will of the Father who is in heaven. Every confession of Christ must be confirmed and approved by obedience and holiness. "Simply to Thy cross I cling" is not all of the gospel of salvation; 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. We never can enter heaven unless heaven has first entered our heart. We shall do God's will in heaven when we get there; but we must learn to do it here, or we never shall get there.

"Every one that cometh unto Me, and heareth My words, and doeth them . . . is like a man building a house, who digged and went deep, and laid a foundation upon the rock." All turns on the doing or not doing of Christ's words. Both the men described in these last verses hear the words of Christ, but one of them obeys, and thus builds upon the rock-foundation. The other hears, but does not obey, and builds upon the sand. The men built houses which were probably very much alike, so far as the appearance was concerned. But there were two kinds of ground in that vicinity. There was a wide valley which was dry and pleasant in the summer, when the men

were looking for building sites. Then there were high, rocky bluffs. One man decided to build in the valley. It would cost less. The digging was easy, for the ground was soft. Then it was more convenient, for the bluffs were hard to reach. The other man looked farther ahead, and decided to build on high ground. It would cost far more, but it would be more safe. So the two homes went up at the same time, only the one in the valley was finished long before the other. At last the two families had settled in the two residences and were happy. But one night there was a storm. The rain poured down in torrents, and floods swept down off the mountains. The house that was built in the valley was carried away with its dwellers. The house on the bluff was unharmed. The illustration explains itself. He who has built in the valley is the man who has only professions, but has really never given his life to Christ, nor built on Him as a foundation. The man who built on the rock is the man who has true faith in Christ, confirmed by living obedience. The storms that burst are earth's trials and the tempest of death and judgment. The mere professor of religion, not a possessor, is swept away in these storms; for he has only sand under him. He who is truly in Christ is secure; for no storm can reach the shelter of Christ's love. It is a terrible thing to cherish a false hope of salvation through life, only to find in the end that one has built upon the sand.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PENITENT WOMAN

Read Luke VII., 36-50

JESUS did not turn His back on social pleasures. Herein He differed from the Baptist. We are almost certainly right in saying that John would not have gone to the wedding-feast at Cana—Jesus went, and went gladly. John, we are quite sure, would not have gone to dinner at the Pharisee's house—Jesus accepted the invitation without a question and without hesitation. His heart was full of gracious love for men, and He sought every opportunity to do good. He was in the world, but His life remained heavenly in its purity and sweetness. Wherever He went, too, He carried blessing.

The two characters, besides Jesus Himself, in this story, are the woman and the Pharisee. The woman was spoken of as "a sinner." The Pharisee was a sinner, too, but not of the same kind as the woman. Yet he scarcely seems to have been conscious that he was a sinner.

The woman was known as a bad woman; but something had happened just before we see her coming into Simon's house which had wrought

a great change in her. Some of the gracious words of Jesus had fallen into her heart and had started there the vision of a better life.

The woman had followed Jesus into the house, drawn by love for Him who had saved her. She carried in her hand a box of costly ointment. She fell at the Master's feet. She wept, bathing His feet with her tears, then drying off the tears with her untressed hair, kissing them, and then anointing them with the ointment. All this was an expression of deep love which was quite in accordance with Oriental ways. It was the grateful act of a truly penitent sinner.

Jesus seems not to have disturbed the woman, and not to have said anything to her. But His host saw what was going on, and his spirit was vexed within him. He said nothing, either, but into his heart came the thought, "Ah, Jesus is not a prophet, as we supposed Him to be, or He would know what sort of woman this is that He is allowing to kiss His feet." According to Simon's religion a good man should keep himself altogether away from all who are not good. The touch of sinners would defile him.

What was the Pharisee's mistake? Did Jesus not know what kind of woman this was? Yes, He knew all about her, her whole past life, all its shame and guilt. But He knew also that she had repented, had given up her sin, had turned to God, and was now a saved woman.

The Pharisee thought that if Jesus had known

who the woman was He would have spurned her. But Jesus had come to the world to be a physician, and a physician does not spurn the sick—they are the very persons it is His mission to receive and to help. The lost are the very ones Jesus came to save, and He will not turn His back on one of them. This woman was welcome at His feet just because she was a sinner, now penitent.

Of all those who come to Christ none are so welcome as those who have in their hearts a deep sense of unworthiness. The banished Peri in "Lalla Rookh," wandered everywhere, searching for earth's most precious thing, having been told that when she brings it the bar will be lifted. Again and again she brought precious things, but it was only when she bore, last of all, a penitent's tear that the gate of heaven opened to her. The dearest thing on earth to God is a heart broken with sorrow for sin. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

In a beautiful parable Jesus explained to Simon the secret of the woman's love and her act of devotion. Two debtors, one of whom owed much, the other little, were both forgiven. Which would be the more grateful? Simon was able to answer the question, although it is doubtful if he understood its application.

Two thoughts may be noted here: one is that, though the debts of the two men were different,

both were debtors, and neither could pay what he owed. Sinners differ as to the amount of their debt to God, but he who has sinned least is as unable to pay as he who has sinned most.

The other thought is that both were forgiven. That was the only way either could become free from his debt, for neither could pay. The only hope of sinners is in the divine mercy. One man may look with pity upon his fellow in the depths of some great wickedness, yet he himself is a sinner, too, one who must be forgiven or perish. Wonderful is God's forgiveness. It is great enough for the worst sinner. It wipes out as utterly the blackest sins as the least defiling.

Hartley Coleridge's sonnet beautifully expresses the meaning of the scene:

“She sat and wept beside His feet. The weight
Of sin oppressed her heart; for all the blame
And the poor malice, of the worldly shame
To her were past, extinct, and out of date:
Only the sin remained—the leprous state.
She would be melted by the heat of love,
By fires far fiercer than are blown to prove
And purge the silver ore adulterate.
She sat and wept, and with her untressed hair
Still wiped the feet she was so blest to touch;
And He wiped off the soiling of despair
From her sweet soul, because she loved so much.”

Jesus showed Simon that this woman loved more than he did by comparing her treatment of him with Simon's. She had a deeper sense of her

sin, and consequently a deeper sense of the mercy she had received than Simon had. She had wetted His feet with her tears and anointed them with ointment, while Simon had not even given Him water for His feet. The more we realize our sinfulness, the greater is our love for Christ when we are forgiven. It is oftentimes true that the worst sinners make the best Christians. They love more because they owe more to Christ. All through St. Paul's life of wonderful devotion the memory of his past enmity to Christ appears as a motive for his sublime consecration. He sought to burn out the shame of his past wickedness by more intense devotion and more earnest service. If we understood better how much we owe to God's mercy we would be more earnest in our Christian consecration.

The words of Jesus to the penitent woman were full of comfort. He told her first that her faith had saved her. How that word "save" must have thrilled her! The poor, shame-soiled, sin-ruined thing that the Pharisee would have spurned from his feet—saved! An heir of heaven now, destined to walk the heavenly streets in white!

There is an old legend that Mohammed once, in passing along the way, touched a plant of mallow, and it became a geranium and ever since has been a geranium, pouring fragrance everywhere. Christ did something far more wonderful that day. He touched this sinful soul, and it was

transformed into beauty. That is what He is doing every day, and can and will do for every one who creeps to His feet in penitence and faith.

Another of Christ's words of comfort to the woman was, "Go in peace." Peace comes with forgiveness. There never can be any true peace while sins are unforgiven. The dwellers on the slopes of Vesuvius plant their gardens and live in their villas and go on with their work and pleasure, and yet they know that beneath them sleep evermore the awful fires of the volcano, which any day or night may burst out and sweep them away to death. The sinner with his life's sin unforgiven can never have true peace. He is sleeping over a volcano. But when sin is forgiven there is peace with God.

CHAPTER XVIII

MALIGNANT UNBELIEF

Read Mark III., 20-35

ONE of the surest ways to hurt a man's reputation is to give him a bad name. That was the course the scribes took with Jesus. They could not deny that He did very wonderful works, for there were the evidences—the demoniacs in their right mind—but they determined to damage or destroy His influence over the people by starting this atrocious slander about Him. They whispered all round that He and Satan were in league, and that He received His power from Satan. "He hath Beelzebub," they said. The same tactics have since been employed many times. Men who are vigorously engaged in destroying the works of Satan are accused of being themselves Satan's agents.

When there is no way of defeating the earnestness or breaking the power of good men, vile tongues resort to slander. Base stories are started, or suspicions are breathed, or certain acts are misconstrued or misrepresented, or motives are misjudged. Such slanders fly on the wind, and the usefulness of many a godly Chris-

tian has been marred or altogether destroyed by them. Yet we must not be surprised if the world treats us as it treated our Master. We may as well make up our mind to the fact that if we are very earnest either in working for the lost or in fighting vice and wickedness, we shall be both misunderstood and misjudged. Some will say we are crazy, and others that we have a devil. The way to escape all such uncomfortable charges is never to rise above the freezing, or at the highest, the temperate point in Christian fervour, and never to break over the lines of eminent respectability in active Christian service. The devil does not worry over easy-going Christians, for He has little to fear from them. But when he finds a very earnest Christian, bold and uncompromising, he tries to strike him down, or to render him harmless.

They said of the wonderful things Jesus did, "By the prince of the demons casteth He out the demons." It will be noticed that even His enemies did not seek to deny that Jesus performed miracles; they only tried to account for His mighty works in a way that would blacken His name. Skeptics in these days who deny the miracles of Christ should take note of this fact, that even His worst enemies when He was in their very midst did not attempt to deny them. They confessed that He wrought strange works. The Pharisees and scribes confessed it. Herod confessed it, and in his remorse thought that John the Baptist must

have risen from the dead. Not one of His opponents ever hinted a doubt concerning the fact of His miracles. "A blasphemous Life of Jesus, compiled from rabbinical authorities, asserts that He wrought His miracles by possessing Himself secretly of the incommunicable name of God, kept in the Holy of holies and carefully guarded there; and that the cause of His death was His deprivation, through the treachery of Judas, of the manuscript in which He had written this name and other mysteries there acquired." Thus, when the theory of demoniacal possession failed, they invented the theory of magic; but they never denied the miracles themselves. There was no open denial of these until the second century in the works of Celsus.

"How can Satan cast out Satan?" That is the way Jesus swept away their slanderous charge. Satan surely would not join hands with Jesus in His work of tearing down Satan's kingdom. Satan would not be so foolish as to help Jesus cast out his tenants and agents. Satan's aim is to get possession of men, and when he has done this he would not turn about and drive out in disgrace the minor demons he had at so much pains got into men's hearts. We should look with great caution, even with suspicion, on professions of interest in the work of Christ from bad men. They have some other motive than the true one. They mean not good, but evil, for the cause of Christ; hurt, not help, for Christ's Kingdom. Sa-

tan will never help Christ destroy the works of darkness.

“No one can enter into the house of the strong man, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.” Thus Christ declared His power over Satan, and gave a hint of what He will in the end accomplish. If He had not been stronger than Satan He could never have entered his “house” or kingdom at all. Satan met Him at the door, at the time of His temptation, and resisted His entrance with all his power. But Christ was too strong for him and overcame him and entered. That was the beginning of Satan’s downfall. At once our Lord began to “spoil his goods,” to expel his emissaries from human lives, to rescue Satan’s slaves from his clasp, to undo the terrible work he had done in the world. The work of Christianity in this world all these centuries has been “spoiling the goods” in “the strong man’s house”; and this work will go on until Satan’s kingdom is entirely destroyed, the last vestige of his power swept away, and the last trace of the ruin wrought by him removed, and till the kingdom of Christ has filled the world. It ought to be a great comfort to us in our struggle with Satan to know that Christ is stronger than he, and that we need but to flee to Him for shelter and help in danger. We ought to know, also, on whose side we are in this world; for there are but two sides, Christ’s and Satan’s, and the sure

doom of Satan and all his is utter defeat and chains and eternal darkness. If we are on Satan's side we can not escape the ruin which is sure to overtake him and all his.

“Verily I say unto you, All their sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men.” This is a wonderful saying. Mrs. Stowe, in “Uncle Tom's Cabin,” draws a picture of a slave, weary and worn, toiling in the sultry sun. One quotes to him the words, “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “Them 's good words,” said the old slave; “but who says 'em?” All their value depended upon who said them. If it was only a man, there was little comfort in them. But it was Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who said them, and therefore they were of infinite value. The same thought applies to these words: “All their sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men.” They are good words, but who said them? It was the same Jesus, and therefore they are true.

“Whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness.” Learned men do not agree in their idea of what it is to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit. But no matter about the exact meaning of the words; they stand here as a warning against a terrible danger. They are like a red light hung over a most perilous rock. While we may not know just what constitutes the sin here warned against so solemnly, it certainly is our duty to keep as far from its edge as pos-

sible. And surely all willful and determined resistance to the influence of the Spirit is a step toward this point of awful peril. This utterance of our Lord should lead us to treat with utmost reverence every appeal, persuasion, or bidding of the Holy Spirit; never to resist, but always to yield and submit to His guidance. We have no other Friend in this world who can guide us home. If we drive Him away from us forever we shall be left in the darkness of eternal night. How long we may continue to reject Him and not go beyond the line that marks the limit of hope, we know not; but the very thought that there is such a line somewhere ought to startle us into instant acceptance of the offered guidance.

“Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.” This seems too good to be true. To be the brother, or the sister of Jesus—did you ever stop to try to think out what it means? Then, for every Christian to be taken by Christ into as close and tender a relationship as His own mother sustained to Him—did you ever try to think that out, remembering that *you* are the one taken into this loving fellowship? Thousands of women have wished that they could have had Mary’s honour in being the mother of Jesus. Well, here it lies close to their hand. They can not have her distinction in this world, but they can have a place just as near to the heart of Christ as she has. How wonderful is divine grace! How strange it is that sinful

creatures can be taken thus into the very family of God, and have all the privileges and joys of children of God! We can not understand it, but let us believe it and think of it until it fills our hearts with warmth and gladness. But we must not overlook the first part of this verse that tells us who are received into this close relationship. If we would be the brothers and sisters of Christ, we must do the will of God.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SEED IN THE FOUR KINDS OF SOIL

Read Mark IV., 1-20

JESUS taught many of His great lessons in parables. He gave to the disciples this reason, "Unto you is given the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all things are done in parables." The truth of Christ looks very different as seen from within and from without. It has been compared to the stained-glass windows of a church. One who stands outside and looks at the windows, sees none of their rich beauty, and can not understand their meaning. They look only like sheets of dull, patched glass. But let one stand within, and all is transformed. The lines, figures, lettering, and the shades and touches of fine coloring appear in all their rich loveliness. So the truths of the gospel may not be attractive to those who are without. The men of the world see no beauty in them. To human wisdom of the gospel is foolishness. Many people sneer at the faith of Christians as they talk about leaning on the unseen God and clinging to

the promises and hopes of the Scriptures. But when one enters the family of God all is changed. What seemed foolishness, appears now as the highest wisdom. Where there was no loveliness, there is now the loftiest beauty. What was laughed at, now seems to be worthy of admiration and praise. Only those who have accepted Christ as their personal Saviour and are faithfully following Him can really understand the wonderful things of His love.

After Jesus had spoken this parable of the seed and the soils, His disciples sought an opportunity to have Him explain it to them. When we do not understand our Lord's teaching, the best thing we can do is to go away to Him alone and ask Him to interpret it to us. None of His words are meant to be unexplainable. He wants us to understand what He says, and He will make it plain to us if we ask Him to do so. He has promised that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth. That is what we need—to be guided into the truth. Many providences are really parables, things we can not understand. They are not only dark and mysterious, but frequently they are very hard to accept and hard to endure. These perplexing things, too, we may take to Christ, and He will make known to us in His own way and at His own time their hidden meaning.

Christ is the great Sower. Men sometimes bring home from foreign countries seeds of plants

or trees which heretofore have not grown in our country. They plant these seeds, and in due time we have the fruits of other climes growing in our orchards. So Christ brings to this world seeds of spiritual things, and plants them on the earth in men's hearts and lives. The words of the Bible are heavenly seeds. They are seeds having in themselves a secret of life which makes them reproductive. They will grow when planted, and will produce trees of righteousness, harvests of holiness.

Christ is the great Sower, but we are all sowers, too. If we are Christ's friends we should sow good seeds wherever we go. We may do this by speaking kindly words, words of sympathy, comfort, cheer, and hope. We may do it also by writing letters to those to whom we can not speak the word they need. We may do it by scattering words of God, either in our own speech or in leaflets or books. We may do it by living so that the good influence of our lives shall fall like seeds into the hearts of others.

Four kinds of soil are mentioned in this parable. There are those by the "way side, where the word is sown; and when they have heard, straightway cometh Satan, and taketh away the word which hath been sown in them." The way-side soil is beaten down by passing feet. At first soft, the soil hardens more and more until it becomes almost like rock. So human hearts, at first

tender and sensitive to every impression, are trodden over by a thousand influences as life goes on, and oftentimes grow like the beaten wayside. One way in which human hearts are thus hardened is by resisting good impressions. Another way is by life's ordinary experiences treading over them like passing feet. Another way is by sinful habits. There is an old legend of a goblin horseman who galloped at night over men's fields, and wherever his feet touched the soil was blasted, and nothing would ever grow on it again. Thus it is with the heart over which the heavy feet of lust, sensuality, greed, selfishness, and passion are allowed to tread. They beat it down into hardness, and at the same time leave a deadly blight upon it. When the seed falls on hardened soil it lies uncovered, not sinking in, and the watchful, hungry birds soon come and pick it up. So Satan does with good seed that falls upon hardened hearts—he comes and takes it away.

There are others, whose hearts are compared to rocky ground, "who, when they have heard the word, straightway receive it with joy; and they have no root in themselves." The seed sinks in through the thin soil and soon shoots up, but as soon withers. This class represents those whose religion is emotional. There is a superficial softness in their hearts which is easily and quickly touched. They begin the Christian life with a fervour which puts older Christians to the blush.

If religion were all ease and comfort, they might get along; but there are temptations, crosses, and persecutions, and these emotional people can not stand such hard experiences and soon are found giving up the struggle and turning back. They have no root; that is, their religion is emotion, not principle. It lacks faith in Christ and love to Him, and depends upon feeling.

Another class is described as "they that are sown among the thorns." The soil had not been properly cleansed. The old roots had not been digged out. The ground was good enough, and the seed good; but the thorns grew too, as rankly as, even more rankly than, the wheat. What are some of these thorns? Jesus says they are the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. Cares are anxieties, distractions, worries. Martha was in danger of having the good seed in her heart choked out by her distracting thoughts concerning her household affairs. Worry is always a peril. Many people have all the good of God's grace in them choked and destroyed by frets and anxieties which they allow to get into their hearts. Many a business man loses Christ in anxiety about his business affairs. It is no wonder there are so many warnings in the Bible against worry. Then, as for the deceitfulness of riches, thousands of lives have been starved into ghostly spiritual leanness by desire for wealth. The point to be kept in mind is that the love of Christ in

the heart and the Christian graces are in danger of being choked out by other affections springing up in the same soil.

The seed on thorny ground is not altogether killed—the growths are so sapped and dwarfed that they bring no wheat to maturity. The wheat amid the thorns grows, but becomes pale and shriveled, yielding no good ripe wheat. So it is in the Christian life in which the thorns are permitted to grow. There are fruits of the Spirit, but they are shriveled and feeble. Men and women may go on working in the Church, teaching, preaching, praying, giving; but the life is not healthy and vigorous. The lesson is the importance of the cultivation of the heart after the good seed has been sown in it. We need to keep our hearts with all diligence and to watch the very beginnings of evil in them. We need to cast out remorselessly anything that threatens our religion. Sometimes God Himself does the weeding. He takes away the wealth that was choking the spiritual life. He lifts out of the bosom the earthly object that is absorbing all the heart's love. The process is painful, but the results are full of blessing.

The fourth kind of soil is the "good ground"—"such as hear the word, and accept it, and bear fruit." The word is received with attention, thought, faith, and prayer. Thus it is kept in the heart, as rich soft soil receives the wheat seed. No birds can pick it away. It settles down deep

into the life, no underlying rock hindering its rooting and growth. The soil is diligently watched, no thorns being allowed to spring up to choke out the golden wheat. Thus the good seed of the word has opportunity to grow and to bring forth fruit. The heavenly teachings that are received into the heart reappear in the character, in the conduct, dispositions, act, spirit, service.

CHAPTER XX

THE GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM

Read Mark IV., 26-32

JESUS loved nature. He saw in it the tokens and expressions of His Father's love and care. It made Him think of His Father. What could be more exquisite, for example, than the thoughts a little flower started in His mind, as we find them expressed in the Sermon on the Mount? He was urging people not to worry, never to be anxious. He wanted to make them understand that they were always in God's thought, in His care. Just then His eye fell on a lily growing in its marvelous beauty by the wayside, and He used it to teach a lesson about the care of God. He cares even for the smallest flower, and His hand weaves for it its exquisite raiment. "And why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

Our Lord thus saw in every flower something His Father had made and beautified, something He cared for with all gentleness. And of whatever other use the flowers are, He at least wants us to learn from them this truth of confidence and trust, so that we shall never be anxious. The flowers never are.

Many of our Lord's words show us His love for nature, His familiarity with it, and with its laws and processes. Our present passage is one that only Mark records for us. Jesus speaks here of the way a seed grows. We have the familiar picture of a sower going forth to sow. In our modern agriculture, with its wonderful machinery, we are losing much of the picturesqueness of the farmer's life as it was in our Lord's day, and even as it was in the days of our fathers. Men do not go forth now with seed-bag swung over their shoulder. Now they ride out on the great grain drill and, as they drive over the field, plant the seeds deep in the earth.

Still the lesson of the seed is the same in whatsoever way it may be planted. It is a very little thing, but Jesus sees in it and in its mode of growing a picture of something very great, very wonderful, a picture of the kingdom of God. The same laws prevail in things natural and things spiritual. "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth." We are all sowers, casting seeds all our days. We may not be farmers or gardeners, yet everywhere we

go we are sowing seeds. We talk to a friend an hour, and then go our way, perhaps never giving thought again to what we said; but years afterward something will grow up in the friend's life and character from the seeds we dropped so unconsciously or without intention or purpose that day. We lend a friend a book, and he takes it home and reads it. We never think of the book again; perhaps our friend never speaks of it, telling us whether he liked it or not. But many years later there is a life moving about among other lives and leaving upon them its impress which was received from the book we lent—something which influenced the course and career of the life.

We think we have but little influence in the world, that what we are or what we say or what we do, as we go about, matters little, leaves little impression on any other lives. Yet there is not an hour when seeds are not dropping from our hands which will stay in lives and grow. Seeds are wonderful things. There is mystery in the secret of life which they carry in their hearts. Diamonds or pearls have no such secret of life in them. Men do not plant them. They never grow. We do not know what marvelous results will come from some slightest word of ours spoken any day. It may not always be good—it may be evil; all depends upon the seed. The farmer sowed good seed, expecting a rich and beautiful harvest. An enemy came one night, while the

farmer was sleeping, and sowed tares. And the tare seeds grew and spoiled the harvest. We need to watch what we are sowing these days, lest a trail of evil and unbeauty shall follow us. We need to watch what we say in our little talks with the people we meet through the days, lest we leave stain or hurt behind us. Every time the first king of the ten tribes of Israel is mentioned in the history it is in this terrible way—"the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." Surely it would have been better never to have been born than to be born and then have such a biography as that.

But it is of the growth of the seed that our Lord speaks here. "As if a man should cast seed upon the earth; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, he knoweth not how." He does not stay in the fields and watch his seed growing. He only casts it into the ground and lets it grow as it will. He does not dig it up every day and see how it is growing. When the seed is once in the soil, it is out of the sower's hand forever. Good or bad, it is gone now beyond his reach. You may write a letter full of bitter words. You were angry when you wrote it. Your conscience told you you ought not to send it, for it would only cause bitterness. You went out to mail it. All along the way as you went toward the post box the voice within kept saying, "Don't mail it." You came to the box and hesitated, for still there

was a clamorous voice beseeching you, "Do not send it." But the anger was yet flaming, and you put the letter in the box. Then you began to wish you had not done it. It was too late now, however, for the cruel letter was forever beyond your reach. No energy in the world could get it back. The evil was irremediable.

So it is when one drops a seed into the ground, whether it be good or evil. The die is cast. The seed is in the ground. There is no use to watch it. So it is when one has dropped an evil influence into a life. Until the word was spoken or the thing was done, it was in your own power and you could have withheld it. Till then you could have kept the word unspoken or the deed undone. But now it is out of your power. No swiftest messenger can pursue it and take it back. The seed is sown, and you can only let it stay and grow. A man goes on with his work, busy in a thousand ways, and the seed he dropped is growing continually, he knows not how, into what form; the word he spoke, the thing he did, is in people's hearts and lives, and its influence is at work, he knows not how.

There is something startling in this thought of how what we have once done passed then forever out of our hand, beyond recall, and how it goes on in its growth and influence in the silence, while we wake and while we sleep. The time to change evil things, to keep them from forever

growing into more and more baleful evil, is before we cast the seed into the ground.

There is a strange and marvelous power, too, in the earth, which, when it receives the seed, begins to deal with it so as to bring out its mystery of life. If the seed is not cast into the ground, it will not grow. Planting it seems to be spoiling it; but really it is saving it, making it grow. Jesus said, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit." This was a little parable. Jesus meant that His life could not accomplish its blessed work but by His dying. The same is true of our lives. We can keep them from suffering and sacrifice; we can choose to live selfishly, keep ourselves from hardship and from self-denial, but that will be keeping a seed out of the ground. Then it will never be anything but a seed. Its life can be brought out, and it can grow only through being cast into the ground.

Here again we see how the planting is all we have to do, all we can do. "The earth beareth fruit of herself." We can not help the soil take care of the seed. Then, in the spiritual meaning of the Master's words, we do not have to help God take care of the good words we speak to others. The seed is divine, and the influences that act upon it are divine. So all we have to do is to get the truth into the hearts of those we would save and build up; God will do the rest. We

are not responsible for the growth of the seed, for the work of grace in a human heart. This does not mean that we do not have God in our lives; it means rather that God and we cooperate in all our good work. God made the seed, and God by His Spirit broods over it in the life where it finds lodgment, and so "the earth beareth fruit of herself."

Great is the mysterious power in the earth which touches the seed and enfolds it, and quickens it, and causes it to grow. But this only illustrates the power that works in human hearts and lives, the power of the Divine Spirit. This holy life receives the heavenly truth that is put into the heart, enfolds and quickens it, and brings out its blessed possibilities till we see a new life like unto God's own life, a Christ-life, blessing the world with its beauty and its love.

The growth is natural and progressive: "First the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear." The farmer does not expect golden grain to come first; it can come only in its time. We should not expect ripeness of experience in the child Christian.

The parable of the mustard seed needs little explanation. Probably only the smallness of the seed was in the Lord's mind, and the largeness of the tree or bush into which the plant grows. The Church of Christ had a very small beginning, and it has grown till now its branches spread over nearly all lands. It is because the seed has life

in it that it produces such wonderful power of growth. It is the secret of heavenly life in the words of God that makes them so marvelous in the results that follow their scattering. Such results do not come from the wisdom or the philosophies of men. The Bible is the Book of God. It was given by inspiration of God. This is the secret of its growth.

The story of the English Bible is a most wonderful illustration of the mustard-seed parable. It is three hundred years since our great Common Version was given to the people, and who can estimate the influence of the Book during these years? Think of what it has done in the building up of the character of the English-speaking people of the world. Think what it has done through the institutions of Christianity which have been nourished by it. Think of all the fruits of the Scriptures in personal lives, in education and culture. The kingdom of God as it has extended in the influence of the English Bible, especially in these three centuries, is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown upon the earth, has grown up, becoming greater than all herbs, and putting out great branches, so that the birds of the heavens lodge under the shadow thereof.

CHAPTER XXI

A TROUBLED SEA AND A TROUBLED SOUL

Read Mark IV., 35 to V., 20

THESE were marked days in the life of Jesus—days in which He did special things or said special words, days that were made bright and memorable by unusual manifestations of grace and love. “That day”—the day at the ending of which our passage belongs, was one of the great days of our Lord’s ministry. It was a day of teaching by parables, a form of His teaching now introduced for the first time. Nothing in nature or in common life was left unused by the great Teacher. The light, the darkness, the plays of children, leathern bottles, foxes and birds, patched and new garments, and even the homely barnyard hen furnished illustrations for His teachings. Thus He brought the great heavenly lessons down into the everyday lives of the plain, common people.

At the close of this busy day Jesus said to His disciples, “Let us go over unto the other side.” Probably His object was to get quickly and quietly away from the crowd, that He might obtain rest. The people gave Him no opportunity for

rest while He was within their reach. They pressed upon Him ever in rude and unmannerly ways, so that He could not get leisure even to eat, and scarcely was permitted to sleep. That He was very weary that evening is evident from what follows in the narrative. It is said that the disciples took Him with them even "as He was, in the boat;" that is, they left at once in the same boat in which He had been teaching, not waiting for any preparations. The object, probably, was to get away unobserved, that none of the throng might see Him departing and follow Him.

The storm seems to have come up unexpectedly after they put out to sea. It was one of those sudden storms that so often sweep down from the surrounding hills upon the Sea of Galilee. This storm was very violent. The waves poured into the boat, which seemed as if it would be swallowed up by them.

Notice that the presence of Christ in the boat with His disciples did not prevent the coming of the storm. Sometimes people think when they are in trouble that Jesus has forsaken them, or they would not have such hard experiences. If He were with them, they say, He would not permit them to suffer so. But Christ never has promised to keep us out of trouble. When He was about going away He prayed the Father to keep His disciples, but only from the evil of the world. He did not say evils, but "the evil." There is only one evil. It is not suffering, nor

loss, nor persecution—the only evil in the world is sin. If Christ is with us we shall be kept from sin, but perhaps not from storms, from sufferings, from bereavements and trials.

The most remarkable thing in the story of this night was the sleeping Master. The tempest howled and the waves swept over the boat; but during all the storm, on the cushion in the stern lay Jesus asleep. This tells us, for one thing, how weary He was after the long day's work, so weary that even the terror and the danger of the storm did not awake Him. He slept through it all. But it tells us also of the peace of His heart, which kept Him in quietness and in confidence in the most trying experiences. This peace the Master would give also to us. He would have such a peace in our hearts that we shall not be disturbed nor alarmed by the greatest of dangers or calamities. If Christ is with us, nothing can harm us. That little boat never could have gone down in the waves with the Master on board. The boat was the emblem of the Church—indeed, the whole Church was in it that wild night. Christ is always with His Church, not only in its days of sunshine and prosperity, but also in its days of trial and in the midst of fiercest storms. Never can the Church be destroyed. "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

The disciples in their terror awoke their Master. They even seemed to chide Him for sleeping

when they were in such danger. "Carest Thou not that we perish?" He did care. His heart was awake and watching while He slept so soundly in His weariness. We need never fear in any time of darkness, suffering, or perplexity that Christ has forgotten us or that He will allow us to be harmed. In another storm on the same sea, when the disciples were also in great peril, Jesus was absent; He was up on the mountain in the darkness. But while away from them, He kept His eye upon them all the night. He saw them distressed in their rowing. Then, in due time, He came to them, walking on the water, and delivered them. Always we are remembered and thought of in heaven. We never can drift beyond Christ's love and care.

While with peace in His heart Jesus slept in quietness in the fierce storm, undisturbed by its roar and by the sweeping of waters over the boat, He heard the first call of the disciples when in their distress they called to Him. There may come times in our lives when Christ appears to us to be asleep. He comes not with deliverance in our danger. He is not disturbed by the storms which to us seem so fearful. But in the wildest fury of circumstances He hears the faintest prayer of those who cry to Him for help and deliverance.

Christ's power over the forces of nature is illustrated in the way He answered the cry of His disciples that night. He arose from the

cushion where He had been sleeping so sweetly, and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still." Instantly the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. It ought to be an immeasurable comfort to us to know that our Saviour is indeed Master of wind and wave, and of all the forces and powers of nature. We need never be afraid in peril of flood or earthquake or storm, for He who is our Friend is Master of all the elements. No wild tempest ever gets away from His control. A Christian woman who was undisturbed in an earthquake said to a friend who wondered at her composure, "Why, I am glad that I have a God who can shake this old earth."

When Jesus had quieted the storm on the sea, He turned to His trembling disciples, whose spirits were swept by a storm of fear, and asked them, "Why are ye fearful? have ye not yet faith?" It was time they had learned to have faith. They had seen enough of faith in Him to teach them to trust and not be afraid in even the sorest dangers. But how is it with us? Are we alarmed by life's perils? Have we not yet learned to trust?

As soon as Jesus with His disciples came off the sea, He found sufferers waiting for Him. "Straightway there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit." In this demoniac we have a sample of the work of Satan when he gets full control in a man. He destroys every beautiful thing in the life, and leaves only ruin.

No chains could bind this demoniac. 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 the Evil One. The love of a godly mother is a strong bond, but many a child tears 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 what in many ways Satan's captives always do. They may not literally go about cutting their flesh with knives or bruising their bodies with stones; but they do gash and bruise their souls. Sin always wounds the life, 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.

Demons were afraid of Christ. "I adjure thee by God, torment me not." The torment this demon dreaded was in being deprived of the opportunity of tormenting the man of whom he had possession. Demons find their pleasure in working mischief, in destroying the beautiful work of

God's hands, and in ruining 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. We ought to tear off Satan's mask and show him as he is to our own hearts and to the hearts of others. 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. Sin is never a friend to man. It never does good to any one, but always harm. 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 persistent demon. No one could bind this demoniac nor resist his superhuman strength. But when the man met Jesus, he met one who was stronger than "the strong man" in possession. It was in vain that the demon adjured Jesus and made a show of resistance. At His word the foul spirit was compelled to leave the man he had possessed so long. 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 captive free. Those who have long been trying in vain to reform, to break away from evil practices, see in Christ the Friend 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 terrible 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. God's way leads upward—it is always uphill to Christ and to heaven. Every divine impulse is toward something higher and better. Christ never yet sent a man downhill. But the devil always drives downward. These poor swine, demon-possessed, rushed down the steep way into the sea and perished. Human souls, demon-possessed, rush down sin's precipitous course and perish. 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 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. There always are people who hate Christ's religion because it interferes with their wrong business and cuts off the source of their sinful gain. Saloon-keepers oppose revivals because when the devil is cast out of men they do not patronize the saloons any more. But it is always a perilous thing to ask Jesus to go away. He did now as these people asked Him to do—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 still continued lame, demoniacs remained demon-possessed. We must be careful never to ask Christ to go away from us. We see Jesus sailing away from this coast, to come back again no more. May He not do the same if we ask Him to leave us?

Jesus knows where He wants His saved ones to witness for Him. 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 to follow Him into distant lands. Others He wants to stay at home and bear witness among those who have known them to the grace and love of God. Each one of us may be sure that if we truly put our life into the hands of Christ He will give us our work where it will do the greatest

good. If He wants one young minister to go to the foreign field as a missionary, he must go. But he must not blame his classmate who does not go to the foreign field, but enters the field at home. The home mission service is just as honourable as the foreign. The only question with any one should be, "What does Christ want me to do; where does He want me to work for Him?" We serve Christ best when we serve in the place and in the manner in which He directs us.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RULER'S DAUGHTER

Read Mark V., 21-43

JAIRUS was an important man in Capernaum. He was one of the elders. People looked up to him. He was influential in affairs, perhaps rich. But as we see him, we think of none of these things—what strikes us in him is his anguish of heart. Grief brings all men to the same level. A father, as we see him battling with the world, may seem sometimes to lack the tender emotions. But let his child become dangerously sick, and his heart is revealed—a heart of tender love.

The next interesting thing in Jairus is his going to Jesus with his grief. Perhaps he would never have gone to Jesus if this trouble had not come to his own home. Not many men of his class favoured Jesus, would invite Him to their homes, or care to be considered among His friends. But the sore sickness of his child and the fact that Jesus was healing so many who were sick, made him ready to go to Jesus, in the hope that his child might be spared to him. We can not know in this world how much we owe to

painful things. Many another father has been driven to Christ by the sickness of his child. Many a mother has been taught to pray and to cling to God by the anguish of her little one.

What Jairus said when he came to Jesus shows that he had faith in His power to heal the sick child. With trembling speech he told Him that his little daughter lay at the point of death, but if only Jesus would come and lay His hands on her, she would not die. We may pray for our children when they are sick. Not always is it God's will that they should recover. This may not be the best thing for them. We should pray in faith, but should then leave our request in God's hands, knowing that He will do what is best. It is right that we should go to Christ with every case of sickness in our home or among our friends. We should send for the physician, too; for God wants us to use human help so far as this will avail. At the same time we should pray; for whether through or independently of means, it is Christ who is the Healer.

Jesus is always quick to hear the cry of human distress. He went at once with Jairus. He did not have to be urged. But on the way there was an interruption. A poor woman, wasted by long sickness, crept up behind Jesus as He was hastening to the ruler's house, and shyly and stealthily touched the hem of His garment with her trembling fingers. There was a prayer in that touch, a heart's cry, which Jesus heard, though no word

was spoken. There was also faith in the touch. The woman may not have understood the theology of prayer. She knew, however, that that One who was passing so near to her had power to heal, and to heal her; and she did the best she knew, and touched the fringe of His garment, believing that in some way she would be healed. So she touched the garment, and instantly healing flowed from Jesus into her body, and she was made well.

She had meant to slip away and lose herself in the crowd, not letting it be known that she was healed; but Jesus called her. He would not allow her to go away without His speaking to her. He wished her to have a full blessing, not a half blessing only. Her disease had been cured, but He wished to give her also a spiritual blessing. Many people in their sickness have only one desire—to get well again. They send for physicians and faithfully use their medicines and try the remedies they prescribe, but they think of no other blessing to be sought. If they pray, it is only for physical healing. But this is most imperfect faith, most meager, inadequate prayer. When we are sick there are two blessings we should seek. We should desire to recover, if that is God's will. It is our duty to try to get well, that we may take up again our work and go on with it. But at the same time we should try to get some curing of faults, some enrichment of life, some new vision of God, some fresh strength

for service from our sickness before it leaves us. It has some mission to us. It would be a great misfortune to us if we should fail to get from it the good, the benefit, the enriching it was meant to bring to us.

This woman had got her healing, but she was on the point of missing the larger help the Master wanted her to have. She was recalled by the Master, came to His feet and told Him all, and received salvation as well as healing.

This was a bit of our Lord's wayside ministry. He was going with the ruler to heal his child. We would say that in view of the fact that the case was so urgent, the Master would pay no heed to the woman's appeal, but would hasten on to the home of the ruler. The little girl was at the point of death, the father had said. Surely there was no time to lose. The child might die if He lingered even a moment. Yet Jesus was not hurried by the urgency of the ruler's importunity. He did not tell the woman He could not wait to heal her. Nor did He ignore the pressure there was in her touch and leave her unhealed. At once healing came to her. That was all the woman wanted, and He might have hastened on with the ruler. But he stopped and turned to speak to her. "Who touched My garments?" The work of healing was only half done, and He would complete it. So abundant is His grace that He never has to fail to do one act of love because He is in the midst of another.

No harm came from the interruption and the delay. True, the child had died before Jesus reached the ruler's home. It seemed, indeed, that Jesus had lingered too long on the way. If only He had not stopped to talk with the woman in the crowd! Now it was too late for Him to come. "Trouble not the Master," the servants said; "thy daughter is dead." Jesus heard what the messengers said, and comforted Jairus by saying to him, "Fear not, only believe." Jesus had made no mistake. He never makes a mistake—He never comes too late.

Jesus went on with Jairus and soon gave back the child to her parents alive. Some whose little ones are dead, as they read this part of the story, may say: "If only Jesus had restored our child after it had died! But He did not." He did not literally restore your dead, yet He comforted you in a way which wonderfully sustained you. Since Christ has died and risen again, dying in Christ means only passing into fuller, richer life. Your child is not dead. You see her not; but she never lived in this world so really as she does now. You have the comfort of knowing also that in the hands of Christ all is well. Then you have the assurance of meeting her again by and by.

Christ has a heart of sympathy and love which will lead Him to take a tender interest in every need or sorrow of ours, and to help us in the best way. Our need is our strongest claim on Him. When the freed slave Sojourner Truth was in

great distress over her child, which had been stolen from her and sold, she offered this prayer: O Lord, if I was rich as You be, and You was as poor as I be, I 'd help You—You know I would. And O, do help me. And I felt sure that He would, and He did," continued the poor woman.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE VISIT TO NAZARETH

Read Luke IV., 16-30

JESUS never forgot the place where He had spent His childhood years. We are not given many facts of His life there. Nothing indicates that there was anything unusual in the story of the thirty years He spent there. The more we think of His life at Nazareth as simply natural, without anything unusual, the nearer shall we come to the true conception of the boy and young man who grew up in the lowly village of Nazareth. Our passage to-day tells of His visit to His old home after He had been away for many months.

“He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up.” It was not an easy place for Jesus to visit. Everybody knew Him. He had lived there for thirty years. He had been playmate and schoolmate with the people of His own age. He had been a carpenter, doing work for many years in the shop and about the town. The young men of Nazareth thought themselves as good as He was, and were not in mood to receive instruction from Him. It is easy for us to understand the prejudice and envy with which people listened

to Jesus as He spoke to them that day in their synagogue.

There are some lessons to be taken, however, from our Lord's example in thus going back to Nazareth. One is, that we ought to seek the good of our own neighbours and friends. Many young men go away from plain country or village homes and in other and wider spheres rise to prominence and influence. Such ought not in their eminence to forget their old home. They owe much to it. It is pleasant to hear of rich men giving libraries or establishing hospitals or doing other noble things for the town in which they were born. Among our first obligations is that which we owe to our old neighbours.

Another lesson is, that as young people we ought to live so carefully that when we grow up we may be able to go back to our old home and, in the midst of those who have known us all our life, witness for God. There are some men, good and great now, whose preaching would have but small effect where they were brought up because of the way they lived during their youth. Sins of youth break the power of life's testimonies in later years. A blameless youth makes one's words strong in mature days.

“He entered, as His custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day.” Here we have a glimpse of our Lord's religious habits. From childhood His custom had been to attend the synagogue service on the Sabbath. Here are good

shoe prints for young people to set their feet in. The time to begin to attend church is in youth. Habits formed then stay by us all our life. If our custom is to stay away then from Church services, we will be very apt to keep up that custom when we get older. On the other hand, if we go to church regularly from childhood, the custom will become so wrought into our life that in after years we shall not incline to stay away. And the value of such a habit is very great.

“He opened the book, and found the place where it was written.” The book was part of the Old Testament. Some people have the feeling that the Old Testament is dry and uninteresting. But we see here what precious things Jesus found in it that day in the synagogue. The passage which He quoted drips with the sweetness and tenderness of divine love. It is a great honeycomb of gospel grace. Some men were about to tear down an old frame house, long unoccupied. When they began to remove the weatherboarding they found a mass of honey. As they removed the boards at different points they discovered that the whole side of the house, between the weatherboarding and the plastering, was filled with honey. People regard the Old Testament as an old, worn-out book, a mere relic of old ceremonial days. But when they begin to open it they find honey, and as they look into it at other points they find that all the interstices, in among the histories, the chronicles of war, and

the descriptions of ceremonial rites, are full of sweetest honey. Here is a bit of dripping comb, and there are hundreds more just as rich. We do not know what we lose when we do not study the Old Testament.

“The poor . . . the captives . . . the blind . . . them that are bruised.” These are the special classes of people to whom Jesus was sent. What a picture this is of humanity! Some people ridicule what the Bible says about a fall. They tell us there never was a fall, and that the world is all right. They talk eloquently about the grandeur of human life. But this eighteenth verse certainly looks very much like the picture of a very bad ruin. Read the description—poor, captives, blind, bruised. There is not much grandeur in that. Any one who goes about and looks honestly at life knows that the picture is not overdrawn. On every hand we see the wreck and ruin caused by sin. Then suffering and sorrow follow, and hearts and lives are crushed and bruised.

But there is something here a great deal brighter than this sad picture. Light breaks on the ruin as we read that it was to repair just such moral desolations as we see here that Jesus came. He came to preach good tidings to the poor, to proclaim release to captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty them that are bruised. He saw in all these ruins of humanity something that by His grace He

could make beautiful enough for heaven and glory. Christ is a restorer. There are men who take old, dimmed, effaced, almost destroyed pictures and restore them until they appear nearly as beautiful as when they first came from the artist's hand. So Christ comes to ruined souls, and by the power of His love and grace He restores them until they wear His own beauty in the presence of God.

“To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” For the Jews this “acceptable year” closed with the condemnation of the Messiah. Jesus stood on Olivet and looked down upon the city and wept over it and said, “If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.” When He spoke these words, amid the rush of tears and with loud outcry of grief, “the acceptable year” closed. After that the doom hung over the beautiful city, which in forty years burst upon it in all its woe and terrible-ness. This is history. But there is another way to look at this matter. There is an “acceptable year” for each soul. It begins when Christ first comes to us and offers salvation. It continues while He stands at our door and knocks. It closes when we drive Him away from our door by utter and final rejection, or when death comes upon us unsaved and hurries us away forever from the world of mercy. Since the past is gone and there is no certain future to any one, the “acceptable year” to us all is now. Shall we

allow it to pass and close while we remain unsaved?

“To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears.” Seven hundred years before had the words been written. Now Jesus reads them and says to the people: “I am the One to whom the description refers. I am the One the prophet meant.” The whole Old Testament was full of Christ, and the New is full of correspondences and fulfillments. It is pleasant, too, to take this particular passage and show how Christ indeed fulfilled in His life and ministry the mission which the prophet marked out for Him. He preached to the poor, He healed the broken-hearted. Wherever He went, the sorrowing and the troubled flocked about Him. As a magnet draws steel filings to itself out of a heap of rubbish, so did the heart of Christ draw to Him the needy, the sad, the suffering, the oppressed. He was the friend of sinners. He brought deliverance to sin’s captives, setting them free and breaking their chains. He opened blind eyes; not only blind natural eyes to see the beautiful things of this world, but also blind spiritual eyes to see spiritual things. Then He lifted the yoke off the crushed and oppressed, inviting all the weary to Himself to find rest. His whole life was simply a filling out of this outline sketch.

“They rose up, and cast Him forth out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill . . . that they might throw Him down.” Their envy grew into murderous rage. We see first the

danger of allowing envious feelings to stay in our hearts; they are sure to grow into greater bitterness, and may lead us into open and terrible sin. We should instantly check every thought or motion of anger or hatred and cast it out of our heart. This act shows also the natural hatred of God which is in human hearts. We talk severely of the Jews' rejection of their Messiah, but this opposition to God is not exclusively a Jewish quality. Is it not the same with all of us? So long as the divine teaching runs along in lines that are pleasing to us, we assent, and applaud the beauty of God's truth. But when the teaching falls athwart our own tendencies and dispositions and opinions, we wince, and too often declare our disbelief. They tried to kill Him; is not the rejection of many people now just as violent? They would kill Him if they could.

"His word was with authority." His words are always with authority. We remember how all things hearkened to His words and obeyed them. Diseases fled at His command. The winds and waves were quieted and hushed at His word. The water changed to wine at His bidding. The dead in their graves heard His call and answered. Evil spirits owned His lordship. Nothing for a moment resisted His authority—nothing but man. Shall we not take Christ's word as the rule of our faith and of our conduct? Shall we not yield to His authority?

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Read Mark VI., 14-29

WE have here at the very beginning a serious case of conscience. One would say that Herod was past having such fits of remorse, as his life was so wholly bad. But in even the worst men conscience is not apt to be entirely dead. At least Herod's conscience was only asleep, and when He heard of Jesus going about the country, working miracles, it seemed to him that it must be John the Baptist, whom he had so tragically beheaded, and who had been raised from the dead. Herod's friends tried to quiet him, assuring him that it was not John returned, but a new prophet, who was doing these wonderful things. However, Herod's fear could not be quieted, his remorse was so great. "No, it is John, whom I beheaded; he is risen." Conscience is our best friend so long as we live right. But if we sin, it becomes a torturing fire. We may think we can easily forget our sin, but conscience refuses to forget. Lady Macbeth said that all the perfumes of Arabia could not sweeten her little hand. Visitors traveling in Scotland are shown a stone with a spot of blood on it which, it is said, will not

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wash off. If we would be surely saved from the terrors of the accusing conscience we must live so as to have the approval of conscience on all our acts.

John the Baptist was a wonderful man. The story of his death is most tragic. It seems utterly unmeet that a man so noble, so worthy, who had done such a good work, should be brutally killed to gratify the resentment of a wicked woman. For it was Herodias who really caused the death of the Baptist. Wicked as Herod was, he would not have killed John if it had not been for the woman, who never could forgive the preacher for reproving her sin. The part that Herodias played in this crime shows her in a most pitiful light. She was a disgrace to her sex. From the time John spoke so plainly against her sin she was determined that he should die for it. Herod protected him from her plots, but she bided her time.

A "convenient day" came, by and by, and Herodias set herself to accomplish her purpose. It was Herod's birthday. A great banquet was in progress—Herod and the principal men of his kingdom were feasting together. Wine flowed freely, and when the king and his guests were well under its influence, Herodias sent her daughter into the banqueting room to take the part of a common dancing-girl in the presence of a party of drunken men. A true mother shields her child from all that would dishonour her. Now, in

order to bring about John's death, this mother was ready to degrade her own daughter.

The record says that Herod was pleased by what he saw. He called the girl to him, and in his drunken mood gave her a promise, "Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee." She was shrewd enough to demand an oath of him, lest when he was out of his wine he might refuse to do what he had promised. "And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom." A man under the influence of strong drink will pledge anything. Many men in such moments have made promises which it has cost them dearly to keep.

The child did not know how to answer Herod, what request to make of him; so she ran to her mother in a dutiful fashion and asked her, "What shall I ask?" Perhaps the child was thinking of a palace that the king might give her, or of some wonderful gems that she would like to wear. But she could not herself decide what to ask. The words in which the mother answered her child's question showed the terrible wickedness of the heart of Herodias. "Ask for John Baptist's head," she said. At last the moment had come for the full revenge of Herodias. But think of a mother asking her own child to do such a terrible thing!

The story moves on swiftly, and at length the closing scene in the tragedy is enacted. The girl

herself must have had a cruel heart to go so gleefully to Herod with the request which Herodias had put into her mouth. "What have you decided to ask of me?" inquired Herod. "John Baptist's head," was the girl's answer. The king was shocked and grieved at receiving such a request. How could he grant the girl's request? He shrank from the crime, but in his cowardice he dared not show his hesitation. His courtiers would laugh at him if he did. He must be brave, whatever the cost might be. Anything that belonged to him he was under obligation to give to the child—he had said he would; he had sworn it. But John's head was certainly not Herod's to give to anybody.

The king trembled at the request. He was about to say to the girl that he could not give her what she asked; but there was his oath—he could not break that, so he said to himself. His princes and courtiers would laugh at him if he showed tenderness of heart in such a matter of sentiment as this. So he sent for an executioner and had the great preacher killed in his dungeon, and his head brought on a dish and given to the girl. Herod had kept his promise; but there was murder on his soul.

"How could Herod have refused," asks one, "when he had taken such an oath?" It was a sin to make such a rash promise, and a still greater sin to seal it by an oath. We should never pledge ourselves to do anything which an-

other may ask of us until we know what it is. To keep a promise made thus may require us to sin grievously. But if in a moment of foolish rashness we pledge ourselves to do something wrong, we are still not required to do it. We should break our promise rather than do a wicked thing. In this case Herod ought to have broken his oath. He knew this, but he was afraid of the laughter of his guests, and committed a horrible crime rather than be a man and refuse to do the thing which he knew to be wrong.

Amid all the dark crime and shame of this story one figure stands out noble and heroic, splendid in character, unspotted in whiteness, strong in faithfulness. We are inclined to pity John, as the victim of such a crime. But our pity should be rather for those who robbed John of his life, while for him we have only admiration. John seemed to die prematurely. He was only about thirty-three years of age. He had preached but a year or so, and was then cast into prison, where he lay a long time. It seemed that he was but only beginning his life work. We can think of his disciples and friends lamenting over his early death, and saying, "If only he had lived to a ripe old age, preaching his wonderful sermons, touching people's lives, advancing the kingdom of God, giving blessing and comfort to people—what a benediction he would have been to this world!" But here we see his splendid life quenched at probably less than three and

thirty. Was it not a mistake? No; God makes no mistakes. "Every man is immortal till his work is done." One thing we know at least—John's mission was accomplished. He was sent from God to introduce the Messiah to the people. He did this, and did it grandly. The best life need not be the longest—it must be one that fulfills God's purpose for it. If we do God's will for us, we have lived well, whether it be for fourscore years or for only a few months.

John died in a very sad and tragic way, died in a prison, at the hands of a common executioner; yet there was no stain upon his name. He had kept his manhood unspotted through all the years. Men would call his work a failure; it certainly was not a worldly success. Yet it was a fine moral success. Jesus said that among all men born of woman, none was greater than John. Earth's failures may be heaven's truest successes.

The life of John the Baptist is rich in its lessons. For example, he hid himself away and pointed the people always to Christ. He was willing to decrease, that Christ might increase. When his popularity waned and he was left almost alone, with scarcely any friends or followers, he kept as sweet and worked as faithfully as when he was everybody's favourite. He was heroic in reproving sin, even in a king. His whole life was noble. Forgetting himself, he lived for God in the truest and most complete way unto the end.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

Read Mark VI., 30-44

AFTER the tragic death of John the Baptist his disciples paid loving honour to his body. Their sorrow must have been very great, for they loved their master. We do not know whether or not John had those lovable qualities which drew men to him and made them his friends, or whether, by reason of his natural sternness and his ascetic severity he failed to be a friend of men, as Jesus was. It is not likely that he drew men to him as the other John did, or as St. Paul did, or that men loved him as our Lord's disciples loved their Master. Yet it is certain that there must have grown up between the Baptist and his disciples a strong affection, and that they were sorely grieved at his death.

Jesus had sent His apostles on a brief missionary tour. When they returned they made report to Him. "They told Him all things, whatsoever they had done, and whatsoever they had taught." No doubt they told Him all they had tried to do, even if they had seemed to fail—how

the people had received them, and how sometimes they had rejected them. They would tell Him, too, of their mistakes and blunders. This is what we should do at the close of any work we are doing for our Master—go to Him and make report of it all. It is well, indeed, that every evening we carry to Christ such a report of our life for the day. There could be no better evening prayer than the reporting to Christ the story of the day—simply, humbly, truthfully, fully, confidently. There will be many confessions in this recital; for we should tell Him all, hiding nothing. If we form the habit of doing this, it will be a restraint upon us many times when tempted to do the things that are not right. We will not want to report anything of which we are ashamed, and we will not do them just because we would not wish to tell Him.

Note also the considerateness of Jesus for His disciples. They were very weary after their tour through the country, and needed rest. The throngs that kept coming to them all the time prevented them from obtaining the rest they needed. Jesus now invited them to a quiet place, where they might renew their strength. The form of the invitation should be noted. He did not say, "Go ye yourselves apart," but, "Come ye yourselves apart." We are not to go away from Christ when we seek a vacation, but are to rest with Him. No vacation away from Christ is complete. Too many people drop their religious work when

they leave home for a few weeks, and some even forsake the altar of prayer and the Bible. But Christ wants us to take our vacations with Him.

Jesus and the disciples did not get a vacation after all. The people saw them crossing the sea, and, flocking round the shore, awaited the Master when He reached the other side. He was not impatient with the people, however, even though they had robbed Him of the rest He needed. He had compassion upon them. It is always thus. Christ carried the people's sorrows. His heart was touched by their needs and distresses. When He looked upon the great throng, and saw among them many suffering ones—lame, sick, blind, palsied—His heart's compassion was deeply stirred. In heaven He is touched to-day with the feeling of our infirmities. Some men's sympathy is only in sentiment and fails to show itself in act. The compassion of Christ filled His heart, and then flowed out in all forms of kindness and helpfulness. Then it was not their hunger, their poverty, their sickness, that seemed to Him their worst trouble, but their spiritual need. They were wandering like lost sheep away from the fold, and had no shepherd. Earth's sorest misfortunes are usually not what we call calamities. Many people seem very prosperous in our eyes—we may even envy them their success—and yet when Christ looks upon them He is moved by compassion because their lives are starving, because their souls are perishing.

When the question of the people's hunger and what should be done for them came up, the best that the disciples could suggest was that they should be sent away to find food for themselves. That is about all that human wisdom or even human love can do. Perhaps we can not feed their bodily hungers. Nor is it always best that we should try to do it. Every man must bear his own burden. Doing too much in temporal ways for those who are in stress or need is not true or wise kindness. The best we can do for those who lack is usually to put them in the way of relieving their own needs. It is better to show a poor man how to earn his own bread than it is to feed him in idleness. But we can always be courteous to any who come to us for help. We may at least in every case show kindness, even when we can not give the help that is asked. We must take care that we do not coldly turn away those who appeal to us for help. The parable of the Judgment in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew teaches us that in the poor, the needy, the sick, and the troubled who appeal to us for help, or whom we see or hear of in any distress, Jesus Himself stands before us. We must be careful lest we some day send Him away hungry.

It was a startling word that Jesus spoke to His disciples, however, when they suggested that the people be sent away to buy bread for themselves. He said, "Give ye them to eat." That is what He is saying all the while to His disciples.

He wants them to feed the hungry. There is no use in sending them to the villages—there is nothing there to feed them. Besides, there is no need that we should send them away, for we have food for them. We have but to read the story through to find that the disciples were able to feed even this great multitude, and did feed them. Their scant supply, blessed by the Master, satisfied every hungry one of all the five thousand. Whenever Christ sends needy ones to us He wants us to give them help, and it will not do for us to say that we can not do it, that we have no bread. When Jesus gives a command He means to make it possible for us to obey it. It may seem to us that we can not do it, that we have not the resources necessary; but if we use our little in trying to help, our little will grow into all that is needed for the supply of the want which has been intrusted to us.

When the disciples had made inquiry they found that they had only five loaves and two small fishes, and they never dreamed that so little could be made enough to feed five thousand hungry men. We are always saying that we can not do anything to bless the world because we have so little with which to work. A young Christian is asked to teach a Sunday school class, and says: "I have no gift for teaching. I have nothing to give to these scholars." A young man is asked to take part in a meeting, but thinks he can not say anything to help anybody. Christ says to us,

“Feed the hungry ones about you,” and we look at our stock of bread and say, “I have only five barley loaves—what can I do with these?” We do not think we can do any good in the world, while really we can bless hundreds and thousands if we rightly use our little store.

It is interesting to note the manner in which Jesus enabled His disciples to feed the people. First they brought their loaves to Him. That is what we should always do with our little—we should bring it to Christ, that He may bless it. If the disciples had tried themselves to feed that hungry crowd with their five loaves, they would not have been able to do it. If we try in our own name to bless others, to comfort the sorrowing, to lift up the fallen, to satisfy the cravings of men’s souls, we shall be disappointed.

The method of distributing the provision is suggestive. Jesus did not Himself pass the bread directly to the multitude—he gave it through His disciples. Study this picture. Jesus stands here; close about Him stand His disciples; beyond them is the great multitude. Jesus is going to feed the hungry people with the disciples’ loaves, but the bread must pass through the disciples’ hands. It is in this way that Christ usually blesses men—not directly, but through others. When He would train a child for great usefulness, He puts love and gentleness into a mother’s heart and skill into her hands, and she nurses the child for Him. When He would give His word to the

world, He inspired holy men, and they wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. When He would save a soul, He sends not an angel, but a man or a woman redeemed already by His grace, to carry the message. This suggests the responsibility of those to whom Christ passes the bread of life. It is not for themselves only, but for themselves and those who are beyond them. Suppose the disciples had fed themselves only from the loaves, and had not passed on the food; the people would still have hungered, while provision enough for them was close at hand.

Notice the careful economy of Christ. He bade them gather up the fragments that were left, that nothing might be lost. Though He had so easily made a little into a great supply of bread that day, yet He would have the fragments saved. We are all apt to be careless about fragments, especially when we have plenty. We should be careful of the fragments of our time. Most of us waste minutes enough every day to make hours. Every moment of time is valuable; in it we may do something to honour our Master and help one of His little ones. Let us take care of the golden moments—the fragments will soon make a basketful. We should let nothing whatever be lost of all that God gives us.

CHAPTER XXVI

MISSION TO THE GENTILES

Read Mark VII., 24-30

MUCH of the public life of Jesus was devoted to caring for sufferers. The doctor's little girl told the messenger where she thought her father could be found, as he was wanted immediately, "I don't know, sir; but you 'll find him somewhere, helping somebody." When people sought for Jesus and could not find Him, He was usually away with some one in need, doing good, helping somebody. At this time, however, He was trying to get away from the crowd. He certainly was not trying to hide from His enemies, for He never had any fear of men. Probably He needed rest for Himself and His disciples. At least we are told He entered into a house and would have no man know He was there. We are sure Jesus never hides away from those who need Him in their distress. It is never true that He can not be found. He never shuts the door upon those who pray to Him or those who come to Him in trouble and want to find Him, refusing to see them. We will never find Him absent nor in hiding when we go to Him with any question or any need.

Try as He would, Jesus was not able to get away from the people. His attempts to have a little rest were always thwarted. We are told here that, though He wished to remain in seclusion, He could not be hid. We can not hide flowers—their fragrance will tell where they are. Jesus could not be hid from human need—there was something about His love which revealed Him to all who had any need. In this case it was a mother with a great sorrow who sought Him. Her little daughter had an unclean spirit. We can not understand how a child could be possessed by a demon, but in this case it was a child. Very great was the mother's distress. This woman had heard in some way of Jesus and of His casting out evil spirits over in His own country. She had never expected that He would come into her neighbourhood, as she was a Gentile, living outside the limits of His country. But when she learned from some of her neighbours that the Great Healer had come to the town, and was in a certain house, she lost no time in finding her way to Him. She came with strong faith. She was sure that Jesus could free her little girl from the terrible trouble. She fell at His feet, in the attitude of deepest humility.

Mothers may get a lesson from this Gentile woman. If their children are sick, they should hasten to Christ with them. If they are in the power of any form of evil, they should especially seek the help of Him who alone can give help in

such cases. There are unclean spirits besides the demons who possessed people in our Lord's day. Every child is exposed to constant temptations and may receive hurt. In every child there are natural evil tempers and dispositions which, if not cast out, will greatly imperil the life.

The first difficulty in this woman's way was the fact that she was a Gentile. Christ was not sent to her, but the gospel now is for all the world. No nation has any exclusive claim to it. It is for the world. But Jesus devoted Himself only to His own people. Not till after He had died and risen again were His disciples sent to all the nations. The woman's nationality was a barrier. Jesus was not sent to any but the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Matthew tells us that when the woman began to plead with Jesus, "He answered her not a word." This is one of the strangest incidents in our Lord's whole life. Usually He was quick to answer every call for help. His heart responded instantly and lovingly to every one who came to Him. A Christ silent to the cry of a mother, pleading for her child, seems so contrary to what we know of the sympathizing and helping Christ that the record seems almost incredible. He was never unsympathetic, unloving, indifferent, or cold. We may be sure, however, that His silence in this case did not show lack of interest in the woman. His heart was not cold to her. All we can say is that the time had not yet

come for Him to speak. The woman's faith needed still further development and discipline to bring it to its best. People sometimes think now that Christ is silent to them when they call upon Him in their trouble. No answer comes to their cries. He seems not to come for their distress. But they may always know that the silence is no indication of indifference. Christ's delays are not refusals. When He does not speak to answer our pleadings it is because He is waiting for the right time to speak.

Matthew tells us also that the disciples interfered, begging Him to send the woman away. They seem to have been annoyed by her following after them and her continual pleading. The fact that she was a Gentile may account for this. The Jews had no sympathy with the Gentiles. It took the disciples a long time, even after the day of Pentecost, to be willing to carry the gospel to a Gentile home. Here they wanted Jesus to send the woman away and to stop her annoying cries. This is the way some people try to get clear of the calls of human need even in these Christian days. They can not stand the cries of those who are suffering. They can not bear to see those who come with pleas of distress. They turn away from their doors those who come asking for help. They do not know that they are turning away Christ Himself, for He says that in the needy who stand before us, asking for aid, He Himself stands, hungry, thirsty, sick, a stranger.

“Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto Me.”

When Jesus did speak to this woman, at length, it was a very discouraging word that He said. “Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it to the dogs.” The children were the Jewish people. They were in a peculiar sense God’s family. It seems very strange to hear the word “dogs” falling from the lips of Jesus Christ, applied to Gentiles. It does not seem like Him. It would not have been surprising to have heard the disciples use this offensive designation, for they still were full of the Jewish spirit. It was common for the Jews to call the Gentiles by this name. However, Jesus was different. There was never in His heart even a shade of contempt for any human being. No doubt there was something in the tone of voice which Jesus used, or in the look of His eye as He spoke to the woman, that took away from His words the offensiveness. Certainly she was not insulted by what He said. Perhaps she was encouraged by the word “first”—“Let the children first be filled.” A first implied a second. Or she may have detected in His language a play upon words which gave her hope. There were little dogs in the home as well as children. She was only a dog, but the dogs had a portion. They lay under the table and got what the children left. The woman with her quick wit seized upon the picture which the words of the

Master suggested. She was content to be a dog and to have the dog's share. Even the crumbs off that table would be enough for her.

There is strong faith in her reply. At last she had won her victory. Jesus said to her, "For this saying go thy way; the demon is gone out of thy daughter." In all the New Testament there is no other such striking illustration of the persistence of faith. Obstacle after obstacle was met and overcome. The woman believed from the beginning that Jesus had power to heal her poor child, and she determined that she would not go away without winning from Him the help which she so much needed.

The lesson for us is that we should never be discouraged by delays in the answering of our prayers. Even God's silence to us should not dishearten us. He before whom we stand can do for us whatever we need to have done. Nothing is impossible to Him. He waits to draw out our faith until it reaches its fullness of power and wins its victory.

If this woman had turned away at any time, discouraged by Christ's seeming repulse of her, by His silence, or by His seemingly scornful words, she would have missed the blessing which at last came to her in such richness. No doubt many people fail to get answers to their prayers because they are not importunate. A man spent thousands of dollars drilling for oil. At last he became weary and gave up the quest, selling his

well for a mere trifle. The purchaser, in two hours after he began work, came upon one of the richest oil wells in the country. The first man had lost heart just two hours too soon. The same want of persistence causes failure, no doubt, oft-times, in praying. Jesus says we should always pray, and not faint; that is, not give up.

We can picture the joy of this mother as she at last went to her house and found her child well. Her home was no longer darkened by this old-time sadness. The child was no longer under the power of the demon, but was happy and well and beautiful. Whatever the trouble with their children may be, mothers should always find the way to Christ and should plead with Him in patience, persistence, and faith, until their children are blessed and happy.

CHAPTER XXVII

WANDERINGS IN DECAPOLIS

Read Mark VII., 31 to VIII., 10

THE activity of Jesus was intense. He was never in a hurry; for hurry is wasteful of time and strength. It spoils one's work. It hinders speed. The man who hurries is nervous and fusses and does not begin to accomplish what the man accomplishes who never hurries. Jesus never hurried. He moved quietly, calmly, as if he had days and days for His work, and yet He never lost a moment. We have all this in the three or four words at the beginning of our passage. "Again He went out." Some men lose time between duties—Jesus never lost a moment. If we would get this lesson for ourselves it would add years to our lives. It is in the interstices between tasks that we waste time.

The world is full of broken and imperfect lives, of people who lack or have lost certain powers or faculties. One has lost an arm, another a leg, another lacks an ear, another has only one eye. The doctor said the other day of a certain man that he has had only one lung for twenty

years. Here it was his ears the man had lost. "They bring unto Him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech." He could not hear. The loss of the sense of hearing is a most serious one. It is easy to think of what a man loses who can not hear. We who know what pleasure comes to us through the words of others, through words of friendship reaching our hearts through our ears and giving us thrills of gladness, inspirations of love, feelings of trust and confidence, can imagine in some measure what it would mean never to hear such words any more. We who receive the exquisite sensations which come to us through voices of sweet song, through the notes of birds, the music of nature which we hear as we walk through the forest or stand beside the sea or listen to the soft breezes and the wild roar of the storm, can understand a little what we should miss if this were a silent world to us. Blindness is the sorest of all losses of the senses, but the loss by deafness is also very great.

This man who was brought to Jesus was deaf. He seems to have been totally deaf. Then, besides, he had an impediment in his speech. What is called dumbness results usually from deafness. The organs of speech are perfect, but those who can not hear can not be taught or trained to speak. The words here, however, seem to imply that there was some disturbance or some impairment of the organs of speech, so that the man could not make articulate or intelligible sounds.

Tyndale's version renders the passage, "one that was deffe and stambred in hys speche."

We should always bring to Jesus our friends who have any defect, or any lack. This man's friends brought him to Jesus. That was beautiful. To pray for our sick or our suffering, from whatever cause, and not to use the means that science and medical or surgical skill have brought within our reach, would be to mock Jesus, declining the help He has offered and asking Him to heal in some other way. We are not authorized to pray God to do anything for us that we can do for ourselves. God never works unnecessary miracles, nor can we ask that divine grace will do for us what we can do without special grace. This does not mean that we are not to bring our sick friends to physicians, nor to use any means that are known for their cure or recovery. Men are accomplishing wonders in these days in the way of healing. This does not show that Christ is any less the Healer now than He was when He was here in the flesh. It means that He is giving His power to men who, with their science and their skill, are now doing the wonderful things.

The friends of this poor man brought Him to Jesus and besought Him to heal the man. We see at once our Lord's sympathy and interest in the way He received the deaf man. "They beseech Him to lay His hand upon him." His response was instant and most gracious. "He took him aside from the multitude privately." His gentle-

ness and considerateness for the man's infirmities appear in all His treatment of him. The deaf man could not hear the words of Jesus and would miss the tenderness and cheer which those who could hear received from His words and tones. Hence Jesus took other ways of giving him encouragement and confidence. He "put His fingers into his hears, and He spat, and touched his tongue." There was something in each of these acts which would help the man to understand the purpose of Jesus. He was deaf—the touching of his ears would suggest to him that Jesus intended to cure his deafness, and started in him expectation and faith. His speech was disturbed—the touching of his tongue by Jesus with the moisture of His spittle would indicate to the man that He was about to cure the defect. Jesus' looking up to heaven was a prayer, and would turn the man's thought to God as the only Healer. The sigh or groaning of the Master showed the sufferer His sympathy with him in his trouble.

After Jesus had spoken to the man in signs instead of words, on account of the man's deafness, He spoke the one word, "Ephphatha." This word is Aramaic. The writer of the Gospel gives the very word which Jesus used. It means, "Be opened." He spoke to the deaf ears and the disordered speech, and instantly these organs recognized their Master. "And his ears were opened, and the bond of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain."

Thus the cure was complete, and the man made altogether well. This is another illustration of the power of Jesus over all the functions and conditions of the body. It may not be His ordinary way of working to cure such physical defects; yet we need not question His power to do so. There have been instances when, although the deafness remained, the use of the other senses has been so quickened that the deafness has been practically overcome. The case of Helen Keller is perhaps the most remarkable of these in all history. She was blind and deaf. She was taught altogether through her sense of touch, through finger-spelling into her hand. She also learned to speak—"the method being that of making the pupil feel the vocal organs of the teacher. She learned to speak well, and to tell, with some assistance from finger-spelling, what some people say by feeling the mouth. Her literary style became excellent; her studies included French, German, Latin, Greek, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, history, ancient and modern, and poetry and literature of every description. She had many tutors, but Miss Sullivan was 'eyes and ears' at all times, by acting as interpreter, and this patient teacher had the satisfaction of seeing her pupil pass the entrance examination of Harvard University. To all time the success attained in educating Helen Keller will be a monument of what can be accomplished in the most unfavorable conditions."

We do not call what was achieved by Helen Keller a miracle. It shows, however, what, no doubt, may be accomplished in other cases through wise and unwearying diligence and through love, helped by the divine blessing. We must note also that the advances of science have put marvelous power into the hands of men who treat diseases and defects of the ear, who now can do what in earlier days it was impossible to do. We hear it said sometimes that certain physicians have wrought miracles of cure. They have not wrought miracles, however, but secrets of nature have been discovered, so that help once impossible is now possible. It is all the work of Christ, whether done by supernatural power or through the imparting of knowledge by which the once impossible results are now within reach.

Jesus charged the man's friends not to tell any man of what He had done. He often did this. Probably His purpose was to avoid the notoriety which would follow such remarkable works if they were talked about. Such publicity was distasteful to Jesus. Some men like to have people talk about the great things they do and enjoy the excitement that is created by the spreading abroad of the news of their achievements. Jesus, however, shrank from having His good deeds talked about. He sought to do His good works quietly, secretly, and continually asked people not to tell anybody what He had done. He encouraged His friends to do their good deeds in the same spirit.

We are not to sound a trumpet before us when we do our almsdeeds. Our life is to be like the dew that falls silently, making no noise, sinking away and disappearing, leaving no record save in the freshening of every blade of grass and the sweetening of all the flowers. So Jesus Himself sought to live and love and serve and slip away unnoticed, only remembered by what He had done. In this case His request was unheeded. So grateful were the friends of the dumb man for what Jesus had done that they could not be quiet about it, but the more He charged them not to tell it, the more they published it. "And they were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well; He maketh even the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak."

The feeding of the four thousand is not the same miracle as the feeding of the five thousand told in all the four Gospels. The place of this miracle was in Decapolis. The many cures Jesus had wrought had drawn throngs to Him. There was again a great multitude. The country was wilderness and desolate, and "they had nothing to eat." Jesus could not look upon human distress with indifference. "I have compassion on the multitude," He says, "because they continue with Me now three days, and have nothing to eat." He might send them away; but if they started homeward unfed, they would faint by the way. We know that the heart of Jesus has not changed, and that He still has the same compas-

sion on those who are suffering. "Does God care?" people sometimes ask. Does He care when people are hungry? Here the question is answered.

It seems strange that His disciples had forgotten the other occasion, when their Master had provided for five thousand hungry men. "Whence shall one be able to fill these men with bread here in a desert place?" Why they did not remember what Jesus had done only a little while since in similar circumstances seems strange to us. But that is just what most of us do. We do not learn from experience. We forget yesterday's goodness in to-day's recurrence of need.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE GREAT QUESTION

Read Mark VIII., 27 to IX., 1

COMPARING the several accounts in the Gospels, we learn that Jesus had gone apart to pray, and the disciples with Him, when this conversation occurred. It was a new epoch in our Lord's ministry. He was now turning His face directly toward the cross. He asked the disciples two questions. The first was, "Who do men say that I am?" The disciples told Him what the people were saying about Him. It is pleasant to notice that they told Him only the kindly things that were said about Him. No doubt many said unkindly things; but the disciples did not report these things to their Master when He asked them what the people were saying about Him. We need not report to others the evil things we hear about them. Let us tell them only the good and kindly things, the things which will give pleasure and encouragement. Some people like too much to report to others the criticisms they hear, thus making life harder for them.

Evidently opinions about Jesus differed then

very much as they do now. Some say that He was a good man, but no more than a good man. Others say that He was a good teacher, a wise rabbi, but no more. Still others say that He was a prophet, one who spoke with authority. Then some say He was divine, the Son of God. Some people cry out against doctrines, declaring it is no matter what a person's creed is, if only he does what is right. But it does matter what one believes about Christ. If you regard Him as only a man you can not trust Him as your Saviour. One only a man can not forgive your sins, nor deliver you in temptation, nor walk with you in death. Those who see only the human in Christ do not find sweet, strong comfort in Him; He can not be much to them in their times of deepest need.

Jesus asked another question, "But who say ye that I am?" This is much more important for each one of us than the first question He asked. Other people's opinions will not make faith foundations for us. No one was ever lost through another's rejection of the Saviour, nor was any one ever saved on the belief of another. Each one must meet the great questions of life for himself. To every one of us Christ puts the question, "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter was always the first to answer such questions as the Master had now asked. Here he answered well, "Thou art the Christ." Peter believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

This is the true belief about Christ. He had been the world's hope through long ages. God sent Him to earth on an errand of love. He became man, thus coming down close to us—Emmanuel, God with us. He is also Son of God, divine, possessing all power, infinite in His love and grace, able to do for us all that we need to have done, and to lift us up to eternal life. If our belief is like Peter's, if Christ is so really all to us in our life that we make Him our very life, we are building on the rock.

One relates this of a little deaf and dumb boy. On Sunday he attends church, and loves to have his mother find for him the words of the hymns, although the music never thrills his ear nor touches his heart. He looks at the hymns, guiding his finger over every word to the end. If he finds the word "Jesus," he is satisfied and sits absorbed to the close of the singing. But if the name he seeks be not there, he closes the book and will have nothing more to do with it. The true test of every creed, of every system of theology, of every life's hopes, is, "Is Christ in it?"

As soon as Peter had made his noble confession Jesus began to explain what Messiahship meant according to the divine ideal. He told His disciples that He must suffer many things, and be rejected and killed, and then that after three days He would rise again. This was not the thought of the Messiah the disciples had—they had no cross in their vision of their Master's coming glory.

They thought He would be a great King, taking His place over all nations, and that they would share with Him His Messianic honour. But Jesus now unveiled the real nature of His Messiahship. He used the word "must"—the Son of man must suffer and be killed. This meant that in no other way could He be the Messiah of the Scriptures. Not only would He be a reigning, glorious King—He would be first a despised, rejected, wounded, bruised Saviour, numbered with transgressors, bearing the sin of many.

The effect of these words of Jesus upon Peter was very marked. His whole soul revolted against the thought of rejection and death for his Lord. He took Jesus and began to rebuke Him, as if he would hold Him back by force from such a destiny. It oftentimes seems to us that the way God is leading us is into darkness and failure, when really He is guiding us directly to the best honour and the highest good. The path to the best things of life often lies through valleys of shadow. Our Leader sees on to the end and knows that our way to light must pass through sacrifice. Let us learn never to resist the ways of God, not doubt, fear, or question them, but always to yield our own way to His, even when He seems to be leading us to sorrow, loss, and sacrifice.

The reply of Jesus to Peter has a lesson for us all. He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get thee behind me, Satan; for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." Peter had been

doing the work of Satan in trying to hold his Master back from His divinely appointed way. We may act the part of Satan to those who are very dear to us, by trying to hold them back from hard and perilous duties to which God is calling them. It is natural for us, when our friends are about entering upon paths of danger or on courses which will involve danger, possibly pain and cost, and require sacrifice, to seek to persuade them to take some other way or choose some other course. In doing this we may become tempters to those we love best.

Nor was it the whole of the great lesson, that the Master must go by the cross to glory. He went on to say that the disciples, too, must go by the same way. The cross is the law of all Christian life. "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." Jesus went by a way of sorrows to His glory, and the disciple must go in a like path. Every life has its own "cross," which each one must take up for himself. That is, each life has its own burden of duty, of struggle, of self-denial, of responsibility, which each must carry for himself. No one can carry the burden for another. Whatever the cross of Christ bears for us, it does not free us from the carrying of our own cross.

The lesson is still further developed in the words which follow, "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, shall save it."

Self-seeking is self-losing. Selfishness is unlovely, but it is worse—it is the way of death. The law of Christ's cross runs through all life. A young girl, beautiful, cultured, honoured, with a lovely home and many friends, turned away from ease, refinement, and luxury, and went to teach the colored people in the South. She lived among them and gave out her rich young life in efforts to lift them up and save them. "What a waste of beautiful life!" said her friends. But was it really a waste? No; losing her life for Christ, she really saved it. If she had held herself back from the duty to which God was calling her, she might have saved her life in a sense, saved herself from cost and sacrifice, but she would have lost her life in the higher sense.

The losing of one's life is an irreparable loss. Whatever we may seem to get in exchange, we get really nothing. For if we gain the whole world, we can keep it but for a little while, and it will have no power to deliver us from death or give us the blessing of eternal life. The world can not give peace of conscience or comfort in sorrow. It can not purchase heaven. All we can do with the world is to keep it until death comes. We can not carry any smallest portion of it with us into the other world. "How much did he leave?" asked one of his neighbors, referring to a millionaire who had just died. "Every cent," was the reply. So it is easy to see that there is no profit, but rather a fearful and eternal loss in

gaining even all the world at the price of one's soul.

Then think for how much smaller price than this, "the whole world," many people sell their souls. Some do it for an hour's guilty pleasure, some for a political office, some for money, some for honour which fades in a day. In a newspaper this advertisement appeared: "Wanted—A nice cottage and grounds, in exchange for a lot of choice liquors." No doubt many people answered the advertisement. Men are continually giving home and property and peace and love and life for strong drink. They are selling their souls also in many other ways for trifles pitifully small.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE TRANSFIGURATION

Read Mark IX., 2-13

THE Transfiguration was one of the most remarkable events in our Lord's life. The object, so far as the disciples were concerned, probably was to restore their confidence in Christ's Messiahship after the staggering blow to their faith which had come to them in the announcement by Himself that He must suffer and be killed. So far as Jesus Himself was concerned, the object of the Transfiguration would seem to have been to strengthen and encourage Him as He set out on His last journey to the cross.

For companions and witnesses on this occasion Jesus had Peter, James, and John. These were His special friends, admitted by Him to His closest friendship. On several occasions we find Him choosing the same three for special companionship. There must have been something in these three men which fitted them for the place of honour to which they were admitted. We know that the holiest will get nearest to Christ. We

know, too, that faith always brings us near, while doubt and unbelief separate us from Him. Purity of heart brings us close—the pure in heart see God. Likeness to Christ fits us for personal friendship. Jesus said that those who serve most self-forgetfully are first in His kingdom. Selfishness keeps us far off. No doubt the eye of Christ saw in the three favoured disciples reasons why they were best fitted to be witnesses of His glory that night. It was not an accident that these, and not three other men, were with their Lord on that occasion. It is a special comfort to find that Peter, though such a faulty disciple, was one of those who were admitted to closest fellowship with his Master that night.

Luke tells us that Jesus was engaged in prayer when the wonderful change in His appearance took place. From this we learn that prayer has a transforming power. Communion with God brings heaven down into our life. Lord Tennyson said, "Prayer is to me the lifting up of the sluice-gate between me and the Infinite." Prayer lets God's own life into our souls. While we pray we are in the very presence of God. When Moses had spent forty days on the mountain alone with God, and then returned again to the plain, the people saw the dazzling brightness of heaven on his countenance. When Stephen was looking up into heaven at the glory of God as revealed now in holy vision, even his enemies saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. Only the up-

ward look can give heavenly beauty. Our communings make our character. If we think of earthly things we will 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 down upon us the beauty of the Lord.

Another strange thing happened that night. There appeared unto Jesus and His disciples two men from heaven, not mere apparitions, but actual men, not men either from the earth, but from heaven—Moses and Elijah. There was something very wonderful in this. 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; and now both reappear, still living, speaking, and working. There are many proofs of immortality, but here is an illustration of the truth. Here we see two men long centuries after they have left the earth, still living and active 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 somewhere. If only we can get this great truth into our heart, how much grander it will make all life for us!

We are told that these men had a talk with Jesus. One of the Gospels gives us the subject of the talk—it was about Christ's decease, His exodus from this world. These men were sent

from heaven to comfort and strengthen Jesus for the journey to His cross. He would have bitter sorrows and great sufferings, and they came to cheer Him. We are not told that He was afraid or that He was in danger of growing faint-hearted before He reached His cross, but the bravest and strongest are better for encouragement and cheer. So the heavenly messengers were sent to earth to talk with Jesus about His death, to show Him what it would mean to the world, that He might be strengthened for it. No doubt all the way unto the end of life Jesus was braver and stronger because of this heavenly visitation. No doubt He had such a vision of redemption as He went to His cross that He rejoiced to suffer, that He saw of the travail of His soul and was satisfied.

May there not be a hint in this of the kind of employment that shall occupy 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 merely a place of inactive rest. Praise will not be the only employment of the glorified ones. They will have opportunity to serve.

The hearts of the disciples were filled with strange ecstasy that night. So absorbed were they in the blessedness of the vision that Peter proposed that they should stay there, offering to build three tabernacles, one for Jesus and one for each of the heavenly visitants. Peter was right—it was good to be there. But at that very mo-

ment human need was waiting at the foot of the mountain for the Master's coming. Then, farther on, were Gethsemane and Calvary for Jesus, and for Peter there was Pentecost, with years of earnest service, and then martyrdom. It is very sweet to commune with Christ in the closet, at the Lord's table; but we must not spend all our time in these holy exercises. While raptures fill our hearts human wants are crying to us for help and for sympathy, and we must hasten away from our peaceful enjoyment to carry blessing and comfort to those who need.

Another element of the Transfiguration was the witness from heaven. It was the Father who spoke and said, "This is My beloved Son: hear ye Him." The disciples had been greatly shocked by what Jesus had told them six days before—that He must suffer and be killed. Now from heaven the Father speaks, assuring them that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, and that they should listen to His voice, and to His voice only. Even if they could not understand, and the things He said seemed to destroy all their hopes, they must be content to hear. There are times when God's ways with us seem very hard, when we think disaster is coming to every fair prospect in our lives. 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 should never fail. We should listen always quietly and submissively to what He says, and when everything

seems strange and dark we should never doubt or be afraid. What so staggered the disciples then we now see to have been the most glorious and loving wisdom. Through the cross there came to the world the most wonderful blessing the world ever has received. So in our strangest trials there are the truest wisdom and the highest love.

As Jesus and the disciples came down from the mountain next morning, He charged them that they should tell no man what they had seen until after He had risen from the dead. There are many things that it is hard or even impossible for us to understand at the time, but which become clear enough when other events follow and cast their light upon them. One riding along a road, approaches a building which has no beauty and which seems to be only a confused pile. But when he has passed by and looks back at it, he sees a structure graceful, impressive, and beautiful. He saw it first from the wrong side. One looks at an artist at work on his canvas and sees only rude daubs. The picture has not yet been completed. By and by it is finished and is a rare work of art. We must wait for finished work before we judge. A boy enters the academy, and a page of Greek is put before him, but it has no meaning for him. He can not read it. He spends a few years in the study of the language, and again the same page is presented to him. Now he reads it off with ease, and every word glows

with some high thought. We are in Christ's school now, and there are many things we can not understand until we get farther on and learn other things, and then the former will be made plain and clear.

CHAPTER XXX

THE CHILD IN THE MIDST

Read Matthew XVIII., 1-14

A PLEASING incident is recorded of Francis Xavier, the Jesuit missionary. Hundreds were coming to him with their needs, their questions, and their heart-hungers, and he was weary almost to utter exhaustion in days and nights of serving. At last he said to his attendant: "I must sleep! I must sleep! If I do not, I shall die. If any one comes—whoever comes—waken me not, for I must sleep." He then retired into his tent, and his faithful servant began his watch. It was not long, however, till a pale face appeared at the tent-door. Xavier beckoned eagerly to the watcher and said, in a solemn tone: "I made a mistake; I made a mistake. If a little child comes, waken me."

There is something in this wondrously like the Master. He never was so weary but the coming of a little child awoke all His love. His interest in children appears throughout all the Gospels.

It was a strange question which the disciples brought to Jesus, "Who then is greatest in the

kingdom of heaven?" These men, although occupying so sacred a place in their Lord's family, were still very human, and had their natural human ambitions. They even seem not to have been free from the passion for official or political positions which afflicts so many people, sometimes even very good people. They had only the earthly idea of the kingdom Christ was to set up. They probably had been discussing the question as to which of them would occupy the highest place in this kingdom. One remarkable feature of biography-writing in the Bible is that it takes no pains to hide the faults of the saints. There is encouragement in this for us; it shows that even the holiest people have their faults and often do foolish things. Of course, this makes no excuse for us, however, for we ought to be very much better than even the apostles were, since we have more light, greater privileges, and better opportunities than they had, and should understand better the teachings of Christ.

There is one proper way, however, of wishing to be great in Christ's kingdom. It is right that we should long to be great Christians. It was said of a certain Christian man that his daily prayer was, "Lord, make me an uncommon Christian." That was a good prayer. There are plenty of common Christians. It is right to pray always, and to strive to meet the level of our praying, "Nearer, my God, to Thee."

The answer of Jesus to the disciples' question

was beautiful and very suggestive. "He called to Him a little child, and set him in the midst of them." He answered their question by an example. "This is greatness," His act said to them. A little child in the midst is used oftentimes to teach great lessons to older people. When a new baby comes into a home God sets it in the midst of a family as a teacher. Parents suppose they are training their child, and so they are, if they are faithful; but the child also teaches and trains them. Thoughtful and reverent parents learn more of the meaning of the fatherhood of God, and the way God feels toward His children, in one week after their first baby comes than they had learned from teachers and books, even from the Bible, in all the preceding years of their lives. Every child's life is a book, a new page of which is turned every day. Children are not angels, and yet they bring from heaven to earth many fragments of loveliness. Their influence in a home is a constant benediction. They change the center of life in their parents—it is no more self; they begin now to live for their child. They train their parents in patience, in gentleness, in thoughtfulness, in love. While a young child is in a home, a school of heaven is set up there.

After Jesus had set the child in the midst He spoke to the disciples, putting His lesson into words, rebuking their ambition and startling them with most serious words. He said to them, "Ex-

cept ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." His words implied that they were not now as little children, that their grasping after high places was anything but beautiful. They must be changed in spirit before they could even enter into the kingdom of heaven; that is, before they could have the spirit that belonged to the kingdom.

But the lesson was not for the first disciples only—it is for us also. What do these words say to us? What is it to become as a little child? There is a legend of a man whom the angels loved and wished to have honoured. They asked God that some remarkable gift might be bestowed upon him. But he would make no choice. Urged to name something which should be given to him, he said he would like to do a great deal of good in the world without even knowing it. So it came about that whenever his shadow fell behind him, where he could not see it, it had healing power; but when it fell before his face it had not this power.

That is childlikeness—goodness, humility, power to do good, helpfulness, without being conscious of the possession of these qualities. Ambition to win distinction, craving for human praise, consciousness of being good or smart or useful or great—all are marks of a worldly spirit which is neither childlike nor Christlike. Moses wist not that his face shone.

Jesus went on to speak other words about the children, while the little child still stood in the midst. He said, "Whoso shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me." Every little child that comes to earth, comes in Christ's name. To receive it is to receive Him. What sacredness this thought gives to every little child that comes to us or makes its appeal to us! We should look with reverence upon it—it comes in Christ's name.

Many wrongs are done to children. Very grave, therefore, is our Lord's word to those who hurt a little one. "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones which believe on Me to stumble, it is profitable for him that . . . he should be sunk in the depth of the sea." There are many ways of causing little ones to stumble. He does it who sets a child a wrong example, thus influencing him to go in the wrong way. He does it who tempts a child to do anything that is not right. It is a fearful thing to offer a boy the first glass of strong drink, or to whisper in a child's ear a doubt, or a sneer at sacred things, or to put a bad book or paper in the hands of a young person.

Jesus also gives us a glimpse of the way children are regarded and cared for in heaven. He said, "See that ye despise not one of these little ones; . . . in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father." Children and those of childlike character are the objects of

heaven's bravest, strongest care. The angels sent to guard them are those who are most honoured of God, and therefore are most powerful in their defense of the little ones intrusted to their care. It would seem, too, that the angels who serve the children are never refused admittance into the presence of God, are not kept waiting at the door, come when they will. There is no little child, therefore, who has not ever with him unseen heavenly guardians who can complain to God of any injury done to their charge, and bring instantly to earth all the power of heaven for his defense. The least sheltered ones, as they appear to us, are the most perfectly sheltered.

Another mark of Christ's love for children and the childlike is shown in the word about the lost sheep. If one of the shepherd's flock strays away the shepherd leaves the ninety and nine and goes into the mountains and seeks the straying one. If a little child is lost from a home, we know how the whole community is roused to try to find it. But these words tell us that heaven is aroused to search for the child that strays away from God. Whether human hearts on earth break in anxiety or not, the heart of Christ is full of loving solicitude when a child strays from His fold.

The last words of the passage are precious. "It is not the will of your Father . . . that one of these little ones should perish." It is not the will of God for any one that he should be lost.

He never made a soul to perish; He would have all to be saved. We are sure, therefore, that in all efforts to bring children to Christ and keep near Him, we have the sympathy, the co-operation, and the help of our Father who is in heaven.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE RICH YOUNG RULER

Read Mark X., 17-31

ALL that is told us about this young man's coming to Christ shows us his sincerity and earnestness. "There ran one to Him, and kneeled to Him." The running shows how eager he was to speak of the Great Teacher, and his eagerness tells of an unsatisfied heart. He seems to have illustrated the best that a young man could reach without taking Christ into his life. He was young, with all his powers fresh and full. He was rich with the honour, ease, distinction, and influence that riches give. He was a man of excellent reputation among his fellow-men. The fact that he was a ruler of the synagogue shows the confidence which 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 when He saw him, and was drawn to him in a peculiar manner. Thus it would be hard to conceive of a young man with more to satisfy him.

Yet, evidently, with all his good qualities, his worldly advantages, his good name, and his conscience void of offense, he was not satisfied, he was not happy. He needed something more to make his life complete. The manner of his coming to Christ, running, and kneeling, indicates that his heart-hunger was intense. It drove him to Christ in the hope and the faith that in Him he might find what he had lacked. It is always true—the best we can attain, the moral best, is not enough. We must have Christ.

The question which this young man asked of Jesus is the most important question any one can ask. "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" We do not know how much he knew about the eternal life concerning which he inquired. The fact, however, that he asked the question shows that he had at least some glimmerings of a life lying yet above him and beyond him, 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 without spiritual life, what comfort will it be to remember his fine successes on the earth?

A rich man in the East failed in business. When he had gathered together the fragments of his wrecked fortune he had in all a few thousand dollars. He determined to go to the West and start in life anew. He took all his money and built a splendid palace car, furnishing it in the

most luxurious style, and stocking it with provision 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 whatever with which to begin life there. This incident illustrates the folly of those who think only of the present life and make no provision for eternity. They use up all their time, all their opportunities, in getting to the gate of the other world, and find themselves forced to begin eternity with nothing, no treasure laid up, and too late now to begin again.

Answering the young man's question, Jesus turned His thought to the commandments. Matthew gives the answer thus, "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 oneself quite obedient while one puts low, easy interpretations 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 the Saviour. A pupil may think his writing quite fair until he compares it with the copy at the head 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 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 understands what the commandments really require, he is at once convicted of sin.

There must have been a measure of 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 was sincere enough, yet he really did not know what he was saying when he spoke thus of his own obedience. He had not broken any of the commandments in an open manner. He was regarded as an ideal young man. Still under the searching eye of this new Teacher, he began to feel that something was wanting. "What lack I yet?" Jesus very frankly answers his question, telling him, "One thing thou lackest." His morality was of a high order. He was not far from the kingdom of God, and yet he was not in the kingdom. 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 them to the Saviour. It is the final step that takes one over the line, from death to life, out of condemnation into the glorious blessedness. One may go to the very edge, and not step over. One

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 he could not be saved until his idol was broken to pieces. 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 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, learned the price, and considered the purchase, but did not buy it, because he was not willing to pay so much. Many are doing just what this young man did—keeping the world, or some little part of it, and letting Christ pass unaccepted.

As the young man turned away, Jesus was grieved. He loved him. He had lovable qualities. Jesus wanted him for His service. Think what this young man might have become in the Church of Christ if he had made the right decision that day! He was a man of fine abilities and capacities. He might have been another beloved disciple, filling the world with gentleness and with kindly influence. We do not know what a loss to the world this young man's wrong choice was.

Jesus was grieved for the young man's own sake. He had chosen money instead of life. It breaks the heart of Christ when we throw away the things of heaven and take only paltry earthly riches. He spoke to His disciples of it and said, "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. General Armstrong said once to a friend, "If you see me get-

ting rich, pray for my soul." But not many men have made such a request of a friend. 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, growing rich. Francis Xavier said that among all the thousands who had come to him with confessions 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 can not be saved. He said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for all things are possible with God." This means that every rich man and every man growing rich needs God in order to be saved. If riches master him, he is lost. Unless God be his Lord, he can not 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 XXXII

THE TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS

Read Mark XII., 28-34, 38-44

THIS scribe admired the way Jesus had answered the questions that were put to Him by His enemies. Jesus always answered well. He never got confused in His replies as oftentimes human teachers do. He never erred in His answers to men's questions, for He knew all truth. We know only fragments of the great body of truth, and therefore frequently find ourselves entangled when we attempt to explain difficult matters or to answer questions that are put to us. But Jesus knew truth in all its relations, and those who sought to catch Him in His words could never lead Him into any inconsistency of statement.

The practical lessons from this are important. One is that Christianity has nothing to fear from enemies who try to make its teachings appear self-contradictory. Amid all the assaults of skepticism, Christianity stands ever unharmed and secure. The hammers are shattered and worn out, but the anvil is unbroken. The other lesson

is that we may take to Christ all our own questions, our fears, our doubts, our ignorance, our perplexity, and He will always have for us a wise and satisfactory answer.

It is the fashion in these days, in some quarters, to decry creeds. "Little matter what we believe," says one, "if only we live right." But if we do not believe right we will not be likely to live right. The duty of loving God is based upon the truth that there is only one God to be loved. If there were more gods than one, there would be little use in teaching us to love God with all our heart. "Which God?" we might ask. So the doctrine of one God is a most practical one. There is only one God, and this one God is our Lord. What a comfort it is for us to know that the God in whom we trust is the great God of the universe!

He is our God. The little word "our" links Him to us and us to Him in closest relations. If He is our God we are under obligations to obey Him, to do His will. We belong to Him. Then, if He is our God He belongs to us, and we have a claim on Him. "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance." Every child of a good father knows with what pride he points to his parent and says, "That is my father." Still greater comfort to a believer is that he is able to point to God and say, "He is my God." All He is is ours—His love, His grace, His goodness, His truth, His mercy.

If God is our God we should love Him. He is the God to whom we owe everything, from whom we came, to whom we go, who cares for us, watches over us, provides for us, keeps us. He is our Father, with all a father's love. We ought to love God for Himself, for what He is in His character—merciful, gracious, holy, loving, good. We ought to love Him, too, for what He has done for us. Surely the commandment is reasonable.

Notice that it is love God asks. Obedience is not enough. One might obey every divine command and not have love for Him whom he obeys. Homage is not enough. We might pay homage to God, and yet have no affection for Him. God must have our love. Nor will a little love do. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." Our love for God must be greater than our love for father, mother, sister, brother, husband, wife, child, or friend. It must fill not our heart only, but our soul, our mind, and our strength. That is, it must draw all the powers of our life with it. It must lead us to obedience, to service, to complete consecration. If we love God supremely, He must be the Master of our life. We must be ready ever for whatever duty or service He asks of us.

Some people's religion seems compulsory; they do right because they must, not because they want to do so. All their work has the character of unwilling service. God says, "I want you to love Me," and if we truly love Him we will fly

at His bidding to duty or to sacrifice with eager alacrity. "But how can I learn to love God?" asks some one. "I want to love Him, but I can not compel myself to do it. I love my father, my mother, my sister; but I can not see God, and He seems great and terrible when I think about Him. He does not appeal to my heart as my mother does. I feel awe toward Him, but not affection."

It is important to know how we can learn to love God. The incarnation was God coming down near to us, that we might love Him. The glory of Sinai did not make its appeal to men's hearts. But when Jesus went among the people, touching them with His compassion, being their friend, comforting their sorrows, it was not hard for them to love Him. We must get to know God if we would learn to love Him. We should read about Him in the Bible until we know His character, His feelings toward us, what He has done for us, especially in redeeming us. Another way to learn to love God is to begin to trust Him. "How shall I learn to love God?" asked one. "Trust Him," was the answer. "I thought I must love Him before I could trust Him." "No; begin to trust Him, and you will soon learn to love Him."

No other duty comes before this duty of love to God. "This is the . . . first commandment." Until we begin to love God no other obedience is pleasing to Him. We may do a great many things

we ought to do, and yet if we do not love Him our doing amounts to nothing. A child may obey all a father's biddings, but if there is no love in his heart, what does the father care for the obedience? A man may be very good so far as his acts are concerned, but if he does not love God his goodness counts for nothing. When Jesus tested the young ruler's love by asking him to give up all he had for His sake, the young man went away sad. He had kept all the commandments from his youth, but he did not love God; at least he loved his possessions more, and gave God up while he clung to his property.

Love to our fellow-men is a very important duty, but it avails nothing unless love to God is back of it and in it. Two comes after one. The second commandment can come only after the first. A good many people boast of their love for men, their humanitarianism. They take the good Samaritan as their model. They are humane, charitable, philanthropic. But this is the whole of their religion. They do not love God, nor worship Him, nor recognize Him in any way. They put the second commandment high up, but they have no first. They do not know God, do not recognize Him, do not love Him. The things they do are very beautiful, and if they first loved God and lived all their life inspired by love for Him, their charities and humanities would be pleasing to Him, and not the smallest of them would go

unrewarded. But since they do not love God there can be nothing pleasing to Him in their love for their neighbours.

The second comes after the first. After we have begun to obey the first commandment, the second presents itself and must also be obeyed. He that loves God will also love his neighbour. The two loves are linked together and are inseparable. St. John says distinctly that he who claims to love God while he hates his brother is a liar. The love of God that does not overflow in love for our brother is not true love.

Jesus was pleased with the scribe's intelligence. He said to him, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." If he would only do the truth he knew he would enter into the kingdom; he was yet outside, although so near. There are a great many people who are almost, but not quite, Christians. There are those who know the way of salvation, but do not with their hearts accept Christ. There are those whose character is good and beautiful. They do many of Christ's sayings. They try to keep the second commandment, and seek to be gentle, kind, loving in temper, disposition, and act. They lack only one thing, but that one thing is vital. They are not far from the kingdom of God. Then there are those who are under conviction of sin and have a deep sense of need. They become honest inquirers, like the scribe, asking what they must do. They hear the

answer of Christ and still stand hesitating, indecisive, on the point of yielding, yet not yielding to Him. They are not far from the kingdom of God, and yet they are not in it. At the door, with the hand on the latch, is still outside, and outside is lost. There are thousands in perdition who have been almost Christians, and yet have perished forever.

Jesus then turned to the people and said some plain things to them about the scribes. "Beware of the scribes." The scribes were the official interpreters of the Scriptures. It was their duty to make plain to the people the word and will of God. But Jesus said they were not trustworthy leaders. They professed to be guides to the people, but they were not safe guides. They were fond of wearing the garb and having the honour of saintly men. They liked to have people salute them as holy men; they took the chief seats in the synagogue and at feasts; but in their private life they were bad men. Instead of being the defenders of widows, they used on themselves the widows' money entrusted to them. Then, to balance their embezzlement, they would make longer prayers than ever in the streets. They were the most despicable hypocrites.

The beautiful story of one of these widows and her suffering shows who were the really good people in those days—not the scribes and Pharisees, who put on the saintly airs that covered lives

of shameful meanness, hardness, and wrong, but the poor, who were despised and robbed. This widow had higher honour before God than any of the rulers. Her gifts, though too small to be counted, weighed far more in God's sight than all the great shining coins they cast into the treasury.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Read Luke X., 25-37

THIS is one of the great parables which only Luke has preserved for us. If Luke's Gospel had not been written, we never should have had this beautiful story. This suggests one reason why we have four Gospels instead of one. No one of the four tells us all about Christ or records all of His sayings. Each one gives facts and incidents and teachings which the others do not give. It takes all four to tell us all that we need to know of our Lord.

The question which this lawyer asked was a very important one, yet it was not asked by one who really wanted to know. He was only a quibbler. Jesus referred this lawyer to the law. "What is written?" The lawyer answered Him, quoting the first and great commandment. The man was glad to show his intelligence and, no doubt, was well pleased with himself. Then came the quiet word, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." There are a great many people who can answer right and do no more.

They can repeat with glib and fluent tongue text after text of Scripture. They can recite catechism, creed, and confession, without missing a word. But that is not enough. They know the law, but do not obey it. If doing were as easy as knowing, how good we should all be!

Evidently the lawyer was confused by the home-thrust which Jesus gave. He wished to justify himself, and so he asked, "Who is my neighbour?" Under the eye of Jesus he became conscious that he had not been fulfilling this law of love. No doubt he had made the commandment rather easy for himself by convenient trimming. For example, he defined the word "neighbour" to mean only such good, pleasant people as belonged to his own set, those who were congenial, thoroughly respectable, those who could be loved without any distasteful association. No doubt also he had been defining love to mean an easy-going sort of sentiment which did not require any sacrifice.

Jesus told a beautiful story to make plain the meaning of the commandment. The "certain man" who was going down to Jericho was a Jew. This road was proverbially dangerous. It has kept its bad reputation through the centuries. Robbers frequently lie in wait for passers-by, hoping to get plunder. That old road is a type of many paths in this world. That poor man, stripped, wounded, almost dead, is a picture of thousands of people who every day are left hurt,

bruised, robbed, ruined, and dying along life's waysides. Last night a body was found in the river and it proved to be that of a woman, young, with rich hair, beautiful face, and graceful form. While the city was quiet she had stolen to the edge and plunged into the cold water, which closed over her with a gurgle and then rolled on quietly as before. A few people dropped a tear of pity as they read of the tragedy in the papers. In one home there was bitter sorrow when the form was recognized. The woman had fallen among robbers, who had destroyed her and left her to die.

God had to send three men along that dangerous road before He got the poor man helped. First, a certain priest went down that way. "When he saw him, he passed by on the other side." One would think that a priest would have a compassionate heart, as his work was all about the temple. People who belong to God in this special way, we would think, would be gentle and compassionate. We are surprised, therefore, to see this priest paying no heed to the sufferer he found by the wayside. He seems to have kept away as far as possible from the poor man. Perhaps he was nervous and afraid lest he might be set upon by a robber and hurt or killed. This feature of the story, however, has its meaning for us. We are the "certain priest." We are journeying along life's highways. We are continually coming up to people who are hurt in some way—

wronged, sick, in trouble, in peril. Love is the Christian law of life, and we are told distinctly that love worketh no ill to its neighbour. Yet there are people going about who are continually doing ill to others, working injury to neighbours. We are always coming upon people who have been hurt—not wounded in body, perhaps, but harmed in life, in soul. What do we do when we come upon these unfortunate ones? Do we do anything better than this priest did?

Another man was sent that way when the first one had not helped the hurt man. This time it was a Levite. He also was one of God's ministers, engaged in the service of the Church. The men who naturally would be inclined to help were chosen. The Levite seems to have gone a little farther than the priest, to have shown a little more sympathy. He paused and looked at the sufferer, then went on. He may have uttered a sigh, saying, "Poor fellow, how I pity you!" But that was all. He really did not do anything for him. There are plenty of people of this sort in the world all the while. Pity is cheap. There is no end of comforters of the kind who say, "I am sorry for you." But this only mocks men's grief or suffering. It is practical help men need, not empty words of compassion.

Then came "a certain Samaritan." The Jews hated the Samaritans. Nothing good was ever expected of them. Therefore the sufferer would have little hope of help from this traveler. He

would not have even spoken to the man in ordinary conditions. But a strange thing happened. This Samaritan proved to be his friend. He was moved with compassion. Jesus is now answering the lawyer's question, telling him who a neighbour is. It is a beautiful picture that He draws.

A good man in a prayer meeting made this prayer, "O Lord, advertise Thy love through us." A young Christian, when asked if she loved Jesus, was moved to tears, saying in her heart, "What a dim light mine must be if others are not sure, without asking me, that I love Jesus!" A Christian writer has recently said that the deadliest heresy is to be unloving. God certainly advertised His love through the Good Samaritan. The man's love was not so dim that others needed to ask him if he loved God. Certainly he was not guilty of the deadly heresy of unlovingness. He had true compassion. He was not content merely to say a few pitying words—his sympathy took the practical form of doing something, something, too, which cost him seriously. He risked danger, not asking if the robbers might still be lurking in the neighbourhood to set upon him. He bound up the man's wounds—that was practical help of the right kind. He stopped the bleeding away of the sufferer's life. He then set him on his own beast—he would not leave him there by the roadside. He rested not until he had him safe in a warm shelter, away from danger. He gave up his own

comfort in making the unfortunate man comfortable. He loved his neighbour as himself.

He was not even content to get the man into an inn, and then throw off further responsibility. He might have said, "I have done my share in helping this poor man—let some other one look after him now." But he was in no hurry to get the case off his hands. He took care of the man for a time, and then, when he had to go on his way, he provided for a continuance of the care so long as it should be needed.

The Good Samaritan is our Lord's own picture of what Christian love should be in every one of His disciples. We ought to study it with loving interest, getting its spirit into our own hearts. It adds force also to the teaching to remember that it was an enemy whom the Samaritan helped. Christian love is to exercise itself not only in being kind to friends, to those who are gracious and good, but its distinguishing characteristic is kindness to enemies.

In a sense this Good Samaritan is a picture of Christ Himself. The wounded man represents humanity, robbed and beaten by sin, ready to die. The priest and the Levites represent human religions which, at the best, give only a glance of pity and then pass on. But Jesus comes full of compassion, serving and nursing back into life, healing, and wholeness, dying souls. A Chinese Christian thus described the relative merits of

Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity. A man had fallen into a deep, dark pit, and lay in its miry bottom, groaning and unable to move. Confucius came by, approached the edge of the pit, and said: "Poor fellow, I am very sorry for you. Why were you such a fool as to get in there? Let me give you a piece of advice—if you ever get out, don't get in again." "I can not get out," groaned the man.

Then the Buddhist priest next came by, and said: "Poor fellow, I am very much pained to see you here. I think if you could scramble up two-thirds of the way, or even half, I could reach you and lift you up the rest." But the man in the pit was entirely helpless, unable to climb up even the smallest part of the way. He could do nothing to help himself. Then Jesus Christ came by, and, hearing the man's cries, he went to the very brink of the pit, stretched down, and laid hold of the poor fellow, and said, "Go, sin no more." That is what Christianity does.

"Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbour unto him that fell among the robbers?" That was the Master's question. The lawyer could not help answering, "He that showed mercy on him." Then came the application, "Go, and do thou likewise." It is not enough to hear good lessons or look on good examples; when we have heard and seen, we must go out and do the good things which are so beautiful, which our judgment commends. It is not enough for the artist to

have lovely visions—he must get his visions on the canvas, where they will be blessings to the world. It is a precious privilege to look at noble lives and to read heavenly counsels. But we must reproduce in disposition, in act, in character, in our own lives, the excellent things we read. Now we have read the story of the Good Samaritan. Is that all we need to do? No; we must go and do likewise.

CHAPTER XXXIV

JESUS TEACHING HOW TO PRAY

Read Luke XI., 1-13

OUR passage opens with an illustration of unconscious influence. The disciples saw their Master praying apart from them and yet within their sight, and were so impressed by something in His manner, perhaps His earnestness and fervour, that they wished to learn how to pray as He did. We never can know what the silent influence of our acts may be upon those who see us. One gentle person in a home unconsciously impresses and influences the whole household. One quiet, restful person makes others calmer and more quiet. One faithful, consistent life in a workshop, an office, or a school is a perpetual gospel, touching all the other lives. By simply being good we may start in many others desires to be good also. A young man, lodging once with a stranger at a country inn, where the two were put to sleep in the same room, by kneeling at his bedside before retiring, touched the other's heart and became the means of his salvation and consecration to useful life

and service. We never know how far the influence of our example may reach.

We all need to make the same request the disciples made, "Lord, teach us to pray." We do not know how to pray, and there is no one who can teach us so well as Jesus can. We will find many words of Christ on the subject of prayer, all of which it will be profitable for us to study. We do not know what things we are to ask for. We are shortsighted and are apt to plead for comfort and help in the present moment, not thinking of the years before us. We all need to pray and need to be taught how to pray. The passage we are now studying is our Lord's answer to the request of His disciples to be taught how to pray.

The opening word of the Lord's Prayer, "Father," is really a Golden Gate through which we must enter into the temple of prayer. "When ye pray, say, Father." We must seek to say it as a child would say it to a father. When we actually do this we are ready to pray. God wants us always to come to Him as little children. If we think of Him in this way as a Father, it puts us into right relations with Him. Ideal human fatherhood means a great deal, and yet in its imperfectness and its sinfulness it is only a dim reflection of the Divine Fatherhood. We can get many precious thoughts of God, however, through what we know of human fatherhood on the earth—his love, his faithfulness, his thoughtfulness,

his patience, his care. The name also suggests what our feeling and conduct toward God should be. If He is our Father, we are His children, and we should never fail in the duty of children.

The honouring of God's name comes first among the true objects of prayer. "Hallowed be Thy name," we are taught to say, as we enter God's presence. He is holy, He is glorious. The name of God stands for God's character, for all that He is. We should give Him the first place in our hearts. We should be careful that in all our life we honour Him, doing nothing that will misinterpret God to others, or dishonour Him. No lesson more sorely needs to be learned in these days than the lesson of reverence. The profanity of men and boys is something appalling. In many of our churches and Sunday schools there is a painful lack of reverence in worship. To hallow is to make holy. We can not add to the essential holiness of God, but we can make people see more of His holiness and have higher thoughts of Him. We can talk about His greatness and goodness and love. Then we can show a reflection of His glory in our own lives, so that all who see us shall learn of God from us. It was said of a noble minister that every one who knew him fell in love with Jesus Christ.

The second petition is a prayer for the coming of God's kingdom. We can help to answer this prayer, first, by letting Christ be our King indeed, ruling in our heart and life, over all our

feelings, dispositions, thoughts, tempers, words, and acts. We can also help to set up Christ's kingdom in this world by influencing others to accept Him as their King. We are advancing His kingdom when we get even one person to accept Christ as Lord and Master. We can do much also by seeking to overthrow evil and establish that which is good. The kingdom of heaven is heaven begun on earth. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you." It must begin in our own hearts, and then extend its influence through us wherever we go.

The next petition is a prayer for the doing of God's will by us on earth as it is done in heaven. The kingdom of heaven is really the making of one place on earth like heaven. If God is our Father, His children should live the heavenly life, wherever they are. A thoughtful boy wanted to know how we can get to heaven, since it is so far away. His mother said, "Heaven must come down to you; heaven must begin in your heart." Then it will not be hard to get to heaven. We must have heaven in us before we can be ready to enter heaven.

Many people think of this petition of the Lord's Prayer as always meaning something very hard, something painful. They change their tone as they say the words and speak, "Thy will be done," in a strained, sad voice, as if a friend were dying, or as if they were passing through some great trouble. But the will of God is to

be done not merely in the acceptance of crushing sorrow, but also in the acts and duties of our common days. We are to do God's will on the playground, in our schools, in our homes, in our shops, and on our farms—wherever we are. God's will is the law of heaven, and if we would help to make this earth like heaven we must learn to do His will while we stay here. It should be a glad and joyous prayer.

We are apt in prayer to think of our own earthly needs first. Many people never go to God until they have some request to make, some help to ask. But in the Lord's Prayer the petition for daily bread does not come until the prayer is more than half finished. We are to pray first for the honouring of God's name, the coming of God's kingdom, the doing of God's will, and then we are to ask God to give us provision for our bodies. We have the same lesson taught in the Sermon on the Mount. "Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

The prayer teaches us to ask for our bread only day by day, and then only for enough for the day. Thus God fed Elijah for many months at the brook Cherith, but only day by day, and

the Israelites also for forty years in the wilderness morning by morning. We ask for "our" daily bread, thinking of others as well as ourselves. We are never to be selfish in our praying.

The next petition is for the forgiveness of our sins. God is always glad to forgive us, but in His prayer there is linked a duty also. We are asking God to forgive us as we forgive others. In an album Guizot wrote: "I have learned in my long life two rules of prudence. The first is to forgive much; the second is, never to forget." Under this one day Thiers wrote, "A little forgetting would not detract from the sincerity of the forgiveness." Then Prince Bismarck added these words, "As for me, I have learned to forget much and to ask to be forgiven much."

The latest petition of the Lord's Prayer refers to temptation. God does not promise to lead us in ways in which we shall have no temptations. The prayer we are taught to make is that we may not be allowed to rush needlessly into any danger. We need never fear temptation if it comes in the way of God's leading, for then we shall always have God's protection. But we should never dare to put ourselves into any place of temptation unless we are sent of God. God's design in temptations that come to us is never to lead us to sin, but to have us overcome and grow strong in resistance and victoriousness. The divine thought in temptation is that we may be proved and may grow stronger.

The lesson of earnestness in prayer is taught in the little parable of the Friend at Midnight. The good man within did not give his neighbour food because the neighbour was his friend, but because the man would not go away from the door until he got the bread he wanted. The lesson is, importunity in prayer. God wants us to be earnest, not rebellious and willful, but always earnest and persistent in our praying. He is pleased when we want things very much and when we believe in His willingness to give them to us. The Syrophœnician woman is an illustration of our Lord's teaching. She knew that Jesus could heal her daughter, and she simply would not be driven away without the blessed boon. Many prayers fail of answer because the person praying gives up too soon. A little longer patience and continuance in prayer would have brought the answer.

The love of human fatherhood is used in the last verses of our lesson in assuring us that God is willing to give us blessings, even the best that He has to give. We certainly would not say that human fathers are kinder than the Heavenly Father. No true earthly father would mock his son by giving him a stone when he asked for bread. We may turn the words about a little and say also that our Heavenly Father will withhold from us the stone which we unwittingly asked for, supposing it to be bread. God will not give us anything

that will harm us, however persistently we may plead.

The best of all gifts is the Holy Spirit. Not only is God willing to give us things we need in this world, things for our bodies, supply for our passing needs; He is willing also to give us the best things of His own love, even Himself, the Holy Spirit. All we have to do is to ask, but the asking must be sincere. It must be earnest and importunate. If we get the richest of God's gifts, and yet do not get God Himself, we have missed the best.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WATCHFULNESS

Read Luke XII., 35-48

OUR Lord often taught the lesson of watchfulness. The duty is one which can not too frequently be impressed. We are all apt to grow negligent concerning things which we do over and over, day after day, through many years. We need to have our thoughts often called to the duty of unceasing watchfulness in service, instant readiness for anything that may come.

The lesson opens with a counsel concerning girt loins and burning lamps. These figures suggest readiness for instant and tensest action. The loose garments must be kept drawn up and girded about the loins, so that without a moment's delay we may be ready for the march, and may not be impeded in our journey. The lamps must be kept always burning, so that whenever the Master may come, we shall be ready to rise and go with Him. A characteristic phrase more than once reappearing in St. Paul's epistles is, "I am ready." Every Christian should hold himself

ready at a moment's notice to do anything or go anywhere at the bidding of his Master.

Men looking for their absent lord, waiting for his return, is the figure used to illustrate the waiting of the Christian for his Lord. No promise of Christ's was given more often or repeated more impressively than that He will come again. The time of the return is indefinite and unknown; but of the fact that He will come there is not the slightest doubt. His coming is always imminent—any hour He may come. These truths are presented in the parable we are now studying. The master is away, and his servants are left in charge of his house. When he will come back, to-night or a month hence, they do not know. But they are so to conduct themselves that, at whatever moment he may return, they will not be confused and he will not be disappointed.

It is not mere idle waiting that is intended—He would find us at our work when He comes. It is a good rule to make every day's life complete, to finish everything before we retire at night, so that if we should never come back to our place of duty, nothing would suffer. A Christian woman was told by her physician that she could not live more than six months, and might die any hour. She did not, however, drop all her tasks and shut herself away to get ready for death; she went on with all her usual duties, only with greater diligence than before. Too many people in such a case would drop active tasks and

spend the time remaining in devotions. But this woman's way was better—Christ should find us busy at our work when He comes.

“If the Lord should come in the morning
 As I go about my work,
 The little things and the quiet things
 That a servant can not shirk,
 Though nobody ever sees them,
 And only the dear Lord cares
 That they always are done in the light of the sun,
 Would He take me unawares?”

“Why do I ask and question?
 He is ever coming to me,
 Morning and noon and evening,
 If I have but eyes to see.
 And the daily load grows lighter,
 The daily cares grow sweet,
 For the Master is near, the Master is here,
 I have only to sit at His feet.”

It is high honour which the Master shows to the servants whom He finds faithful. “He shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and shall come and serve them.” No honour could be higher than this—that the master should bid his servants sit at the table, while he himself takes the servant's place and waits on them. Yet this is just what Jesus will do for His faithful ones at the heavenly feast. He did it, indeed, at the last Supper, when He washed His disciples' feet. He said also to them, “I am in the midst

of you as he that serveth." We can not understand this, but we know that heaven holds for us surprises of blessedness far beyond our highest dreams. The picture suggests to us also the dignity and nobleness of service. We are taught to think it menial and degrading to serve, but in Christ's kingdom they who serve are the highest. Love always serves, and love is divine.

Christ sought to make it very plain to His people that the time of His coming to them can not be known. He may come in the second watch, or in the third watch, or in the dawning of the morning. The value of this uncertainty as a factor in life is to press the duty of incessant watchfulness. "If the master of the house had known in what hour the thief was coming, he would have watched, and not have left his house to be broken through." Of course. But that is just what men can not know—when the thief will come. Thieves do not send, beforehand, a notice of the hour when they intend to break into a man's house. They come when the master of the house is least likely to be watching. So Christ will come as a thief in the night. This means that His coming will be entirely unexpected and will be a surprise.

"It may be when the midnight
Is heavy upon the land,
And the black waves are lying dumbly
Along the sand ;

WATCHFULNESS

When the moonless night draws close,
 And the lights are out in the house ;
 When the fire burns low and red,
 And the watch is ticking loudly
 Beside the bed.

“ It may be at the cockcrow,
 When the night is dying slowly
 In the sky,
 And the sea looks calm and holy,
 Waiting for the dawn
 Of the golden sun,
 Which draweth nigh.

“ Behold, I say unto you, watch ;
 Let the door be on the latch
 In your home :
 In the chill before the dawning,
 Between the night and morning,
 I may come.”

The great lesson impressed in this passage is the duty of readiness for the coming of Christ. While the words had special reference to the great event of the return of Christ to the world, the lesson applies to every coming of Christ. We never can foretell any future, even the commonest, even the nearest to us. We never know what may happen in the next hour. We should so live that any moment of our days and nights we may be ready for any coming of Christ, ready for any duty that may be most suddenly given to us, or ready to die if the call to go home should come to us.

What does this mean? For one thing, it means that we must be at peace with God, reconciled to Him. It means that we must be faithfully following Christ, doing our work day by day, hour by hour, as it is given to us. One who is not saved is not ready for Christ's coming. Death is a coming of Christ to men, for it ends their probation and ushers them into the presence of God. No one is prepared for death who has not accepted Christ as Saviour, and is not living in Him.

There is a beatitude in our lesson which we should take into our lives. "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." "So doing"—how doing? Doing his work with fidelity. If a man went away and left a servant in charge of a certain piece of work, fixing no time for his returning, what should the servant do in the master's absence? Sit in the doorway and watch to see his return? That is not the kind of watching that will please his master. He wants his servant to attend to the duties assigned him, and desires to find him, on his return, not idly gazing out at the window, but busy at his work. The way to be ready for Christ's coming, whenever and in whatever way He may come, is not to sit down in idleness and watch for His appearance, but to keep at one's tasks with unceasing diligence, so that when He comes He may find our work all finished.

Again and again is repeated the warning to those who are unfaithful. "The lord of that serv-

ant shall come in a day when he expecteth not." There are several things said about this servant. For one thing, he is unbelieving. "My lord delayeth his coming." As a result of his unbelief he is unfaithful to his duties and to the trust reposed in him. Then, besides unfaithfulness in duty, he is unjust to his fellow-servants. He becomes selfish, grasping, domineering, cruel. Then in his own moral habits he becomes debased. He is found eating, drinking, drunken. The punishment of the unfaithful and evil servant is stated clearly in the last verse. It is a fearful thing to disregard life's solemn responsibilities. 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 XXXVI

JESUS DINES WITH A PHARISEE

Read Luke XIV., 1-14

JESUS did not refuse any invitation to a proper social function. In this His example is important for us. He wants His people to be in the world, though not of the world. He does not desire us to withdraw from men, but to live with them in life's common relations, only being careful all the while that we live the true life as citizens of heaven. We are to be the salt of the earth, our influence tending to purify and sweeten the life about us. We are to be the light of the world, shedding brightness upon earth's darkness, helping weakness, comforting sorrow.

John the Baptist would not have accepted the invitation of this Pharisee. He was an ascetic. His theory of life required him to keep out of the world, witnessing against its evil by withdrawing from it. But Jesus did not follow John in this. He gave men a new type of religion. His first public act, after returning from His temptation, was to accept an invitation to a wedding feast. His theory of life was that the truest and most

effective protest against the world's evil may be made from within, by living a holy, godly, and beautiful life in the midst of the world's evil.

Jesus had a reason for accepting social courtesies. He wished to show the divine sympathy with all human life. We used to be told that He often wept, but never smiled. But we can not think of Jesus never smiling. His whole life was one of gladness. He went among men that they might know He was interested in their lives. Life was not easy for most people in our Lord's day. Their work was hard, and they were not kindly treated by those who employed them. Their burdens were heavy. They were poorly paid. Jesus wanted them to know that He was their friend, that He cared for them, sympathized with them. He was ready for every opportunity to get near to them, that He might do them good. When He attended dinners, feasts, or weddings, He was not satisfied merely to eat and talk over the empty trivialities which are usually discussed round the table on such occasions. He found time always to say some serious, thoughtful words among the lighter things, which those who heard Him would not forget. Some of His most important teachings were given at feasts. Coventry Patmore says:

“Yea, find thou always time to say some earnest word
Between the idle talk, lest with thee henceforth,
Night and day, regret should walk.”

We scarcely know why this Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him. We can not suppose that it was really a cordial, friendly invitation; that he wished either to honour Jesus or to have the pleasure and privilege of entertaining Him and hearing His profitable conversation. Possibly it was a sinister motive which led him to give the invitation—a plot to get Jesus near to him, that he might catch Him in His words or lead Him to do something or say something which could be used against Him. It may be that the presence of the man with the dropsy that day was part of the same evil intention. It was on the Sabbath, and if Jesus would heal this man on that day, there would then be cause for criticism, such healing being considered by the Pharisees a desecration of the Sabbath. Of course, the sick man may have come in of his own accord, drawn perhaps by the hope that Jesus would hear him. But there is room for the suspicion that his being present that day was part of a scheme to get Jesus to violate the Sabbath rules as they were interpreted by the scribes.

Jesus was not afraid of any such plots. He never thought about expediency or diplomacy when an opportunity for doing good came His way. We are told that He “answering spake.” What did He answer? No question was asked Him, so far as we are told. Evidently He answered the thoughts of the lawyers and Pharisees who were watching to see if He would heal

the sick man. Jesus is always aware of what is going on within us. Our thoughts are as open to Him as our acts are to our neighbours. We should not forget this when our thoughts and feelings are not what they should be.

The question Jesus asked brought up the subject of Sabbath healing. The Jews considered it wrong. But they did not care to answer Him just now—so “they held their peace.” They wanted Him to heal the man, that they might bring their charge against Him. Jesus healed the man. Thus He teaches us to think for ourselves in matters of duty, and not to be influenced by what we suppose other people will say. Too many people take their moralities largely from the opinions of others, doing this and not doing that, to meet the approval of somebody. But that was not the way Jesus did. His rule of life was God’s opinion. “I do always the things that are pleasing to Him.” That should be our rule of life.

Jesus asked another question. “Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a well, and will not straightway draw him up on a sabbath day?” This question His critics would not answer. They admitted that it was right to relieve a dumb animal in such a plight. But if it was right on the Sabbath to help an ox out of a well, how could it be wrong to help a suffering man out of his trouble on the same holy day? Surely a man is worth more than an ox, dearer in God’s sight, and we should be more willing to

relieve a man than a beast. Thus Jesus stripped the Sabbath of the disfigurements which human hands had put upon it, and set it forth in its beauty, what God meant it to be when He first gave it to man.

There was another lesson which Jesus wanted to teach that day. So He "spoke a parable." He had noticed that as they took their places at the dinner the guests scrambled for the best places at the table, the seats of honour. There is much of this same spirit yet in the world. One sees it on railway trains, on steamers, in hotels and boarding houses, almost everywhere. Nearly everybody wants the best, and scrambles to get it. Sometimes it is seen, too, where members of families try to get the choice things on the table, the most comfortable seat, or the brightest, airiest room. Often unseemly strifes occur and bitter wrangles take place between brothers and sisters, each demanding the best. It will be well to study this lesson carefully and to apply it to ourselves—the kind of application we should always make first in studying Christ's words.

Jesus said, "Sit not down in the chief seat." We would say that common politeness would prevent any guest at a dinner from rushing for the seat of honour. It is understood in all refined society that these favoured places are for the guests who are specially honoured that day. Even these guests, though they know they are to have the distinction, do not take their places unbidden, but

wait to be invited to them. "Sit down in the lowest place," said the Master further.

Thus the religion of Christ teaches the most beautiful humility and courtesy. We are not to seek to be ministered unto, but to minister; not to get distinction and praise, but to live humbly and quietly. Kossuth said that of all natural emblems he would choose as the emblem for his life the dew. It makes no noise, seeks no praise, writes no record, but is content to sink away and be lost in the flowers and grass blades, and to be remembered only in the fresh beauty and sweetness it imparts to all nature. Those who always demand that they shall be recognized and that their names shall be attached to everything they do, have not learned the mind of Christ. Our aim should be to seek to have Christ honoured, then to do good to others, and to be remembered only in the blessing and good which we leave in other lives. Jesus tells us, further, that those who look after their own honour shall fail to be honoured, while those who live humbly, modestly, without seeking distinction or praise, shall receive the best promotions.

The last teaching of the passage is also very important. "Bid the poor, the maimed, the lame." Mary Lyon used to say to her Mount Holyoke graduates, "Go where nobody else wants to go, and do what nobody else wants to do." That is another version of the teaching of Jesus here. The rich have plenty of invitations—Chris-

tian love should seek to give pleasure to those who do not have much of it. If you are at a party, and there is one person present who seems to get no attention, that is the one whom, according to our Lord's teaching here, you should be most interested in and should take particular pains to make happy. Among your neighbours are some who have many things to make up their enjoyment—friends, money, health, books, social opportunities. But there are others who lack in these regards. While you are to love all your neighbours, your love should show itself especially toward the latter class—those who have less and who need you more.

CHAPTER XXXVII

FALSE EXCUSES

Read Luke XIV., 15-24

“A CERTAIN man made a great supper.” This supper is a picture of the blessings of redemption. The redemption of Christ is said to be great—he who prepares it, its blessings, the numbers who enjoy it, its eternal duration, and the sweetness of its joys—all are great. At a feast men provide the best provisions they can obtain; in the gospel we have the best that heaven has to give. At a feast there is plenty; in the gospel there is infinite abundance. There is pleasant fellowship at a feast, and the gospel brings us into intimate communion with God and into sweet fellowship with other Christians. There is one marked contrast, however—earth’s feasts are soon over, while the gospel feast is unending.

Next comes the invitation. “Come; for all things are now ready.” One of the things included is forgiveness of sins. Deep in every soul is the consciousness of sin and of separation from God because of sin. There is therefore a craving

for the taking away of sin, and peace never can come until this craving is satisfied. Another hunger of the heart is for fellowship with God. The human soul was made for God and never can find rest until it finds it in reconciliation to God and restored communion with Him. Human friendship is very sweet and brings deep joy, but we need also the love of God in our hearts to make the satisfaction complete.

One who did not know the facts would say that this invitation would find universal acceptance. We can scarcely think of anybody declining an invitation to such a festival as this. But instead of universal acceptance, "they all with one consent began to make excuse." Most people are eager to accept social honours. But this is a spiritual feast. It is not this world's dainties that load the table, but the things of God's love. The joy to which men are here invited is not earth's festivity, but the joy of forgiveness and communion with God. To accept this invitation men must leave their sins and enter upon a new life of holiness. The natural heart does not take kindly to this. The begging off of those invited is true to nature.

The excuses given are only excuses—they are not real reasons. The truth is that those invited do not want to come to the supper, and therefore make up pretexts having the appearance of reasons for not accepting the invitation. Men do not like to say bluntly that they will not come to

Christ, nor accept His mercy and love. That would seem discourteous. Hence they resort to insincerity and hypocrisy, revealing under all manner of flimsy and empty pretexts their unwillingness to accept Christ as their Saviour and Friend.

The excuses which are given are typical. One man said, "I have bought a field, and I must needs go out and see it; I pray thee have me excused." This may be called the property excuse. That was a very costly piece of ground to its new owner when we consider that it kept him away altogether from Christ and deprived him of eternal possessions. Yet there are many fields which have done this very thing. They have cost men their souls. The parable is not overdrawn. There are a great many people who lose their lives for things worth even less than a ten-acre field. Esau got only a plain meal as the price of his birthright. Judas got about twelve or thirteen dollars for his act of treason to his Master which has blackened his name for all generations, and which sent his soul into eternal darkness. Caring for property is always an insidious danger. It is not meant to be a snare to men—business ought to be a help heavenward. It is, when it is followed as our Master means that it shall be followed. Many men, however, are led to give more thought to planning how to make the most of their farms and their money than to the saving of their souls and making the most of their lives.

The second man offers the business excuse. "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them." He already had engagements for the day on which the feast came, business engagements which he thought he could not set aside—rather, which he would not set aside. He had no thought of postponing the breaking in of his oxen in order that he might attend the great supper. That is, he was not willing to make a little readjustment of his business arrangements even to honour his God and to get a new blessing for himself. The business of trying the oxen certainly could have waited another day, but the man missed the supper altogether while he spent the day out in the dusty field.

Many people are kept away from the church, from religious duties, and from Christ Himself by business occupations. They say they have no time to pray or read the Bible because their work is so pressing. They have no time to go to church, or to take an interest in spiritual affairs, because their worldly duties press them so. One man said the other day that he always played golf on Sunday. His business during the week required every moment of his days. His mind was under a constant strain. In order to be able to begin again this life of stress on Monday, he must have absolute rest on Sunday. He found this relaxation nowhere, he said, as he did in golf.

This is the way many men talk about the matter of religion. They have not time for it. They

need Sunday for rest. Yet some of these days they will have to take time to be sick, and then, some day, time to die. What comfort will they get in these hours from all their life of engrossing business care?

The third man gave pleasure as his excuse. "I have married a wife, and therefore I can not come." He was so much taken up with the joys of wedded life that he could not turn aside. There is no doubt that home pleasures and delights do oftentimes so absorb people as to keep them away from religious duties and even from Christ. Sometimes the very blessings of home life interfere with faithful following of Christ. A loving wife may unintentionally hold her husband back from Christian service by the exactions of her affection. She is unwilling to spare him from her side that he may do the work which the Master would have him do. Peter in his love for his Master would have kept Him from going to His cross. Too often a happy home by its very happiness so satisfies men's hearts that they do not feel the necessity for anything more. We all need to watch that we never allow our home or our love for dear ones to keep us in any sense from our full duty to Christ. If we love father or mother, wife or friend, more than Christ, we are not worthy of Him.

When the master received the "regrets" of his invited guests, he bade his servant go out quickly into the streets and lanes, and bring in the

poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame. The servant did this and reported, "Yet there is room." There is always room. The heart of God is never full. The church is never full—its doors ever stand open and its welcome is ever extended to every one who will come. Heaven is never full—there are places remaining still unfilled in its many mansions. In the description of heaven in the Book of Revelation we are told that the city has twelve gates, three entering from each point of the compass. These gates forever voice heaven's welcome to all those who will come. They are never shut, by day or by night, and no matter when one may come, he will find ready admission and glorious welcome.

Heaven must be filled. If those who are first invited will not come, the invitation is extended to others and pressed upon them. "Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in," was the bidding. These words show us the importance of earnestness in those whose duty it is to invite men to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not merely to find Christ ourselves, and then be satisfied. The first impulse of the true Christian is to seek other lost ones. The words of the parable suggest, first, that we are to go into all the world, wherever there is a lost soul, and invite all men to come. We are to invite them earnestly, to constrain them, to press the invitation upon them. The morning papers the other day told of a policeman rushing into a burning

building, climbing the stairways, through flame and smoke, to save a mother and her children. Like earnestness should we have in rescuing perishing souls.

A visitor at the hospice of St. Bernard, in the Alps, tells of one of the noble dogs coming in one morning, holding his head and tail to the ground, and slinking away to a dark corner of his kennel, as if ashamed to look any one in the face. The monks explained to the visitor that the dog had not been able to find anybody to rescue that morning in the snow, and therefore was ashamed to come in from his search. How will it be with us when we reach the end of our life, if we have not rescued any one from the storms and the dangers? On the other hand, much of the joy of heaven will come from meeting those whom we have been allowed to bring to Christ. Some one writes:

“Perchance in heaven one day to me
Some blessed saint will come, and say,
‘All hail, beloved, but for thee
My soul to death had fallen a prey:’
And oh, what rapture in the thought—
One soul to glory to have brought!”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

Read Luke XV., 11-32

THE world would be very much poorer if the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel had not been written. The whole chapter should be studied. It is rich in spiritual instruction. It is all about seeking and finding lost things. Publicans and sinners flocked to Jesus, and He received them graciously and kindly. His enemies, however, found fault with Him for being so friendly to these outcast classes. They sought to put social obloquy upon Him by saying that He was the friend of publicans and sinners. The parables of this chapter are Christ's answer to this criticism. He did not deny the charge. He did not apologize for what He had done. He said that was the purpose of His life. His mission was to the lost—it was to save such that He came into the world.

The picture of the shepherd—seeking, finding, then bearing back on his shoulder his lost one, gives us a glimpse of the wonderful depths of love in the heart of Christ. The second parable tells

of a lost coin for which the owner searches with lighted candle and broom until she finds it. A coin bears the image of the king and represents the human soul on which God's likeness is imprinted. The third parable tells of a lost boy.

The trouble began in the boy's discontent. His home was happy, but into this paradise sin crept. He became restless, discontented. His father's authority irked him. He began to have dreams of freedom. He would like to be out in the world, away from all restraint. So he demanded his portion.

That is where sin begins. A man wants to have his own way without regard to the divine will. The father "divided unto them his living." He yielded to the son's demand for his portion. This may seem strange. Why did not the father refuse the son's unreasonable request? God does not refuse the demands we make upon Him. The other day one telling of a life of departure from God was disposed to put the blame on God. "Why did God let me leave Him and go away from the life of obedience I was living?" But God holds no one by force in the bonds of a good life. We belong to Him, we owe Him love, obedience, honour, service; but He will never compel us to stay with Him, or to love and obey Him. The stars are held in their courses by laws which they can not break. Our little planet can not get its liberty, can not fly away from the sun's control, however it may weary of the restraints of

gravitation. But stars are things. We are moral beings, under moral law, and God never compels us to stay with Him. We can break away if we will.

The story moves swiftly. "Not many days after, the younger son gathered all together and took his journey." From many a home door young men have gone forth to begin a noble career—brave knights to redress wrong; heroic soldiers to fight for country; missionaries to carry the gospel to darkened lands. Then the departure was honourable. But this prodigal's going forth was to shame, dishonour, wretchedness.

Mark the haste. It was not many days after he had demanded his portion when we see him on his way to the far country. Sin's course is swift. When a man has broken away from God's control, he is eager to leave God's presence. Our first parents, after they had sinned, hid themselves from God among the trees. When you have done wrong to a friend you dread to meet him. Sin makes us ashamed to look into God's face. The prodigal could not now endure his father's loving presence, and hastened away.

The story of sin is always the same—a story of want and ruin. In the far country the prodigal wasted his substance with riotous living. His money was soon gone. But money is not all of a man's "substance." Indeed, money is really not substance at all. It is the most uncertain, unsubstantial thing a man has. Life is substance.

Character is substance. Manhood is substance. An artist bought a piece of canvas for a few cents. He then put a picture upon it—an immortal creation—and it was sold for more than a hundred thousand dollars. God put His own image on the soul of man, and now a human life is priceless. Man is God's child, but a little lower than God.

Thus we have hints of the meaning of the "substance" which the prodigal wasted. If money were all a man wasted when he plunges into a sinful life, it were a small matter. Men oftentimes lose money, and are still rich as ever, because manhood is left, character is left. But when one goes into sin, though his money remain, though he still is a millionaire, he has wasted that which is worth infinitely more than money—God's blessed, infinite gift of life.

After waste came want. "When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country." In the famine the boy found himself without friends. It is a pathetic record which says that in his dire need he went and "joined himself to one of the citizens." He hired himself out. He had made no friends in the far country. He had spent his money there, in banquets and revels and social dissipations, in which evil companions had shared. But now, when he had no money, and was in want, he had no friends. Sin does not bind bonds of affection between human lives. Sinning together does not make people friends. A man spends all he has at a saloon, but when he

has no more to spend the saloon-keeper does not become his friend and take him into his house as a brother to shelter him and make a home for him.

So we see this young man, erstwhile a gay and popular spendthrift, feeding swine for the citizen to whom he had attached himself. This pictures the degradation to which sin drags down a man who leaves God and chooses the evil way.

At last hope dawned. "He came to himself." He had been beside himself in the sad days of his sinning. When a man stops in his evil course, repents, and becomes a Christian, his old companions say, "The man is crazy." But the truth is he was crazy before, and now he is in his right mind—come to himself. Sin is insanity; religion is saneness.

Wonderful is the influence of home. It was a vision of home that first flashed its divine light upon the prodigal's soul. He said, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare!" As he sat there watching the swine and famishing, there came back to him a memory of the days of innocence and plenty in his father's house. Many a man has been saved far on in his years by such a memory. The old home tugs at our hearts, no matter where we wander. The child of sin who has wasted all her beauty in evil, when the hectic flush comes on her cheeks, and the ominous cough racks her body, creeps back home to die in her mother's bosom. The

soul's true home is in God. That is where we all belong. In our childhood life heaven lies about us. This is a world of sin, and we are fallen creatures, but there are in us fragments of the defaced image of God—gleams of tenderness, flashes of nobleness, pulsings of good feeling, longings for better things, visions of purity—which tell of an origin above this world. It is a blessed moment when to one living in sin there comes a vision of the love of God and of holiness. Home is the one place in this world whose door is never shut in a man's face, howsoever evil he has made himself.

Quickly the young man made up his mind. "I will arise and go to my father." The glimpse which memory had given him of the home bright with love and joy, while he was wasting his life in wretchedness, was enough. He saw in vision his father's house, and beaming there in the doorway he saw the face which had looked into his the morning he came away, with love and yearning. Even the servants in that home had enough and to spare. Resistlessly the old home drew on his heart.

Many people resolve to do right, and then take no steps toward the doing of it. This young man, however, carried out his good resolve at once. It was not easy to go home. He had come away rich, well-dressed, gay, and proud; he must go back stripped of all, a poor beggar, with penitence and confession. But he did not hesitate. He was too

much in earnest to think of the cost of his repentance.

One of the most beautiful revealings of this story is in the picture it gives of the father. "While he was yet afar off, his father saw him." Evidently he had been watching for his boy. That is a way fathers have—mothers, too. No matter where the child may wander, the loved ones at home never forget him. I knew a home from which a boy had been gone for twenty-seven years. Not a word ever had come from him during that time. Yet not a night passed but the widowed mother sat at the window, hour after hour, watching the street that went by the door, hoping that she might see her lost son returning.

And at last one night he came.

So God watches for the beginnings of repentance. We have not to trudge all the way back and knock at the door to get God's attention when we desire to return to Him. He sees the penitent afar off. And that was not all. This father "ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Every word here has a volume of meaning in it. Let your heart interpret it. The father saw his son in rags, in ruin, and his heart broke. Then he "ran." How glad he was to see his boy returning home! How glad God is to see His child returning!

The son began his confession—a confession he had studied out carefully before he left the far country. He did not ask to be received back as

a son, but only as one of the hired servants. Did his father take him at his word and give him a place among the servants? No, he took him back into a son's position. The ring, the robe, the shoes, were all tokens of honour. Then a feast was made. All this is an expression of the love of God for His children who come back to Him in penitence even from their farthest wanderings.

There is one thing we must not overlook in studying this story. It must not be forgotten that, though God forgives and restores, the prodigal never can be as he would have been if he had not gone to the far country. Sin is a terrible thing.

“Are you afraid to die?” asked a visitor of a man who lay on his deathbed, one who had lived a prodigal's life, returning to Christ only in time to die. The man was now grieving, and his friend said to him, “Why, you are not afraid to die, are you?” “No,” said the dying man, “I am not afraid to die; but I am ashamed to die. God has done so much for me, and I have done nothing at all for Him.”

CHAPTER XXXIX

BARTIMÆUS AND ZACCHÆUS

Read Luke XVIII., 35 to XIX., 10

It is said that when a certain French queen was journeying through her country, orders were given that no persons in sadness or in trouble—blind, lame, or suffering—should be allowed anywhere along the way. The purpose was to keep from the sight of the gentlewoman everything that might cause her pain. When Jesus was journeying, however, no such commands were given. On the other hand, all manner of sufferers thronged the waysides, and He never resented them as impertinent intrusions.

Bartimæus was blind and a beggar. He was sitting by the wayside, holding out his hand to receive alms from those who passed along. He heard a strange noise, the noise of trampling feet, and he asked what it meant. They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. He knew who Jesus of Nazareth was. He had never passed that way before, and now was the blind man's one opportunity. Bartimæus knew what that name meant. He knew that Jesus was a great healer,

that He could cure the sick, and that He could give blind men their sight. Instantly, as soon as the people repeated the name, his cry broke upon the air, "Jesus, Thou son of David, have mercy on me." The people rebuked the blind man, bidding him keep quiet. But this only increased his earnestness. When the cries reached the ear of the Master He stopped and commanded that the blind man be brought to Him.

The story of Zacchæus is different from that of blind Bartimæus. This was also his day of opportunity. Jesus is ever passing by. He does not linger. He may come again—He does continually come again. But He is ever moving on, and the blessing we would get from Him at any time we must get as He passes by. All the days seem alike as they come to us; but each one is really individual and peculiar, coming with its own opportunities, privileges, and blessings. If we do not take just then the gifts it offers, we never shall have another chance to get them, and always shall be poorer for what we have missed.

Zacchæus was a publican. He was also rich. Usually wealth gives men influence and power. But Zacchæus was hated and despised, not because he was rich, but because of the way he had got his riches. His occupation was reason enough with his countrymen for hating him. Rightly or wrongly, Zacchæus was supposed to have grown rich by exactions from his own people. Money, to be even in a worldly sense an honour to a man,

must be got in an honourable as well as in an honest way. The luxurious and worldly comforts which money brings are a paltry compensation for the hatred and contempt of one's neighbours and a want of respect in one's community.

The place of Zacchæus in Jericho was no enviable one. For greed of gain he had been willing to sacrifice the sweet joy of human approval and commendation, the joy of having friends; but it would have been better far for him to have remained a poor man, approved and honoured by his people, having men speak well of him, than to grow rich at the cost of all that made life a gladness and a blessing—the respect and love of his fellows. There are many, too, in towns and cities, whom men hate just as Zacchæus was hated in his town for having grown rich in dishonourable ways. The exposure of wrong ways of getting money has left many names dishonoured in our own days.

When Zacchæus learned that Jesus was coming that way, he was greatly excited. "He sought to see Jesus who He was; and could not for the crowd, because he was little of stature." It is a golden moment in any one's life when he begins to want to see Jesus. It is the starting of a new life. The interest of all heaven centers upon a man in this world who begins to pray, to look to God for mercy, to long to become a Christian.

There were difficulties in the way of Zacchæus. There always are difficulties in the way of a man

who wants to find God. The crowd was in the way of Zacchæus—the crowd is always in the way of those who want to get to Christ. Zacchæus was little, too little to see over the heads of the people; we are all in some sense too little of ourselves to see Christ. People hide Him from our eyes. We must expect that there will be obstacles in the way of our desire to find Him.

Zacchæus was eager and determined to see Jesus, and therefore set about the surmounting of the difficulties. “He ran on before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him.” The people must have laughed at the rich little man running ahead to climb up into a tree. But Zacchæus was too earnest to mind the laughter and the sneers. Nothing should ever be allowed to hinder us in a great purpose, especially in getting to see Jesus. Ofttimes one has to brave the ridicule of others, but we should never let ridicule hinder us from doing our duty and getting a blessing from Christ. We should not allow ourselves to be laughed out of heaven. Zacchæus overcame his littleness by getting up into a tree. Men must often overcome disadvantages by expedients. Personal disadvantages often become one’s best blessings. The very effort to overcome them makes one a stronger, nobler man.

Zacchæus was trying to see Jesus that day, but Jesus was also looking for him. “When Jesus came to the place, He looked up.” Zacchæus did a good thing when he climbed up into a tree under

which Jesus was about to pass. We should put ourselves in the way of Christ, going where He is to be. He has promised to meet with His people where two or three are gathered together.

It was a strange word that broke upon the ear of the little man in the tree that day. Jesus called him, "Zacchæus, make haste, and come down; for to-day I must abide at thy house." That was far more than Zacchæus was looking for. He hoped only to get a good view of Jesus as He passed, but his earnestness brought him much more than that. It brought him a divine friendship. Jesus called him. He knew his name. Wherever you are, Jesus knows you are there and knows your name. He knows also what is in your heart, sees the desire there. He called Zacchæus by name. Bible invitations rain down on the earth for everybody; yet when one touches your ear and heart you hear your own name spoken with it and know that you are personally called. Jesus asked Zacchæus to come down from the tree. He wanted to meet him. He is always calling people to come down, to get nearer to Him. It is a lowly place where Jesus stands to receive sinners, a place of self-abasement, of penitence. Zacchæus was bidden to come down in haste. There is always haste in Christ's calls.

Zacchæus was quick to respond. "He made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully." He did not hesitate an instant. If he had done so he would have lost his opportunity, for

Jesus was only passing through, and soon would have been out of sight. A moment's lingering and indecision, and he would have been gone, and Zacchæus would have been left unblessed. That is the way thousands of people do who hear Christ's call. They defer obeying, and soon the opportunity is passed.

The conversion of Zacchæus seems to have been sudden and very thorough. It was in his own house that he said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man, I restore fourfold." Grace began at once to work in this little man's heart. His acceptance of Christ took hold of his life. It went down into his pocket-book. He is an example for the rich who come to Christ and are saved by Him. All they have belongs to Christ, and everything is truly given to Him if the conversion is genuine. How they shall use their wealth for Christ is a very serious question, which they should answer with great care. Jesus asked one seeker to lay down the whole of his wealth, and then give himself to Him, besides, for ministry. We have easy theories of consecration by which we make out that we may keep our money and then use it for Christ. Yes, but the problem is vital. Do we use it for Him?

Another evidence of the genuineness of the repentance of Zacchæus was shown in his resolve to make restitution to those whom he had wronged. "If I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man,

I restore fourfold." Here we come upon another too much neglected part of consecration. We say: "Let the past go. We can not change it. We can not undo the wrongs we have done. Let us make the future beautiful, pure, and true." This is right in a sense. It is idle to waste time in unavailing tears and regrets. Yet there may be wrongs we have done which we can undo, or at least in a way can set right. If one has spoken false or injurious words against another before his conversion, he should seek instantly to undo the harm so far as it is in his power. Sorrow for sin is not enough if we can in any way make right that which we have marred. The law of restitution applies to influence; but alas! how impossible it is to recall or undo or gather up that which has gone before.

Jesus saw the sincerity of the man's heart and the reality of his conversion, and said to him, "To-day is salvation come to this house." That the man's repentance was genuine was evidenced by such moral changes in his character as always accompany true repenting. Zacchæus was saved. The publican was now a child of God. It is always so. There is no vain seeking of Christ in this world.

The people murmured at Jesus because He went among the outcast. He assured them, however, that these were the very people He had come to save. "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." Sinners were the very

ones He had come from heaven to continue to seek. In another place He illustrated the same truth by the case of a physician, whose mission is to the sick, not to the well. Who would sneer at the physician for choosing sick people to associate with and call upon? Who then should murmur at Jesus for going among sinners, when He came to this world expressly to save sinners?

CHAPTER XL

CHRIST'S TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

Read Mark XV., 1-15

WE speak of Christ's trial before Pilate. Really it is Pilate's trial before Christ that is described in our Scripture. The narrative holds up the Roman governor in such a blaze of light that all the world can see him. The story of this trial begins in the early morning, when Jesus was led to Pilate. During the night the rulers had informally condemned Him to death, but they could not carry out their own sentence without bringing their prisoner to the Roman governor. This was one of the humiliating conditions of their subjection to the Romans. Meanwhile Jesus had been kept under guard during the morning hours, and had been cruelly mocked by the soldiers. It was during this time that Peter's denial occurred, and the pain of the disciple's words as they fell upon Christ's ears was keener than all the mockeries of the heathen soldiers. As the first streaks of dawn appeared in the east, the members of the Sanhedrin were together again to hasten the formalities, so as to get Jesus on the cross at the earliest possible moment.

When Jesus was taken to Pilate He was bound. The rulers supposed that their cords would hold Him. Knowing as we do who this Prisoner was, we are sure that no chains of earth could have held Him if He had put forth His power, and therefore that their bonds were useless. We understand also that this quiet submitting to be seized and led away was entirely voluntary. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, not resisting, exerting no power in His own defense, though omnipotence was His, because He was laying down His life for us.

But what a strange picture this is—the Son of God bound, manacled as a common prisoner, and led away under arrest! What humiliation! But did they shackle the arms of His power with their chains? Did they stain the radiancy of His glory with the shame they put upon His name that day? We know that while He Himself wore chains, submitting to them, He is able to break our bonds and set us free.

The rulers had told Pilate that Jesus claimed to be a king. They thus sought to secure Pilate's consent to His execution as one who was disloyal to Rome. "Art Thou the King of the Jews!" asked the governor, referring to what His accusers had charged. Jesus did not look much like a king as He stood there, His hands tied and a cord about His neck. Pilate's question sounds like ridicule. Yet Jesus answered calmly, "Yes, I am a King." Where was His kingly power?

Where was His throne? Where did His kingdom lie? These questions are not hard to answer to-day. Millions now bow to Him and worship Him as King of their souls. In heaven He is honoured and adored as King of kings. On earth, too, His sway is felt even where He is not acknowledged. His influence has permeated all lands. Righteousness, truth, love, and grace are the characteristics of his reign, and these qualities are entering more and more into the life of all the world.

When the chief priests accused Jesus before Pilate, Jesus answered nothing. Pilate could not understand His silence, and so endeavoured to induce Him to speak. "Behold how many things they accuse Thee of." But still He was silent. "Jesus no more answered anything," the record says. We can not too often remind ourselves of the wisdom of silence under false accusation. It is told of a certain bishop in the olden times, that when most grievously and falsely accused by enemies, he refused to give even one word of denial or to offer any proof whatever of innocence, saying that God knew all about it, and that if it was God's will that he should live under the shadow, he would do it in silence, like his Master on his trial. This is what a Christian should usually do when falsely accused, perhaps not even offering explanation. Jesus at least answered nothing, but "committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." That is, He left His name, His life, and the whole matter of His vindication to

His Heavenly Father. There is no spot now on His name, though He died as a malefactor. So may we trust ourselves in God's hands when we are wrongly accused, answering nothing, but committing the whole matter to Him who will judge us righteously.

Pilate was aware from the beginning that the rulers really had no case against Jesus. If He had been courageous and just, He would have delivered Him out of the hands of His enemies. But He could not forget His own interests, and tried in various ways to parry the question of decision. He saw clearly the motive of the rulers. "He perceived that for envy the chief priests had delivered Him up." The rulers were envious of the influence of Jesus with the people. Envy has led to many a crime. It was envy that led Cain to slay his brother Abel. It was envy that caused Joseph's brothers to hate him and to sell him as a slave, to get him out of their way. In many a school a bright scholar is disliked and even persecuted in many ways because of the envy of his schoolmates. In business the successful man is followed by the envy and the enmity of rivals. In society a popular young person is oft-times assailed by those who are outshone. Many a good name is blackened by envy. We should be on our guard continually against this sinful tendency in our hearts.

One of the expedients to which Pilate resorted in his effort to release Jesus indirectly, without

exerting his own authority, was to get the people to choose Him as the one prisoner to be set free at that Passover. But the rulers, determined on the death of Jesus, insisted upon the release of Barabbas, a noted criminal. "Jesus or Barabbas?" was now the question. Barabbas was a robber and murderer. He had been engaged in an insurrection against the Romans, probably was chief in the band. His condemnation was just. Jesus never had done anything but bless men and do them good. No enemy could say a word against Him. No witness had testified that ever He had done the least unkindness to any human being. Yet the people did not hesitate in their choice. They chose the guilty, blood-stained criminal for friendly recognition and freedom, and sent the pure, holy, and gentle Jesus to dishonour and death. We have, every one of us, to make choice likewise between Jesus, the holy, blessed, living, glorious One, and sin. Which are we choosing?

This determined choice of Barabbas for freedom still left Jesus on Pilate's hands. He was disappointed. He had hoped to get clear of deciding in His case. He was compelled now to do something, either to assert his power and set Him free, or yield to the people's clamour and send Him to the cross. "What then shall I do unto Him whom ye call the King of the Jews?" Pilate's question is a question which every one of us must answer—we must do something with Jesus. Wa

must take Him to our hearts, to the highest place of love and honour, or we must reject Him. What shall we do with Him? Before every one of us He stands waiting at our door, and we must ask and answer this very question, "What shall I do with Jesus?" He comes to us in every gentle and gracious way—to be our Saviour, our Friend, our Lord, our Guide, and we must either accept Him or reject Him. We may postpone our answer, but delay does not rid us of the question—it only pushes it forward, and when we go on a little we shall meet it again. The question must be answered either by our acceptance or by our rejection of Christ. Not accepting is really rejecting, and, therefore, while we think we have not answered the question, we really have answered it. We should think seriously what the rejection of Christ involves. We know what it involved for Pilate. What will it involve for us? Would we crucify Him afresh?

At length Pilate yielded to the pressure of the rulers and gave sentence that Jesus should be crucified. He did it, we are told, wishing to content the multitude. That was Pilate's opportunity. He was the one man in all the world who could send Jesus to the cross. No other one could do it. It was a fatal and terrible distinction that was his among men. Whether Jesus should have justice and be set free or should die innocently, he had to settle. The Jews could not touch Jesus without Pilate's consent.

We know what he did with his opportunity. He had not the courage to be true, to be just, to protect the innocent, to maintain right. He knew well that Jesus had done nothing worthy of punishment. He struggled feebly for a time with his conscience, and then gave way, sentencing to death as a malefactor a man he knew to be without sin or fault. Thus he lost his opportunity to do justice and to win for himself an immortality of honour. He went through the farce of washing his hands before the rulers, saying that he was not responsible. But the stain upon his soul no water could wash off; the brand of dishonour marks his name with an immortality of shame. The lesson is for us. We all have our opportunity to stand for truth and right. What shall we do with Jesus who is called the Christ?

CHAPTER XLI

CHRIST CRUCIFIED

Read Mark XV., 22-39

AFTER Pilate had sentenced Jesus, the soldiers crowned Him with thorns, robed Him in purple, and saluted Him in mockery as King of the Jews. Later the purple robe was replaced by His own garments, and Jesus, bearing His cross, was led away to be crucified. Faint from suffering and loss of rest, the burden of the cross was too heavy for Him, and the soldiers seized Simon, the Cyrenian, who was passing by, and compelled him to bear the cross after Jesus.

Simon was an unwilling cross-bearer. There may have been no tenderness toward Jesus in the hearts of the soldiers when they pressed this young man into the service to help Him when He staggered under His heavy load. Perhaps they wanted only to have Him get along faster. Yet it was a compassionate act, whatever its motive. This was one of the kindnesses shown to Jesus on the way. If Simon afterward became a disciple of Jesus, he never ceased to remember with grati-

tude what even unwillingly he did that day to give comfort to his Master.

Even amid the terrible scenes of Calvary there were gleams of human pity. One we have seen already—the help Simon gave Him in carrying His cross. Here is another: “They offered Him wine mingled with myrrh.” The object was to dull His senses somewhat, as is now mercifully done by the use of anæsthetics when surgical operations are to be performed, so that He would not be fully conscious in the terrible agonies of crucifixion. We can not but be grateful, loving Jesus as we do, that there were women with tender hearts who sought thus to mitigate His sufferings. His refusal of the offered kindness meant no disrespect to them. He tasted the wine, showing His appreciation of their kindness. But He declined it, we may suppose, for two reasons. He would not seek to lessen in any way the bitterness of the cup which His Father had given Him to drink. Then He would not cloud His mind in the least degree as He entered the experiences of the last hour. He would not dim the clearness of His communion with the Father by any potion that would dull His senses and thus impair His full consciousness.

In the fewest words we are told of the crucifixion of Jesus. “They crucified Him.” Crucifixion was a terrible mode of punishment. It was reserved for the lowest criminals, and, therefore, set the mark of ignominy on those who were sen-

tenced to endure it. The shame of the cross was the deepest shame that could be put upon any one man. But there was a yet darker meaning for Jesus in the crucifixion than that which the world saw. This is a mystery, however, which we can not fathom. We know only this, that He was the Lamb of God bearing the sin of the world. What this great work of atonement meant to Jesus in those hours when He hung on the cross, we never can understand. It is enough for us to know that from His anguish comes our joy; from His stripes, our healing; from His crowning with thorns, our crowning with glory; from His forsakenness, our peace.

The custom was for the soldiers in charge of the crucifixion to divide the sufferer's garments among themselves. In many a home there are garments which we sacredly cherish because some beloved one, now gone, once wore them. We love to think of the garments Jesus had worn. They may have been made by His mother's hands or by the hands of some of the other women who followed Him and ministered unto Him. They were the garments the sick had touched with reverent faith, receiving healing. A peculiar sacredness clings to everything that Jesus ever touched. What desecration it seems to us, then, to see these scoffing Roman soldiers take the garments He had worn in His holy ministry and divide them among themselves as booty! What terrible sacrilege it

seems to see them throwing dice there under the very cross, while the Saviour of the world hangs upon it in agony! Gambling for that seamless robe which trembling hands had touched in faith to find healing! There is a suggestion in this stripping off of Christ's garments. He hung naked on the cross that we may stand in the final judgment arrayed in robes of beauty. Those soldiers went about after that day wearing Christ's clothes; if we are saved we are wearing the robes of righteousness made by His obedience and suffering.

The cross of Jesus was marked that day so that all the world might know it. Over the Sufferer a wide board was nailed, bearing the title, "King of the Jews." It was the custom thus to indicate the name and the crime of the person suffering. There was no crime to write over the head of Jesus, for not even His enemies had been able to find anything against Him. So Pilate wrote the only charge the rulers had made. He was the King of the Jews—the Messiah who had been promised through all the centuries, longed for, prayed for, waited for. He was the King of whom David was the type. He had fulfilled all the Messianic predictions of the Old Testament. He had brought infinite blessing to the nation. Yet this was the way His own people treated Him. Instead of receiving with love and honour Him whom they had been expecting so long, they had

rejected Him, and now had nailed Him on the cross. But He is our King, too. How are we honouring Him?

It was strange company in which Jesus died. "With Him they crucify two robbers; one on His right hand, and one on His left." There were three crosses that day, and each has its own special suggestion for us. On the center cross hung the Saviour, dying for the sin of the world. We should study long and reverently this death scene. He died, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree.

Even during those terrible hours there were manifestations of grace and power on that middle cross. There was a prayer for His murderers which showed His spirit of forgiveness. There was His word to John and His mother which showed His thoughtfulness for her He loved. There was His word to the penitent robber, showing His power to save even in His death hour. There was the cry of forsakenness which gives us a hint of the awful blackness which surrounded the Redeemer as He bore our sins.

On one of the other crosses we see dying penitence. Few are the words we hear, but they are enough to show us the proofs of true regeneration in this man who not until the last hour repented and sought for mercy. On the other cross we see dying impenitence. This man saw Jesus, heard His prayer, listened to the words of His

companion, and yet was lost. So one may be close to the Saviour and yet perish. Men sometimes say, "I will take the chance of the thief on the cross." Yes, but which? for there were two.

A great multitude was gathered that day about the cross, but most of the people were there to mock. Even the chief priests mocked Him. We must remember that it was while He was dying in love for the world that the world was thus pouring bitterness into His cup. Strange return indeed to get for such infinite love! Yet it shows more and more the depth and wondrousness of that love, that even the treatment He received from men while giving His life for men did not chill His love. They said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save." That is just what love must always do—sacrifice itself, that it may save others. Jesus did not save Himself because He would save the world He loved.

We have a glimpse of the most intense moment of Christ's agony in His cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" We never can understand this cry. We learn here a little more of the infinite cost of our redemption. Then let us never forget that it is because death was so terrible to Him that we can look upon dying as simply passing through a valley of shadows with divine companionship. He "tasted death for every man." He endured death's awful bitterness, that we may die in sweet peace.

The rending of the veil in the temple as Jesus died tells of the completion of His work of redemption. The way of access to God was now opened to all the world. Heretofore none but the priest could enter the Holy of holies; now all could enter.

CHAPTER XLII

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Read Luke XXIV., 1-12

THE important question in all that refers to Christianity is, "Did Jesus truly rise again?" St. Paul says that if He did not rise, our faith is vain, we are yet in our sins, we have no Redeemer. Until that morning Death had been an unchallenged conqueror. All the generations of men had been taken captive by him, and not one person had ever returned. True, a few persons had been recalled from his power, but only for a little time, to be reclaimed again after a brief respite. Death never had been really overcome.

Some one has said, "No philosophy will ever satisfy men which can not throw a plank across a grave." To our natural eyes the grave is a dark chasm over which we can not pass. Has Christ bridged this chasm for us?

He came to be the world's Redeemer and Deliverer. He conquered every form of evil—sickness, human infirmities, demons. Now He had met the last enemy and apparently had been defeated by Him. Death had carried Him down into

the prison of darkness and had shut the door upon Him. If He had not risen, that would have been the end. If He were not able to overcome death, He could not be the world's Redeemer. All our hopes, all the hopes of the world, waited outside that sealed door to see if Jesus would come again. Did He rise?

It was the first day of the week, very early. A little company of women were hurrying toward the tomb where their Master had been buried three days before. Worthy of notice is the beautiful and loyal devotion of the women friends of Jesus. Woman's ministry gave Jesus much comfort during His sorrowing years, and now, when He is dead, women are the first to come to His grave. The women friends of Jesus are as brave and tender in their loyalty to Him to-day as they were when He was on the earth.

What brought these women friends to the tomb that morning? They had no thought that Jesus had risen or would rise again. They supposed that His body still lay in the grave, and they wished to honour it. It was a beautiful sentiment which sought thus to show love's tender regard for the departed. It was fitting to pile fragrant spices in the sepulcher, filling the place with sweet odours. In like manner friends lay flowers on the coffins of their beloved dead in our own time. It is one of love's tender ways of expressing itself. It is fitting and beautiful. But let us not forget to put flowers also upon the

pathways of our friends while they live. That is better. It is a poor compensation to allow hearts to starve for want of kindness along all the years, and then to send elaborate floral designs to be laid on their coffins or graves. Let us be kind to our friends living, and then honour them in death.

As the women hurried on through the dim dawn they were perplexed about the stone which had been rolled to the door. It was too heavy for their feeble strength to roll back, and they asked each other, "Who shall roll us away the stone?" Apparently they did not know that the stone had been sealed with the Roman seal, and that, also, a guard of soldiers had been set to watch the grave. If they had known this, their anxiety would have been still greater. But when they came near enough to see the grave, they found that the stone was already rolled back. An angel had been there before them.

We may get a lesson here about the needlessness of anxiety over difficulties in our way. Whenever God wants us to go He will open the way for us. It is ours only to go straight on, in confidence and faithfulness, doing our simple duty, and leaving to divine love and wisdom the opening of the path, the rolling away of the stones. Impossibilities become easy possibilities when God is leading.

Fearlessly the women entered in and found that the body was not there. This greatly perplexed them. But suppose they had found the

body in the grave—what then would have been the conclusion? That would have meant no resurrection, Jesus still held in the clasp of death. The women were disappointed in not finding the body, but in this disappointment lay the glorious hope out of which all our Christian joys come to-day.

We should get here a lesson of comfort for our own hearts when we stand by the graves of our Christian dead. The body of our loved one may be in the grave, but the friend we knew and loved is not there—he is with his Lord. Speaking of believers who are departed, St. Paul says they are “absent from the body,” “at home with the Lord.” You go to an old house where your friend used to live. You knock, but get no answer. The house is empty. Then you find that your friend has moved to a new house, a larger and better one, on the hill. You stand by the form of your dead and speak, but get no answer. The house of clay is empty. Your friend is not there—he is absent, he has gone away. Where is he? He has moved out of the old house and is now “at home with the Lord.” That is the story of Christian death. It is life, not death.

In their disappointment the women had a vision which brought great comfort to them. They saw two forms in dazzling apparel keeping watch in the tomb. One of the evangelists speaks of them as young men. All heavenly life is young. It is a pleasant fancy of Swedenborg’s that in heaven the oldest angels are the youngest. The

longer they dwell in the glory of that happy home, the younger they become. In heaven all life is toward youth. In this world we grow ever toward feebleness and decay. But in the immortal life all this is reversed. The angels were young men, although they were created before the human race began.

As we look into this empty tomb there are several lessons we should learn. We are assured by it, first, that Jesus actually died. Certainly He was buried there. His head lay there, and His feet lay here. He was surely dead, for Pilate had official inquiry made, and received assurance of the fact before he would give leave for the removal of the body. If any doubt had existed concerning His death, there certainly could be none after the soldier had thrust the spear into His side. Here are the grave cloths, the pieces of fine linen which gentle hands had wound about His limbs. Here is the napkin that covered His face, lying neatly folded by itself. Look closely at the place, for He was here—He was actually dead.

But He is not now in the grave. There is no dead form lying there where He lay yesterday. The grave is empty. But are we sure that He is risen? May not His body have been stolen away? No; for a great stone was rolled to the door and by Pilate's order sealed, so that it could not be removed without breaking the seal. Further, at the request of the rulers a guard of Ro-

man soldiers was stationed by the tomb to watch it. These precautions of Christ's enemies, taken in order that His body might not be disturbed and a story of resurrection started, form important links in the evidence of His resurrection.

Carelessness about sealing or watching the grave would have left room for uncertainty as to the fact of resurrection. But now we can say, without a shadow of doubt, "He is risen." His enemies helped to make the testimony infallible and invincible. Thus the empty tomb declares the resurrection of Christ. Death could not hold Him.

The empty tomb proclaims another precious truth to the Christians. Jesus rose, and so shall all who sleep in Him rise. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

The angel called the attention of the women to words which Jesus had spoken during His lifetime. They reminded them that He had said He would rise again. The women remembered the words now. It seems strange to us that the disciples should have forgotten the promises of Jesus about His resurrection. If only they had remembered these words they would have been spared their sorrow when they saw Him led to His cross. All the uncomforted sorrow of the disciples during those dark days and nights came

from not remembering what Jesus had said to them.

Often it is because we forget what Christ has said to us in His Word that we are in sorrow and in darkness. He has revealed to us the infinite love of His Father; if only we remembered this love we should not be overwhelmed by the strange things of providence which appear to us to be evil and destructive. He has told us that death for a believer is only going to his Father's house; if only we remembered this word, we should not dread to die, nor should we grieve immoderately when our loved ones go from us.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE WALK TO EMMAUS

Read Luke XXIV., 13-35

SOME time in the afternoon of the day on which Jesus rose, two of His disciples, not apostles, but friends, took a long walk into the country. We are not told why they went to Emmaus. Perhaps they had given up hope. Thus it is too often with Christ's friends in these days, when trouble comes upon them. The bright dreams fade, they grow disheartened and turn away as if the sacred beliefs they had cherished so long were only delusions. We see here, however, how needless was the discouragement. No hope really had faded. What they thought was cause for sorrow was the secret of the most blessed hope the world ever has known.

As these men walked along the way they talked together of the strange things which had happened. This was natural. Their hearts were full of these things, and they could not but talk about them. If the conversation of Christian people is sometimes vapid and trivial, it must be because their hearts are not filled with the holy themes which ought to occupy them. Is there

much truly religious conversation? What did you talk about yesterday, or last evening, in the long walk you took with your friend? This example suggests to us at least the value of good, earnest, wayside conversation. Most of us walk more or less with our friends. Why should two intelligent Christians talk together for an hour or longer and neither of them say one word better than the idlest chit-chat about the merest nothings?

Now a most interesting thing occurred. As they went on talking together, Jesus Himself drew near and walked with them. That is always the way. Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." We are met in His name when love for Him draws us together. Then He will always join us. If only idle words are on our lips, if we are gossiping about our neighbours, saying mean and disagreeable things about them; if we are talking of things which are not beautiful and good, we have no reason to expect Christ to draw near and join us. He would not be interested in our conversation, nor would we care to have Him listening to what we are saying. In order to have Christ go with us in our walk, our talk must be of things which will be congenial to Him. This, therefore, is the test—Would Jesus want to enter into this conversation with us? Would He be pleased to hear the words we are saying drop from our lips?

Sometimes we join a group of busy talkers,

and suddenly the conversation ceases. They do not want to go on with it in our presence. Would we keep on with this talk of ours without embarrassment or sense of unfitness in it if Jesus were to come in and sit down visibly in our circle?

He walked with these friends unrecognized. They did not know him. This is oftentimes the way with us—Jesus draws near to us and we fail to know that it is He. He comes to us in our sorrow, and we do not see Him by our side. We go on weeping and breaking our hearts, while if we saw the glorious form that is close to us, and knew of the love that is throbbing against our breasts, we would put away our tears and rejoice. Many people fail to recognize the divine love and comfort in their grief and go on as if there were no stars shining in the sky. How many of us are conscious of the presence of Christ with us, or get from it the full comfort, inspiration, and help which we might get?

Sir Launfal, in Lowell's poem, wandered over all the earth in search of the Holy Grail. When at last, after long years had passed, he returned, aged and bent, to his old home, lo! there under his own castle walls did he find the object of his search. So, often would we find close beside us, in the Scriptures we already possess, in the circumstances in which we are placed, in the human tenderness that is about us, the help we are seeking and the truth we need, if only we had eyes to see.

The Stranger showed a deep interest in the two men. The sorrow in their faces and tones touched His heart. Jesus always has a quick ear and sensitive heart for human grief or need. He knows when we are sad, when our burden is greater than we can bear. Then He is quick to express sympathy. He wants to give help.

This conversation shows that Jesus desires His friends to confide in Him. It does good for a burdened heart to tell out its trouble to Him. So when these men spoke to Him of the things that filled their hearts that day, He asked, "What things?" He knew, of course; but He wanted them to speak out their fears and doubts and ask their questions. So when we are in sorrow Christ wants us to tell Him of all that troubles or perplexes us. The telling will do us good. Then, by bringing them to Him, we shall have the tangles unsnarled.

Jesus spoke to these disciples out of a loving heart, telling them how slow they were in believing in what the prophets had spoken. He then told them that it behooved the Messiah to suffer the very things which this Jesus they were grieving over had suffered. He told them that if they had only understood the Scriptures their hearts never would have been cast down by the things which had befallen Him. God's way is always the true one. Our way would not bring us to the glory we desire any more than the disciples' idea of the Messiah would have brought salvation to

the world. When God sets aside our plans for our lives we may know that His plan, however different from ours it may be, and however it may seem to thwart our plans, is the right one.

“If we could push ajar the gates of life,
And stand within and all God's workings see,
We could interpret all this doubt and strife,
And for each mystery could find a key.”

These two men enjoyed a rare privilege that day in having Jesus as an interpreter of the Scriptures concerning Himself—“He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself.” It would be interesting if we could read the interpretations he gave. What a wonderful talk that was! We may be quite sure that He quoted the passages which depicted the sufferings of the Messiah, showing that the cross was part of the divine plan of redemption. Doubtless He quoted the fifty-third of Isaiah. Thus He went over the Old Testament, interpreting it and showing how he had fulfilled these ancient predictions. No wonder their hearts burned within them as He opened to them the Scriptures.

At length they came to the place where their journey ended. He was disposed to go on farther, but they urged Him to abide with them. If they had not thus constrained Him, He would have passed on. Think what they would have missed if he had not gone in with them. We do not know how much of the revealing of divine love

and grace we miss continually because of the tameness of our praying. We ought to get a lesson from the example of these disciples, who constrained the Stranger to go in with them and were rewarded by finding in Him the Friend for whom they were so hungering.

When they sat down together at the table for their evening meal, the Stranger took bread and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. Perhaps it was these familiar acts which revealed Him to them. Or they may have seen the nail mark in the hand that broke the bread. We are not told how, but in some way they came to understand that the Guest at their table was Jesus Himself whom they were mourning as dead, but who was now risen and living. What if our eyes should be opened to see Jesus every time He is beside us, eating with us, walking with us? How radiant would all life then become!

Another suggestion from this Emmaus story is that oftentimes it is only as they leave us that we learn the value of our blessings. "Their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight." How often is it true that only in their vanishing do our friends reveal themselves to us:

"In this dim world of clouding cares
We rarely know, till 'wilder'd eyes
See white wings lessening up the skies,
The angels with us unawares."

Somehow our eyes are holden and we do not see the loveliness. Faults seem larger and blemishes greater while our friends are close to us. But as they leave us the faults appear faults no longer, "just odd ways," and blemishes are transfigured into shining marks. Why wait for the hour of departing to see the beauty and the good?

CHAPTER XLIV

JESUS ASCENDS INTO HEAVEN

Read Luke XXIV., 36-53

It was in the upper room on the evening of the day on which Jesus arose. The disciples had gathered there, drawn together by their common sorrow and also by the strange things which had occurred that day. The doors were closed and fastened. Suddenly, with no opening of the doors, Jesus Himself appeared among the disciples. They were terrified, but He spoke to them these quieting words: "Peace be unto you." Still further to alleviate their terror He said, "Why are ye troubled? . . . See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself." Doubts always cause perplexity. Doubting cost Thomas a whole week of grief and sadness. Even those who have given up their Christian faith confess that in doing so they lost the sweetest joy out of their lives. Jesus showed the disciples His hand and His feet, that they might see in them the print of the nails and thus be convinced that He was indeed risen. The print of the nails is the indubitable mark of Christ where He appears. We see Him always as the

suffering One, or as the one who has suffered, for He bore our sins.

Slowly the doubt and fear of the disciples vanished, as they beheld their Master right before them, as they looked at the wounds in His hands and feet, and the marks of the thorns upon His brow, and heard His voice in words of love. He sought then in other ways to make them familiar with the fact that He was risen. He asked them for something to eat, and when they had given Him a piece of a broiled fish, He ate it before them. We see how gentle Jesus is in dealing with the doubts and fears of His disciples. He does not want them to disbelieve. Yet He does not chide and condemn them because they are slow in believing. He is most gentle with those who are seeking to believe. Some Christian teachers are stern and severe with those who even ask questions which seem to indicate doubt or uncertainty as to great teachings. But Jesus deals most lovingly with every one who has difficulty in believing.

Somehow the disciples had been very slow in understanding the words which Jesus had spoken to them before His death about the manner of His Messiahship. They had been so full of their earthly idea of Him that they could not accept or even understand any suggestion which permitted a different view. He reminded them of what He had said. "These are My words which I spake unto you." The cross was no surprise to Jesus.

All along His years He saw it standing at the end of His course. The events in His life which had seemed so terrible to the disciples, for a time blotting out all their hopes, were the very things which He had foretold, over and over again, during His ministry. If they had only understood His words, they would have been saved all their perplexity when they saw Him going to a cross. Many of the perplexities of our lives come from the same forgetting of the words of Christ. There are many promises in the Bible, but we forget them just when we most need to remember them. We throw away our life preservers just when we ought to be buckling them about us.

Now Jesus sought to make all things plain to His disciples. "Then opened He their mind, that they might understand the scriptures." There is a promise which says that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth. We sometimes forget that we need to pray God to open our minds, to help us to understand the deep things of His Word. The lessons of the Bible are shy, and hide themselves away from ordinary search; only prayer and reverent love will find them.

The commission of the disciples contained the gospel "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." They were to begin right where the cross had been set up. We should begin at home, just where we live, to tell the story of Christ. The lighthouse throws its

beams far out to sea—a hundred miles from the shore, it is said, some of the lights are seen—but it pours no light round its own base. The lighthouse, therefore, is not the best picture of an individual Christian life. We should shine, first, close about ourselves. “He does the best in God’s great world who does the best in his own little world.” We should begin at Jerusalem, touching the lives nearest to us. But that is not to be the end. Every Christian has something to do with getting the gospel even to the remotest ends of the earth.

The first disciples were to be not only messengers, but also witnesses. “Ye are witnesses of these things.” How shall people know of things they have not seen, unless others testify of these things to them? The disciples knew personally the story of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. No other persons knew these facts. If the story was to reach the world it must be told by those who knew it. It is our business, after we have seen Christ, to become witnesses of Him to those who have not seen Him. It is not said, “Go and bear witness,” but, “Go and be witnesses.” The testimony is not to be merely in words—it must also be in the life.

The disciples may well have shrunk from such a tremendous task as their Master put upon them in giving them their commission. But He hastened to assure them that they would not be left unhelped. “Behold, I send forth the promise of

My Father upon you." They were to receive the Holy Spirit, and thus would be enabled to deliver their message, live their new life, and carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. The promise is put in a little different way in the last words of Matthew's Gospel: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Jesus went to heaven when He ascended, but He returned as to His real life, in the Holy Spirit, on the day of Pentecost. Since then the presence of Christ has been as actual among His people in all this world as it was during the days of His incarnation in the little company of friends who knew Him personally.

The story of the Ascension is told briefly. "It came to pass, while He blessed them, He parted from them, and was carried up into heaven." In the last glimpse the world had of Jesus in human form, He was holding out His hands over His friends, blessing them. Ever since that time the hands of the risen Christ have really been spread out over this world, raining benedictions down upon it. Jesus is at the right hand of God, but He has not lost any of His interest in this world, nor has He withdrawn His hands from the work of redemption. He ever lives in heaven to make intercession for us. Then He is always with us in the world, in real, personal presence, so that any one of us may say, "Christ and I are friends."

When the disciples had seen their Master ascending out of their sight they were not over-

whelmed with grief, as they had been when He died on the cross. They understood now the meaning of His departure, and their hearts were full of joy and gladness. "They worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." While they would not see Him any more, they knew where He had gone, and why. They knew also that He had not left them, that they had not lost Him, but that He had gone out of their sight, that He might become all the more to them, in their spiritual life and in their power for service.

There was something yet to do before the blessing of Christ's redemption could come upon His disciples. They were to wait for the promise of the Father. So they came down from the Mount of Olives and entered the city, to begin the waiting and prayer, at the end of which the Holy Spirit would come. "And were continually in the temple, blessing God." We can not always be engaged in prayer and formal acts of worship, but we can have in our lives continually the spirit of devotion. We can always be expecting to find blessing, looking up to God and pleading for it. If we live thus, a life of prayer, of faith, and hope, our week days, even when engaged most busily in the work of the world, will be full of song and cheer. If we can not write hymns which people may sing, we can at least make our lives songs, so that all who see us shall hear the music of love and peace in our life.

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