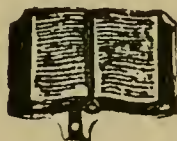


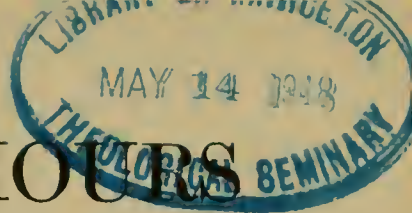
DEVOTIONAL HOURS WITH THE BIBLE

READINGS IN THE ACTS, THE EPISTLES
AND REVELATION

BY
J. R. MILLER, D. D.



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British Congregationalist.

DEVOTIONAL HOURS WITH THE BIBLE

By J. R. MILLER, D. D.

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READINGS IN THE ACTS, THE EPISTLES
AND REVELATION

GENERAL PREFACE

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

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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

IN 1908, when Dr. Miller was persuaded to prepare these practical comments for the volumes of this series, he asked me to share his editorial duties in order that he might have time for the new work. Side by side we worked for four years, during which he completed seven volumes of the eight. He was busy on the last volume when he realized that God would soon take him from earth. Then the request was made that I complete the volume for him.

It will not be necessary to tell readers that the messages are all from Dr. Miller's pen. My only task has been the choice of material and the adjustment of the chapters. JOHN T. FARIS.

Philadelphia, January, 1913.

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READINGS IN THE ACTS, THE EPISTLES
AND REVELATION

CHAPTER I

CHRIST'S ASCENSION

Read Acts I: 1-14

THE Ascension was part of the work of Christ as our Saviour. It was not the end of it. The Gospel narrative is described by Luke as "all that Jesus began both to do and to teach." It is interesting to think of words and deeds of Jesus as beginnings. He did not cease to live and work when He went away from earth. He only returned to heaven, where He continued His active interest in behalf of this world. The atonement was made on the cross, but the real work of saving men goes on all these common days. Men are not saved merely by Christ's death on Calvary; each one is saved by a personal relation with Christ, and by the work of Christ, which goes on in his life from the day he settles the great question until he enters heaven. Thus the work of Christ is going on; He only began it in His years on the earth. The coming of the Spirit was really the return of Christ to this world to continue His ministry. His work is carried on, too, by His people in this world. We are the body of Christ and we are to be Christ to others; Christ would live in us and work through us.

The most wonderful miracle the world ever saw was the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead. The truth of the resurrection is the very corner stone of our Christian faith. Everything depends upon it. If it could be disproved, the whole system of Christianity would be swept away. A Christ who died and did not rise again could never be the Helper and Saviour we need. If the body of Jesus still lies amid the dust of Jerusalem, how can He help us in our struggles, our toils and our duties? If death was too strong for Him, how can we hope that He can conquer death for us? In those forty days during which Christ remained on the earth He appeared again and again to His disciples in different manifestations of His love, and gave them proofs which left not a shadow of a doubt in any heart.

No doubt they would gladly have gone forth at once to begin the work of preaching and saving men. It would seem, too, as if they were prepared to go, for they had been in training with Christ for three years. Now that He was risen and ascended to heaven, why should they wait longer? We think of them as eager to begin their work. But they were not yet ready. We learn that waiting sometimes is our first duty. It is easier to be active than to wait, but sometimes everything depends upon our ability to be patient and not to move. When Christ wants us to wait, though it may seem to be a waste of time, we can always serve Him best by simply waiting. Indeed, we

can serve Him then in no other way. Many a good life is marred and its usefulness wrecked by impatience; it is the patient man to whom blessings come. A story is told of a Christian woman who had been active for many years, busy in ministries for Christ, who at last was laid aside in wasting consumption. Yet she was as quiet in her waiting as ever she had been in her most active years. One day her pastor said to her: "I cannot understand your quietness and peace these days. In former times, when you were well, you were ever going somewhere on some ministry of love, and were never still a moment. But now you seem to be as contented and restful here in your bed, when you can do nothing, as ever you were in your busy days." She replied: "When I was well, I used to hear Jesus say, continually, 'Go and do this or that,' and I always went quickly and obeyed Him. But now I hear Jesus say each hour, 'Lie here and cough,' and I know that it is His will for me, and I do it as sweetly as I can." She had caught the secret of the restful life.

The waiting was not idle—there was a purpose in it. There was a promise of divine power. "Wait for the promise." They were not yet ready to go out to work; they were not prepared to preach Christ's gospel until they had received the divine gift. There is a good lesson here for very many of us. Ofttimes we are in too much of a hurry to get to active work. We do not think of preparation for it. Some young men can hardly

restrain their impatience to get through college and theological seminary, that they may begin to preach. They want to combine as many years as possible in their course of training that they may get the more quickly into the field. They think they are wasting time in studying Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Church history and theology. But they make a serious mistake. To be fitted for work in life they need all the preparation they can possibly obtain. Then, even after one has finished the formal courses of study and is intellectually ready for the work, there is still something more to wait for; no man should begin to preach the gospel of Christ until he has waited at Christ's feet for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This preparation he cannot get from books nor in colleges and seminaries. The apostles had been well taught, with Christ Himself as the teacher; yet even they were not fitted to go out and meet the world until they had been filled with the Holy Spirit. The lesson applies to all of us. Every morning we should linger in prayer before God to receive His Spirit to fit us for the day's life and duty. Before every special ministry to which we are called we should also wait until we are endued with power.

The disciples were full of questions. All their original thoughts about the Messiahship of Jesus and the form of their own service had to be re-adjusted. So they came with the question, "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to

Israel?" Jesus answered, "It is not for you to know times or seasons." They were anxious to know about the future, to have a sort of program or chart of the coming years. They were somewhat inclined to speculation. Jesus taught them that they had nothing to do with the times and seasons, which were still in the Father's authority. They did not need to trouble themselves about these things. The lesson is important for all of us. There are many things it is better we should not know beforehand. Indeed, it is a merciful provision that we cannot see into the future. If we could see the sorrows, struggles, defeats and trials that we shall have to meet before we get home, all our bright days would be saddened by anticipation of these things. As it is, we go on, unconscious of shadows that lie before us, living as if all were clear and bright, trusting God for the future. Then when we come to the hard points, God gives us grace to meet them. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." On the other hand, if we knew the joys, blessings and prosperities which we are to have in our life, it might make us vain and self-confident. At least it might hinder us from doing our work in the very best possible way. It is better far that we should leave all our future in God's hands; it is not for us to know the times or the seasons.

The disciples were assured that they should receive something better than a chart of the times. Instead of worrying about the future, they should

have strength given them to meet the future as it should be opened unto them. Instead of idly prying into hidden things their duty was to take up the work of Christ and enter heartily upon it. The lesson is very important. We are told to watch for Christ's coming, but the way to watch is not to sit down in idleness and wonder if He will come to-morrow, but to keep our hands ever full of earnest work in His service, work which will help to hasten the coming of His Kingdom, work at which we should like Him to find us when He comes.

The particular form of the work of the disciples was indicated. "Ye shall be my witnesses." It was for this that they had been called and trained—that they might be witnesses for Him. A witness is one who knows something of which he is to testify to others. Forty days before, Jesus had been put to death in Jerusalem, and they were to go out and tell of this. They had lived with Him for three years, hearing His words and seeing His life. They were to testify of all they had heard and seen. To the men who had stained their hands in Christ's own blood was the gospel first preached. Another thought is that the murderers of Christ first received the gospel and many of them were saved. This would prove to all the world that none need perish. For if those who had nailed Christ to the cross should receive remission of sins, surely no other sinner anywhere could have sins too black to be forgiven.

A still further suggestion from this command was that all Christian work should begin at home, right among those whom we know and love the best. We are to begin at this center and then work out as we can into all the world.

While Jesus was talking one day to His disciples "he was taken up." In the other account of the Ascension we are told that it was while with uplifted hands He was blessing that He parted from them and was carried from them. This was the last glimpse the world had of Jesus. We like to remember how a friend looked and what he was doing the last time we saw him.

No wonder the disciples stood looking up into heaven after their ascending Lord. But this was not their most important duty. There was no reason for sorrow. They had not lost Jesus. He had told them it was expedient for them that He should go away that He might send the Comforter. Besides, He had not gone to stay. In due time He would return again. Pensive gazing is never the best occupation. Working and witnessing are better. When our friends leave us, we are not forbidden to sorrow, but certainly we are forbidden to sorrow in a way that breaks up our life of duty and service. A mother who lost a beloved daughter years ago, has done scarcely anything since but visit the cemetery and weep. Her home duties have been neglected. The living members of her family have received almost no care. She sits and gazes up into heaven and weeps for her child.

This is not the way our Lord wants us to do. He wants us to go at once back to our duties, thoughtful and serious, yet earnest and faithful, looking for blessing from heaven and witnessing by our faith and hope to the glory of our Saviour. One was telling me of a friend who came in one morning and sat for half an hour and spoke of matters which were much on his heart, giving this younger person advice and counsel and showing the deepest, most loving interest. In two days he was gone and then my friend said he never could forget that last visit, with the eager affection and the deep interest. That good face will always be remembered as when it was last seen. That was the way the disciples would always think of Him.

This last act of the Master, as He was leaving the earth, ought to mean a great deal to us. The last thing He did was to stretch out His hands and breathe from His lips a blessing. Christ's mission to the world was to bless it. At every step He left benedictions. Wherever He went He carried cheer. There are a few human friends whose visits are full of inspiration. A sick woman, a great sufferer for many years, said one day to a friend: "Yes, I am better this afternoon. I had Dr. Chalmers, my pastor, here, and he never comes but I say: 'That is just how Jesus would have come to see me. That is the way Jesus would have spoken. That is the way Jesus would have looked.' And I am better afterwards." Jesus was always lifting up His hands and blessing

people. He blessed the children, the sick, the sorrowing, the lonely. His whole life was really just like that vision the disciples had of Him that day of the Ascension.

Some people spend too much time gazing into heaven. There is a time when we ought to look upward, toward the skies. Man was made to adore. The original word in Greek for man means the upward look. One who looks always downward only grovels. Heaven is above us. We get our inspirations from above us. Our final home is above us. Never to look upward is to miss all that is worthy, beautiful and divine in life.

But there is a gazing into the heavens which is most idle and wasteful. The disciples saw their Master as He left them, and watched while His form was visible, until it was folded away in the cloud. Then it was their duty to hasten away to begin their waiting and praying. They were not to lose a moment. Peter wished to build tabernacles and keep the transfiguration glory on the mountain. But it was a mistaken wish. Work was waiting, and the purpose of the transfiguration was to prepare the Master and His disciples for going forward in the service of love.

It is not enough to read the Bible and to have our hearts warmed by its revealings and our spirits stirred by its calls to duty. The fervour is meant to send us out into the world to live nobly and to make the world better and happier. Let

us heed the call that bids us away from our idle gazing to serious duty. We dream too much—
| dreaming accomplishes nothing till we turn away and put our dreams into acts. We need the dreams to give us the inspiration, to show us the ideal, to set before us the heavenly pattern; then we must go forth to make the dreams become real in life, in character, in service.

CHAPTER II

THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVEN

Read Acts II: 1-13

THIS is the story of the beginning of the Christian Church. It was fifty days after the death of Christ. It did not occur at a convention—it was not an earth-born organization that was effected that day—it was heaven-born.

When Jesus ascended He sent His disciples to prayer, continuous prayer. The prayer was for a definite object. A promise had been given to them, but they were to get it by prayer, persevering, believing prayer. Ten days had passed and here is what is said about the disciples, “They were all together in one place.” This was an ideal meeting. For one thing they were all there—the ministers and the women and the men, too. At some prayer meetings there are many women, but very few men. All the friends of Christ living in Jerusalem were present at this meeting. None excused themselves because they had other things to do. The interest was so deep that nobody thought of remaining away from a single meeting. This was now the tenth day of the meetings, and yet no one had grown weary. What a

loss to the person it would have been if anyone had stayed at home the day the Spirit came! People who miss even one meeting do not know what blessing may come that day which they will lose. Thomas was absent from a meeting one evening, and we know what he missed. Jesus came that night, and for a whole week Thomas was unhappy and lived in doubt. If anyone had been absent on this day of Pentecost, he would have missed a great blessing.

We must notice, too, that these people all came promptly. A long while after the meeting began Peter said it was only nine o'clock. They must, therefore, have met at daybreak, at the latest, and yet they were all there. That was another good point—promptness and punctuality. They were also there with one accord. They were all of one mind. There was no discord among them. They had one purpose. Their hearts made music, and God heard the music in heaven. There is another thing about their praying—it was importunate. The meetings had continued now ten days, but none of them had wearied. All these points we should treasure up, so that we may pray in the same way.

The breath of God was breathed upon the waiting company. Breath means spirit. The night after the resurrection, in the upper room, Jesus breathed upon His disciples and said, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit." On the day of Pentecost they heard a sound like a wind. It was not a wind—it

was the breathing of God. Until the wind of God blows upon our hearts and lives there is no divine blessing for us. Miss Havergal tells of receiving once from a friend a gift of an æolian harp. She did not know how to use the harp to make music on it. She tried picking and thrumming its strings, but there was no music produced by this process. Then she looked over the friend's letter that had come with the harp, and learned how to use it. "Raise your window," the instructions ran, "and put it under the sash, that the wind may blow over the wires." Then the room was filled with the gentle strains. The only way to get the music from these lives of ours is to have the wind of God blow upon them.

First the wind, then the fire—both symbols of God—and then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Here we see the blessing of importunity and persistence. If they had ceased praying any time before the tenth day the blessing would not have come. No doubt many of our prayers fail to be answered because we grow weary and give up too soon. We talk a great deal about submitting to God's will in praying. That is right, but we may be altogether too submissive. It is God's will oftentimes that we should not cease to cry to Him. He wants us to be importunate, to press our request, to pray, and not faint. It was a wonderful answer that came that day—they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. They were filled; not a little measure of the divine blessing was

granted, but all they could receive. God will give us all we have room for of His grace and love. The reason some have more blessing than others is because they make more room in their hearts than others do for the blessing. The boy who has his pockets full of nails and marbles and bits of string, when his mother tells him to take all the cakes his pockets will hold, does not get many cakes. Older people, whose hearts are full of this world, get but a small measure of the Spirit in their praying. It was the Holy Spirit that was given to these first disciples so richly; it was not mere good feeling, but warm emotion, not fresh enthusiasm, not a good influence, but the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God—it was Himself that God gave them. He came down to live in them, not with them only, but in them. So this was the most wonderful blessing that was ever given to men. The best of it is that we may have the same blessing if we will only ask for it. We get nothing in this world so freely. Lowell says:

Bubbles we earn with our whole soul's tasking,
'T is heaven alone that is given away,
'T is only God can be had for the asking.

We all like to have visits from pleasant friends. Here is a Friend, the most pleasant, the most tender, the most helpful Friend in this world. He will come to visit us if only we ask Him, if we really want Him to come. He will come, not to make a short stay of an hour or a day, but to

remain always as our guest; not merely in our house, but in our heart.

The effect of being filled with God was seen at once. "They . . . began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." It was very important, then, that the disciples could talk to the crowds of foreigners on the streets in their own languages. They were to be missionaries, and they could not tell these strangers about Christ unless they knew their language. This miracle of tongues made them ready at once for their work. When our missionaries go to heathen lands the first thing they must do is to learn the language of those to whom they would tell the story of Christ. This takes a long time. On the day of Pentecost the foreigners from all countries were right there, and there was no time for the disciples to learn the different languages in the ordinary way; so God taught them at once how to preach in different tongues. The Spirit does not give this same power to Christians in these days. You will not be able, without any study, to speak German, or Spanish, or French the moment you are converted. But there is a sense in which the Spirit gives every new convert a new tongue. A Christian has a new speech. The tongue that spoke lies, speaks truth now. The tongue that spoke bitter words, utters now only kind, loving words. So we do get new tongues when we receive the Holy Spirit. If a boy or a man swears or lies and speaks bad words, or gets

cross and utters angry words, we know that he still has his old tongue and has not yet gotten a new one. But when he has the language of love, of praise, of prayer, we know that he is under a new power, the power of God.

“Every man heard them speaking in his own language.” This was a token that the gospel of Christ should sometime be preached in that language. In a certain sense this was fulfilled in the apostles’ days, for the preachers went everywhere with the Word. But it is now fulfilled in a far more glorious sense, for the Bible has been actually translated into nearly every important language of the world, and is sent to every nation, so that the people of all lands may literally hear the gospel and the wonderful works of God in their own tongue.

That was a wonderful day. No matter from what country any man in the throngs on the streets had come, there was some one to tell him of Jesus Christ and His love, and of the great redemption offered now to all the world. “How hear we, every man in his own language? . . . They were all amazed, and were perplexed.” No wonder they were amazed. It was really a wonderful thing that had happened. Indeed, everything about redemption is wonderful. The sending of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, to be born as a little babe and to live a human life, was wonderful. The dying of Christ on the cross was wonderful. Then the coming of the Holy Spirit was wonderful.

Yet there are many people who find more to interest and amaze them in bits of shells or stones or minerals, or in birds or ants or beetles, than in the gospel. They think the subject of redemption a matter suited only to Sunday-school children, ignorant people, and sick folks, while they find subjects suited to their great minds in the fields of the sciences and philosophies. How little earth's wise people know of the wonderful treasures of wisdom hidden in the gospel!

We are told in a later verse that some of the people mocked. There are always some people who will scoff and ridicule every extraordinary manifestation of God's grace. When Jesus performed great miracles, they said He was in league with Beelzebub and wrought His mighty works through Beelzebub's power. Festus pronounced St. Paul mad when he saw his great zeal and earnestness in Christ's service. These scoffing beholders accounted for the wonderful things they saw the disciples doing by saying that they were drunk. The same kinds of scoffing are heard in modern days when a great work of grace is going on anywhere. There are always some who mock.

CHAPTER III

A MULTITUDE CONVERTED

Read Acts II: 32-47

EVERYONE had a theory of the strange things that had happened. Some accepted the events as divine manifestations. Some mocked and ridiculed. Some said the disciples had been drinking wine too freely. Peter spoke to the throng and explained the meaning of the wonderful event. He brushed away the thought that the disciples were drunken, by reminding them of the early hour. He suggested the importance of the matter by saying it was something an old prophet had foretold and then declared that it was the work of the Messiah.

Jesus had been crucified and had risen, and "he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear." Jesus told His disciples it was better He should go away, for if He did not go away, the Comforter would not come; but if He departed He would send Him unto them. It seemed strange to the disciples that anything could be better to them than the staying with them of their Master. But now, when the promise had been fulfilled, they began to understand it. If Jesus had

stayed on the earth with His disciples, not going to His cross, there would have been no atonement, no Lamb of God bearing the sin of the world. There would have been no resurrection with its glorious victory over the last enemy. There would have been no intercessor in heaven pleading for struggling souls in this world and offering evermore the blood of His own sacrifice for sin. There would have been no Holy Spirit coming to stay with believers and to live in the heart of every Christian. Pentecost made it plain that it was indeed better Jesus should go away.

In the plainest, clearest way Peter declared the full, glorious meaning of the events of the past seven weeks connected with Jesus Christ. "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified." The Jews had killed their Messiah. This would seem to be the defeating of God's purpose of redemption. Yet that was not the end. Though the Son of God was dead, God's plan of love for the world could not fail. Jesus was raised up and exalted to be Lord and Christ. The Jewish people had missed their chance, had lost their Messiah, but Jesus was still the Messiah for all the world. God's purpose was not suffered to fail. The blood shed upon the cross by the rejecters of Christ became the very blood of eternal redemption. The love of God is greater than human sin.

Peter's words went to the hearts of the men

to whom he was speaking. The Holy Spirit gave divine power to the words. "When they heard this, they were pricked in their heart." It was as if their hearts had been pierced with sharp iron. Their souls were filled with remorse. They saw now what they had done. God had sent His Son to be their Messiah, and although they had been looking and praying for the Messiah, yet they had killed Him. No wonder they felt the power of remorse. Jesus comes to each one of us now personally, as He came to the Jews. If we reject Him as our personal Saviour we crucify Him afresh. What have we been doing with Jesus since we first heard His name? People sometimes say they are not great sinners; they have done nothing very bad. They forget that the greatest of all sins is the rejection of Jesus Christ as Redeemer and Lord.

The people asked in their great distress, "What shall we do?" They saw their sin and cried out to know what they must do to be saved. Could they undo the terrible crime they had committed in crucifying their Messiah? They were in sore perplexity, and they did just what they ought to have done—they asked Christ's apostles to tell them what they should do. If we have been rejecting Christ we should ask the same question. We cannot change our past; we cannot undo our rejection. A soldier lay dying in a hospital. A chaplain was passing through the ward, and seeing the dying man, knelt beside him and asked him,

“Can I do anything for you?” The soldier opened his eyes and looked up with despair in his face, and cried, “Oh, sir, can you undo?” Then followed a sad confession of a wasted life. The young man had not only ruined his own life, but had also been a tempter to many another. “Oh, sir, can you undo these things for me?” he cried again. No; there is no possible undoing. What is done cannot be undone. But although the past be wasted, the future remains. God is ever giving us another chance to be saved. We shall see in Peter’s answer what we must do.

Peter put his answer in a few plain, clear words, “Repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus.” There was still a way of salvation, though they had so dealt with their Messiah. Repentance was the first step. What is repentance? It is more than dropping a few tears over a wrong life. The wrong must be given up, turned away from, forsaken forever. There must be a change of mind, and that change of mind must show itself in the conduct. A little way out of Dayton, a young man met an old gentleman one day and asked him, “How far is it to Dayton?” “Twenty-five thousand miles,” was the answer, “if you keep on as you are going now; a quarter of a mile if you turn square about.” If an impenitent sinner, facing away from God, asks how far it is to heaven, the answer is, “Millions and millions of miles, if you go on this way; just two steps if you turn right about.” We

never can be saved if we keep our sins. We must repent. Baptism implied that the penitents had received Jesus Christ as their Saviour and accepted Him as their Lord. If we would be saved we must do the same—give up our sins and receive Christ.

The penitents were baptized unto the remission of their sins. It is sin that is the trouble. Our sins have destroyed us. But there is one way of being saved from our sins. It is through Jesus Christ. Remission is more than mere forgiveness. It means sending away, dismissing forever. This tells in a word what God does when we come to Christ. Merely to remit the penalty would be a poor blessing. In our heart the old sin still would live, with all its old power. The only way really to be freed from our sins is to have the sins themselves cleansed out of our life. God's forgiveness is complete; He remembers our sins against us no more forever. Then He sends His Spirit to live in us. He breaks sin's power and gives us a new master. Christ says, "Take my yoke upon you." The final result is the lifting of the life up to glory. One summer day the sun found some foul, stagnant water lying in a gutter. It lifted it up and the winds bore it on their wings through the air, and on a mountain top, far off, it settled down again upon the earth, no more foul and stagnant, but cleansed and pure now, white, spotless snow, radiant as an angel's garment. So Christ takes souls stained and defiled

by sin, lifts them out of the foul corruption of earth, and brings them at last to the mountains of glory, whiter than snow.

Peter assured the penitent people before him that they need not despair. There was hope for them. "To you is the promise, and to your children," he told them. Although the Jewish people had crucified Christ, the offer of salvation was still made to them. Even hands which had been stained with the blood of the Messiah were washed white in the very blood which they themselves had shed. The word "children" in this verse is very suggestive. God never leaves out the children. He has a warm place in His heart for them in His Church. The children may have all the blessings of Christ's redemption. Christian parents should look with happy faith upon their children as heirs to God's promises.

The gospel was not for the Jews only, but for all the world; it was for "all that are afar off." The circle widens out, as when a stone is dropped in the center of a lake and little waves roll in circles wider and wider, until they splash on all the shores, even out on the farthest bays and creeks. The promise was given first to the company that stood there and heard Peter, and then it reached out until it came to those who were afar off—the farthest off in space, living at the ends of the earth; the farthest off in time, down to the end of the world; the farthest off in character, the worst and the guiltiest.

Those early followers of Christ “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching.” Continuance and steadfastness are essential. It is not enough to begin a Christian life; one must go on unto the end, through all discouragement, through all temptation, through all trial, faithful unto death. These first believers kept themselves in the school of Christ, coming continually to the meetings to receive instruction from the apostles. A good Christian life must always be a growing life. There must be growth in knowledge. Young Christians will never grow, however, if they feed only upon trashy novels and flashy story papers. They must get the apostles’ teaching, God’s good bread for souls. They kept themselves also in the fellowship of the apostles. We would say they attached themselves to the Church and made Christian people their friends. They went regularly to the communion—the breaking of bread. They were faithful in attending the meetings for prayer. Thus they took up the new life with great earnestness and faithfulness.

At once love awoke in their hearts for fellow Christians. Some of these were poor, and those who were rich shared their plenty with them. “They sold their possessions . . . and parted them to all, according as any man had need.” That is, they were large-hearted and generous. They gave to Christ not only themselves, but all that they had. They understood that the strong must help the weak, that the rich must help the

poor. They lived together as one family. Whatever there was exceptional about the condition of things in the early Church, the principle is always the same. Those who have blessings must share them with those who lack. Those who are strong must help those who are weak. Those who have abundance must share their plenty with those who are in want.

The result of such beautiful Christian living was greatly increased. "The Lord added to them day by day." This is the way a church should grow. The Lord added those who were added; only the Lord can truly add souls to His Church. Men's converts do not amount to anything, if that is all they are. There is no use in our urging people to join the Church until they are first joined to Christ and have been renewed by His grace. We might as well tie green branches to a bare pole, and think we have a living tree. It is interesting, also, to notice that the Lord added "day by day." Converts were not made merely at communion seasons or at revival times; day by day men came to Christ and took Him as their Master. In every true, living church there should be continuous revival.

CHAPTER IV

THE LAME MAN HEALED

Read Acts III: 1-11

It could not have been more than a few weeks or months after the day of Pentecost. The apostles were busy teaching the three thousand converts. They continued to attend the temple services, at least the daily hours of prayer. The first miracle was wrought in connection with one of these services.

Peter and John appear here together. They were close, personal friends. They were complements of each other—the one having what the other lacked. Peter was the speaker. John was the quiet apostle. It was at the hour of evening prayer that the two men were going up to the temple. They were going to offer worship—they had no thought, so far as we know, of any special ministry of their own—the miracle they performed was a piece of wayside work.

As the two men came near to the Beautiful Gate a beggar was lying there. There probably were other beggars there who had come or had been brought by their friends to beg from the people. “And a certain man that was lame from

his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the door of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple."

As this man had been brought daily to this door, probably for many years, there is little doubt that he was there oftentimes when Jesus passed and repassed that same door. Probably he reached out his hand many times to Jesus, as He was passing the temple, but having no faith to ask for healing he had remained unhealed all the while. So, year after year, multitudes of people lie unblest and unhealed about the very gates of God's sanctuary, while Christ constantly passes by them. It is not enough to live near a church, even close by a church door. One may be lost even in such a favoured position.

This first apostolic miracle was more than a miracle. It illustrated the work of the Church. The man who lay at the gate was helpless—he had been carried there. The unsaved cannot save themselves. The beggar saw Peter and John about to enter the temple and "asked to receive an alms." He expected to receive a little money from them. He did not know that they were able to do something far better for him than to put a silver coin into his hand. So, continually, in our praying we ask for little things, bits of money, or bread, or some worldly thing, not knowing, or not realizing, that there are infinitely better things which we might get. We are fooled by life's ap-

pearances. The things which we think are the most important things are the least important. Bunyan tells of the man with the muck rake, gathering up the rubbish, but not seeing the crowns which hung in shining beauty close above him.

Many good people pay no heed to beggars. They do not give them a kindly look or a gracious word. How do you know who the beggar at your door may be? Of William Cullen Bryant it was said that he thought of every man he met as an angel disguised, and treated him as such. Peter had a kindly heart. This man did not ask for healing. The miracle was not wrought in answer to his prayer, but the merciful thought had its origin in the heart of the apostle. So Christ looks upon us, sees our needs and pities us even when we ask nothing of Him. Notice, too, Peter's condescension and humility. He was not too fine a gentleman to stop and have a little talk with a lame beggar. He spoke gently to him. He did not forget that under those rags there beat a human heart whose feelings could be hurt by rudeness. It is certainly worth while for us to learn this one little lesson in passing. Even if we are finely dressed we need not brush by a ragged beggar or poor man with disdain. We do not know who the person is. We do not know that wrapped up in that heap of wretchedness is an immortal soul, which is capable of shining in heavenly glory. It may be one of God's children who sits there. At least it will do us no harm, in passing, to stop

and say a kind word. We must not forget that Jesus said, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me."

We may study the way Peter showed kindness to the beggar. There are a good many people who cannot give money to the needy, but they need not therefore do nothing. "Silver and gold have I none; but what I have, that give I thee," said Peter. He was a poor man. He had left all to follow Christ. He had no money with him that day to give to any beggar, and he might have heaved a sigh, dropped a tear, and then passed on to his evening prayers. But that was not what Peter did. He did not conclude that because he had no money with him therefore he could not do anything for the poor man. He would give what he had to give. But money is not the only thing people need. It is usually the poorest alms that can be given. Kind words are better, love and sympathy are finer. So far as we know, Jesus never gave money to anyone, and yet there never was such another giver of blessings as He was. We cannot impart the same large measure of help that Jesus gave, but we can give the same kind of help. There is not one of us who cannot give to others things which will enrich their lives far more than if we put money into their hands. We can give a cheering word, if nothing else, to some weary one in the way; a word will brighten his heart for many a long mile. Courage put into

a tired heart, sympathy into a sorrowing heart, are better than any gift of gold. None of us are too poor to give something to others. If we cannot give silver or gold we can certainly give love and sympathy, which are better than money.

It is interesting to read on and see what Peter did for this man to whom he could not give money. He said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. And he took him by the right hand, and raised him up." Surely this was very much better than any alms Peter could have given the beggar. If he had given him money it would have helped him along a little further as a beggar. That would have been all. But when the man was healed he did not need to be helped any more. He was able now to take care of himself. Was not that a far better way to aid him than if he had left him still helpless, merely giving him temporary relief?

Note the twofold help Peter gave this man. First, he spoke the word which kindled hope and faith, and led to the man's healing. Then he reached out his own strong hand to help the man to rise. It is a good thing to lend a hand when one is down to help him rise again. There are many about us who need the helping hand. It is not enough to preach and teach; we must give sympathy, love and help to those who are lying helpless in their sins. Then the sorely tempted and those also who have fallen need a hand to help

them rise. There is a wondrous power in the touch or clasp of a human hand. While we bid men to rise up and walk we must be ready always to help them.

The lame man instantly responded. "Leaping up, he stood, and began to walk." The cure was instantaneous and complete. The healing was proved by his rising and walking and leaping. We must prove the reality of our conversion by acts of spiritual activity. Some people profess to have become Christians and then just lie where they were, inactive, showing no evidence of spiritual life. They have mouths, but they speak not for Christ; they have hands, but they take up no work for Christ. They have feet, but they walk not for Christ. Conversion ought to send the life tingling into every member. When Christ enters our heart we will walk and leap and praise God.

"He entered with them into the temple." He did not want to lose his friends and clung to them. Besides, he wished to make confession of his healing before men. The newly converted Christian should at once join Christ's people and make his friendships and companions among them. This implies open confession of Christ, and that is a most important duty. Christ requires it, and it is needful to the completeness and the wholesomeness of Christian life. It implies also unison with the Church, and this is a duty of great moment.

The effect of this miracle on the people was

very great. "The people saw him walking and praising God: . . . and they were filled with wonder." The mere sight of the man walking about—this man who had never walked before, whom all the people had known for years as a beggar at the gates—was a sermon in itself. If he had sat still after he was healed, still holding out his hand and asking for alms, his healing might have been a little comfort to himself, but it would not have been worth a straw for testimony or influence. Those who have been healed by Christ ought to manifest it. To know of such a great Physician of souls and not tell men about it, is a crime against nature. Confessing Christ and speaking of Him will bring deeper joy to our own hearts. Besides, it makes known to others in similar need the Healer and Friend to whom they may go for blessing. We should rise up when Christ has blessed us in any way and let people know about it—at least let them see in our life what He has done for us.

"Why fasten ye your eyes on us, as though . . . we had made him to walk?" The people's first thought was to regard the apostles as wonderful men, because of the miracle that had been wrought through them. But Peter hastened to turn all the glory of the miracle to Christ. It is a mark of true religion that we seek to give Christ the honour and glory of whatever good we do. We are apt to accept compliments and gratitude for

ourselves when we have been blessed and used in doing good to others, forgetting that to Christ belongs the honour and the glory. We cannot but be pleased to have Christ do good through us, but we need to watch that all the praise and the honour shall go to Him.

CHAPTER V

THE TRIAL OF PETER AND JOHN

Read Acts IV: 1-31

THE healing of the lame man made a great stir in the temple. Peter at once began to speak to the wondering people, explaining the miracle. In doing so he told again the story of Jesus Christ, who had been rejected by the rulers and crucified, but whom God had raised up and glorified. Through Him, said Peter, is this man made strong and well. It grieved the rulers that Peter was proclaiming Jesus Christ as the power through which the lame man had been healed, and also as the Author of resurrection.

While Peter was thus speaking, there came a party of priests and Sadducees with a squad of temple police, to arrest the apostles, whom they put in prison over night. This, however, did not check the progress of the gospel. In the very next sentence we read, "But many of them that heard the word believed." The rulers had cast the apostles into prison, but they could not put chains upon the Holy Spirit. The number of the converts continually increased until the three

thousand of the day of Pentecost had become five thousand.

Always opposition has helped God's cause. The storm that sets itself to put out the flames only fans them into intenser violence. This truth should give great confidence to those who are called to suffer persecution. There is a beatitude for such—"Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The story of the trial of the apostles vividly recalls the scenes of our Lord's trial, a few weeks before. The place was the same, and we find the same names—Annas and Caiaphas, for example. The rulers imagined that they could compel the apostles to submit to their dictation. How farcical all this appeared to the angels, as they looked down upon it, out of the skies!

Peter was the spokesman, and he spoke well. This is a different man from the old Peter of former days, especially the Peter of the night of Christ's betrayal, when he lacked courage to confess his Lord, and quailed before the taunting words of a girl. Now he stands before the highest tribunal of the nation, and exhibits a courage which makes the rulers tremble. It was because for the hour of need the Spirit of God freshly filled him. It was not Peter that spoke, but the Holy Spirit who filled him and spoke in him. The Spirit is for us as truly as He was for the apostles. He is ready to fill us with His own life whenever

we have any work to do, any testimony to offer, or any trial to endure. Let us claim our spiritual birthright.

The rulers implied that the apostles had used some secret art—magic or sorcery—in healing the lame man. They had demanded, “By what power, or in what name, have ye done this?” intimating that some agency other than divine had wrought the cure. Peter was not angry—he kept his temper and spoke calmly. He used no insulting words. Then he was also tactful. He referred to “a good deed done to an impotent man, by what means this man is made whole.” There ought to be no criticism or condemnation of a good deed done to a lame man, restoring him to strength. We condemn people for hurting others, not for helping them. He then told his judges at once the source of the power which had healed the man. “Be it known unto you all.” Christianity has nothing to hide. It has no secret arts by which it accomplishes its great works. It uses no incantation, practices no tricks, does nothing in the dark. It wants the whole world to know just what is the secret of its power. It has nothing to fear from the closest and most critical examination of its methods. This is not the case with the world’s religions. They make everything as mysterious as possible. They dare not throw open to the gaze of men the arts and practices by which they claim to work. One of the proofs of the genuineness of Christianity is that it challenges

the inspection of the world. Its secret of power is an open secret. It has nothing to keep back. It never fears to submit to the fullest examination and the severest tests. It possesses an abounding confidence.

Peter then declared boldly that it was "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised," that the man had been cured. Why did he add the words about the crucifixion of Jesus? Why did he not prudently stop with the word Nazareth? He was speaking now to the very men who had condemned Jesus, and to the Sadducees who were enraged by every reference to the resurrection; why did he not refrain from using these offensive words, which threw the terrible charge right in their faces? That would have been trimming the truth down to make it less offensive, cutting off the very part that his judges disliked to hear. It would not have been faithful witnessing, for it would not have told his hearers of their sin and guilt, nor would it have proclaimed the power of God in raising Jesus from the dead. In our efforts to be courteous and polite, "wise as serpents," and to avoid giving offense, let us be sure never to keep back any part of the truth.

Peter further declared that this Jesus was the Messiah. "He is the stone which was set at nought of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner." They had rejected Jesus as unsuitable to be their Messiah, but God had

made Him the Saviour and Lord of the world. In the same way do human and divine estimates differ continually. In the things men admire, God sees no beauty, and in the things which men despise, God beholds the rarest loveliness. He took for the foundation of His heavenly temple a stone which the human builders thought unfit to be used anywhere in the wall, and He is building the whole temple out of things that men despise, for the saints of the Lord are not those whom this world honours. God is gathering into His Church those whom earth sets aside, and then its glory in the end will outshine all the splendours of this world.

Peter declared also to the rulers that there is no possibility of personal salvation in any other but in Jesus Christ. If these men themselves, these rulers, ever reached heaven, it would be by the way of the cross which they themselves had set up. To all rejecters the same is true—if they ever are saved it must be by the Christ whom they are now despising. There is no other way.

Two facts are unanswerable. One was the effect of Christ upon His friends. They were “unlearned and ignorant men,” men who had not had the teaching and training of rabbis and scholars, and yet they were evidently men of great power. “They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” The marks of Jesus were in their lives. They had been impressed by His influence. They saw it in their very faces. There was some-

thing in them which recalled the bearing of Jesus that morning when He was on His trial, and then they remembered that they had seen them with Him at that time. It is a great thing when we make people think of Christ by the way we bear ourselves. No one can be with Jesus as a companion, a teacher, a friend, and not show it in his life. It was said of Dr. Babcock that "the secret of his wondrous influence among men was that he made God so attractive. He helped men to fall in love with Jesus Christ."

The other fact which they could not answer was the man himself. There he stood, healed—how? "Seeing the man that was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it." They could not say the man had not been lame—everybody had known him as the beggar of the Beautiful Gate. They could not deny that he had been healed. There was a man who said he had been able to refute every proof offered by the Christian religion, save one—his mother's life. There is no argument in proof of the power of the gospel equal to what the gospel itself has done in the lands into which it has gone. Regenerated men and women are unanswerable proofs of the regenerating power of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER VI

THE SIN OF LYING

Read Acts V: 1-11

THERE are blemishes on the fairest human beauty. The best man has his faults and imperfections. The holiest periods of the Church have their defections and dishonours. The history of the apostolic days has in the brightest of its glory this sad story of Ananias and Sapphira. The spirit of love was regnant in the early Church. It was a true brotherhood. Whatever anyone had he was ready to share with those who lacked. "Not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own." This generosity was voluntary—there was no forced communism. But many of the wealthier Christians sold their possessions and brought the money to the apostles, to be used by them in helping the poor. One of these generous givers is named—Joseph Barnabas. Elsewhere we are told that Barnabas was a good man. His name means "son of consolation," or "son of exhortation." Evidently he was one of those men who have a genius for helping others. He had learned how a Christian man should use his money. He was prompted by

love for Christ and for the poor to sell a piece of land and to lay the money at the feet of the apostles, to be used in helping his fellow Christians who were poor.

The closing verses of chapter four and the beginning of chapter five should be read together. The word "but" makes a striking contrast between what goes before and what comes after. One man's good deeds inspire good deeds in others. No doubt the influence of the generosity of Barnabas did much to make others of the first Christians liberal. No doubt, too, his noble act put it into the heart of Ananias to do what he did. He wanted to be generous, too. The people were loud in their praise of Barnabas when it was known that he had made his gift of love. Perhaps his desire to have the commendation of his fellow church members was the motive which inspired him. Possibly, at first, his impulse was right and his intention likewise. He may have meant to bring all the money to the apostles. It often happens that under a stirring appeal a man resolves to give a certain large sum to some good cause. But as he thinks over the matter his enthusiasm wanes, his willingness to make the self-sacrifice diminishes, and he ends by giving nothing at all, or only a small part of what he intended to give. This may have been the case with Ananias. At least we know that, having sold the property, he brought only a small portion of the proceeds, which, however, he repre-

sented as all he had received—secretly keeping back a part, while getting credit for the giving of all.

Peter made it very plain that though Satan had put the thought into his heart, Ananias was yet guilty. “How is it that thou hast conceived this thing in thy heart?” He first said that Satan had put it into the heart of Ananias, but he reminded him that he himself had first conceived the thought, allowed the thought to be born in his heart. Satan may be the author of the evil thoughts which are whispered in our ears, but we make them our own when we accept them and adopt them. Satan does not work them out—we do that. We cannot, then, throw off the responsibility for our sins by blaming the tempter with them. They are our own when we commit them, no matter who first tempted us with them. We are not responsible for temptations, for suggestions of evil,—Jesus was tempted in all points; suggestions of evil were made to Him,—but we are responsible whenever we accept evil suggestions and let them into our heart. We must resist every temptation, for no matter how fiercely the tempter plies us, if we yield, the guilt and the penalty will be ours. Satan will never help us to bear the consequences of our sins.

Peter reminded Ananias further of the terrible nature of his sin. His falsehood was not merely one that had been made to men. “Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” Is there

any lying unto God in these modern days? Was this sin of Ananias' one that can be repeated in Christian service and worship in our day? Have we never come perilously near a like sin? When we unite with the Church we profess, both in act and in words, to dedicate to God all that we are and all that we have. Do we keep back no part? It is told of some old Saxon warrior who came to unite with the Church, that when he was immersed he held up his right hand out of the water. When he was expostulated with, and told that his whole body must be buried, he replied that he would keep that hand to himself for battle with his enemies. He could not give up this part of his old life. There are too many people who reserve some part of their life undevoted when they make their consecration to God. We sing hymns not to men, but to God, and yet we frequently come upon lines which declare our fullest love and our unreserved devotion to Christ and that promise the most unbounded service. Do we really mean all we say when we sing such hymns? Do we not sometimes profess in our prayers what we fail to make good in our lives? Are not these things of the nature of lying to God? Men boast of their character for veracity, that their word is never questioned by their fellow men. Are they as careful to keep their word with God, to fulfill every promise and vow to Him? It is a great sin to lie to men. No sin is condemned in the Bible more persistently than

falsehood. Liars must be shut out of heaven's gates and shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. But lying unto God is far worse than lying unto men.

Quickly came the punishment. "Ananias hearing these words fell down and gave up the ghost." His death was not Peter's act, but God's. It was not merely summary punishment for his presumptuous and daring sin, but being visited thus at the beginning of the Christian Church, it became a beacon, marking a fearful peril and sending its warning down the after ages. Thus God branded hypocrisy in the Church as among the most fearful of all sins. We should not forget that our Lord spoke no words so bitter and scathing as the words He spoke against hypocrisy. The lesson should be heeded by everyone. Such penalty may not be visited now upon those who lie to the Holy Spirit as Ananias did. They may live on and die in quiet. But the guilt is none the less because the judgment is not visited at once. There is a day coming when every such sin will receive its just recompense of reward.

Sapphira kept herself in the background, possibly intentionally. She was not present when Ananias brought in the money. Neither had she learned of his terrible death. Three hours afterwards, not knowing what had happened, Sapphira came to the meeting. Peter then asked her about the sale of the property. "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much." She had an oppor-

tunity to repent and confess her sin. But she did not do it. She answered, "Yea, for so much," naming as price the amount which had been given to the apostles. Then swiftly followed the question, "How is it that ye have agreed together to try the Spirit of the Lord?" It was one of the worst exaggerations of the guilt of this deed that the two had deliberately agreed together to commit it—two persons, especially, so closely and sacredly united as husband and wife. This shows that it was not a hasty sin, wrought under sudden and powerful temptation, but a sin deliberated over, calmly planned, and boldly executed. Many people will do things secretly which they would never do if they were first to put their thought and purpose into words for any ear to hear. If men who commit evil deeds would always talk to their wives about them first, fewer crimes would stain their hands. Hearts are very hard when two persons conspire together to do any wicked thing.

The effect of this terrible occurrence upon the people was awe and dread. "Great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all that heard these things." Such examples of divine judgment should deter others from like sin. Though God may not punish hypocrisy in every case by instant death, yet the penalty will be no less terrible. We all should be afraid of sin. We should be afraid also of every approach to sin, every smallest step toward it, for the evil

that seems little at first grows at last into a power which binds the soul fast forever. One day when the tide was out, a man went out to gather sea plants on the rocks, and in stepping from ledge to ledge his foot slipped down and became jammed in a crevice. He attempted to pull it out, but could not. He cried aloud, he shrieked, he prayed, but all in vain—no one heard him. So the tide came rolling in, and rose up higher and higher until it rolled over him and drowned his last gurgling cry in its remorseless waters. So it is that sin clutches men. Even one sin, one secret sin, one evil habit, may hold the soul that indulges it until the floods of judgment come and roll over it, engulfing it in eternal destruction.

It was thus with Ananias and Sapphira. They indulged the sin of covetousness and love of approbation, until their souls were caught and overwhelmed. It is always perilous to commit even one sin—that may be the one that will bring judgment.

One of the great lessons to be learned from this incident is that we cannot possibly deceive God. We talk about secret sins, as if any sin were secret when all heaven sees it, when God beholds it and the angels witness it. Sometime exposure will come.

There is a story of a king who had been vanquished in war. His conqueror offered terms which were satisfactory in every respect save one—they required him to do public homage to his

victor. That, however, was at length so far modified that he was to be allowed to render his homage in the tent of his rival. But when the hour came, and the captive was in the very act of doing homage, his conqueror, by some machinery which he had prepared, suddenly stripped off the canvas covering, and the men of both armies saw the king on his knees before his conqueror. If we allow sinful ambition or evil appetites to overmaster us, and think we can save ourselves from humiliation by doing homage to it under the secrecy of a curtained tent, we may be sure that when we are in the very act of confessing our allegiance to it, the Lord will throw down the covering and unveil our degradation before the eyes of angels and men.

CHAPTER VII

THE APOSTLES IMPRISONED

Read Acts V: 17-32

THE sin of Ananias and Sapphira and the swift judgment that followed did not check the progress of the Church. "By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought. . . . They even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that, as Peter came by, at the least his shadow might overshadow some one of them." Every one of us casts a shadow of influence on others wherever he goes.

But the bitterness of the rulers was not allayed by the judgment. They grew more and more fierce. The narrative goes on: "The high priest rose up, and all they that were with him . . . and they were filled with jealousy." The word "jealousy" gives us the key to this whole incident. The apostles were received with favour by the people. Multitudes were thronging about them with their sick, brought to be healed. It was the wonderful success of the gospel that so enraged the high priest and his party. There are some persons who cannot bear to see other persons succeed or to hear other people praised.

Even in churches are sometimes found those who are embittered and aroused to jealousy by the prosperity of other churches. Instead of rejoicing that souls are saved, that the poor are helped, that evil spirits are cast out, that good is done, they criticize, talk bitterly, and oppose the efforts which are so manifestly of God. A godly Christian minister put it down at the end of a year, as one of the year's lessons, that he had learned to rejoice in the prosperity of others. No lesson is harder to learn, and none is more beautiful in life. We are all too apt to be jealous of those who are more honoured in life and work than ourselves.

The rulers had not yet learned that walls do not make a secure prison for Christ's friends. "They . . . laid hands on the apostles, and put them in public ward. But an angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them out." There is no use trying to fight against God. He who sits in heaven laughs when rulers take counsel against His anointed. Joseph's brothers thought they had got the boy out of the way when they had sold him as a slave, but the Lord only laughed at their plot and took him into His own hands, making a mighty man of him. The princes chuckled when they got Daniel into the lion's den, but the laugh was turned when he came out unhurt and they themselves were cast to the hungry beasts. There was fiendish glee in certain quar-

ters when the three Hebrew youths were cast into a fiery furnace. Their stiff knees would be limbered now. But that laugh was turned, too, before the end came. Haman chuckled when he got the gallows built for Mordecai. He would soon be rid of the old Jew who had been in his way so long. But he fell into his own trap. The rulers crucified Jesus and sealed the stone and set a guard about His grave. But they only brought derision upon themselves, while by their act they exalted Jesus to a place of highest honour and glory. So here, the rulers cast the apostles into prison, bolted the doors, and set their guards, but an angel came quietly by night, took the prisoners out, and left the keepers standing guard over an empty prison. Wicked men do not have all things their way in this world. There is a God who is just and true, who keeps His hand upon all the affairs of earth, who takes care of His own and guards them as the apple of His eye. This is one of the most precious truths of the Bible for the suffering and imperiled servants of God. They are absolutely safe in the hands of God.

The angel who brought the apostles out of their prison had a message and a commission for them: "Go ye, and stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this Life." The angel did not tell the apostles to flee away and hide from the rulers. That is what escaping prisoners usually do. But these men were set

free, not to go away from danger, but to continue their work. Then, they were not to go and talk about their trials and hardships, to excite sympathy among the people. They were not to say a word about themselves at all, but were to declare the words of "this Life," eternal life, the way of salvation. They were not to go and speak in quiet places, away from danger, but were to stand in the temple, the most public place in all the city. They were to speak to the people—that is, to all the people, poor as well as rich, ignorant as well as learned. It is a suggestive name by which the gospel is here called—"Life"—this Life. Jesus Christ came that we might have life and that we might have it abundantly. The apostles were prompt and eager to obey the angel's bidding. They hastened to the temple about daybreak and began to teach.

The high priest did not know what his prisoners were doing. Full of rage, he was eager to have them punished, and called a full meeting of the court, and sent officers to bring the apostles from the prison. "But the officers . . . returned, and told, saying, The prison-house we found shut in all safety, and the keepers standing at the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within." The high priest was sure of his victims. He had them safely locked in the guardhouse. It was a startling surprise when he learned that the prison was empty. There is an old Bible word which says,

“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly.” There is a promise also which assures us that “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it.” Satan is very shrewd and cunning, and by long practice has learned to do his work well. But God is stronger and wiser than Satan, and knows how to deliver His own out of Satan’s hands.

At length the apostles stood before the court and were accused of having disobeyed the command to speak no more in the name of Jesus. To this Peter answered, “We must obey God rather than men.” This should be the motto and life principle of every one of us. This has been the martyr’s word in all Christian centuries. Bunyan, when condemned to three months’ imprisonment for preaching the gospel, and told that if he did not promise to abstain he would be banished, nobly replied: “I am at a point with you. If I were out of prison again to-day, I would preach the gospel again to-morrow, by the help of God.” Not many of us will be called to assert the principle in such circumstances of peril; but in life’s ordinary business, in its common affairs, in school, at home, at play, we shall every day have opportunities to follow conscience, to do what God commands without being swerved from duty by what men say. It would be very fine to do some such heroic thing as the apostles did

here, but it is just as fine in God's sight to live faithfully and loyally in the midst of the countless little temptations of the most commonplace life.

“Him did God exalt with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins.” Here we have the whole gospel. Jesus was the Messiah of God. He was rejected and killed by those He had come to deliver and save. But God raised Him up and exalted Him to the throne of glory. There He is not only King of kings, but the Saviour of all who will believe on Him. The two words, “repentance” and “remission,” are full of meaning. We are not saved merely from sin's power, but from sin itself. That is, we are pledged to give up our sin. Repentance means this. Then remission means more than merely wiping out the penalty; it means also the putting away of the sins themselves.

CHAPTER VIII

STEPHEN THE FIRST MARTYR

Read Acts VI: 1-8; VII: 54 to VIII: 2

STEPHEN is one of the most interesting characters in the New Testament. His story is short, but intense. His work belongs to a few days, and he makes but one speech, but his influence belongs to all after time. He was the first deacon and the first Christian martyr.

Stephen's fiery eloquence touched many hearts, but it also aroused the members of the Jewish synagogues, who set themselves against him. We must not be surprised if our efforts to do good awaken opposition. The more we try to honour Christ and build up His kingdom, the more opposition we shall encounter. So long as we keep quiet about people's sins and connive at their wrongdoings, they may not seriously oppose us. But when we assault the evil we see in them and openly condemn it, we shall certainly stir up enmity and antagonism and bring upon ourselves opposition and possibly persecution.

Stephen's opponents were no match for him in argument. "They were not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake."

It was not Stephen with whom they had to contend; there was an unseen One beside him all the while who helped him. The Spirit in Stephen whom his opponents could not resist was the Holy Spirit. Stephen was an inspired man when he stood before his opponents and declared to them the words of God. He was filled with God, as were the apostles on the day of Pentecost. If we go out in Christ's name to speak for Him, there will always be One with us whom no man can withstand. If only we remembered this, it would make us brave, resistless, in speaking the truth.

False witnesses were brought to testify against Stephen, to try to convict him, as the rulers had tried to convict Jesus. False witnesses are continually testifying against Christianity, in the effort to prove that it is not a divine religion. The world is full of books which seek to cast doubts upon divine revelation. In all life, too, there is a disposition to bear false witness. Reputations are made and unmade in certain drawing rooms.

In the council before which Stephen was standing there was intense bitterness. The faces of the men grew dark with rage as they looked upon him and heard his words, which they could not answer. They were little like honourable judges sitting in a court of justice. Their hearts were full of rage and fury. In contrast with all this, Stephen himself was calm and quiet. The peace of God was in his heart. He was sustained and

strengthened by the trust which nothing could disturb. The record says, "All that sat in the council, fastening their eyes on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." What is the face of an angel like? We cannot tell, but we know that those who live in God's presence, in the light of God's love, must have shining faces. No doubt Stephen's face shone. The secret of the shining was in his heart. The peace of God was there, and even amid the excitements about him, with enraged enemies glowering upon him, he had no fear, but was kept in perfect quiet. An angel's face must be gentle and loving, for angels never know the feeling of anger or bitterness or hate—and we know that Stephen's heart was full of love. There was no unforgiveness in Stephen—he had learned from his Master the lesson of patience under injustice or wrong—to make dark lines upon his countenance. An angel's face must have marks of strength in it. Stephen was strong. Even with all the people against him, he had no fear. He was strong in God.

The contrast between the members of the Sanhedrin and Stephen is most striking. His quietness and sweetness enraged them the more. "They were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." They became like infuriated wild beasts as they listened to Stephen's words. But while the rulers were so furious, Stephen was calm and full of peace. He had

found refuge from the strife of tongues in the presence of God.' The secret is given in the words, "full of the Holy Spirit." When God is in a man, filling him, there is no room in him for fear or anger, or for any earthly passion.

Stephen "looked up stedfastly into heaven." That was well. If he had not looked up he would not have seen the vision of glory which he now beheld. If he had looked down, he would have seen danger and would have been afraid. He looked up and saw not the human rage and fury, but the sweet peace of heaven above him. Like Moses, "he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." We should train our eyes to look upward, heavenward, Godward, for there are our blessings, our goal, our home, angels, God Himself, and all fair and beautiful things.

The members of the Sanhedrin lost all self-control, all dignity, and in their rage became an ungoverned mob. They cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and, rushing upon Stephen, dragged him out of the court room, through the gate, out of the city, and stoned him. Thus the eloquent voice was hushed, so that no more could it be heard on the earth. His life, cut off so suddenly, so violently, when only beginning its usefulness, seems a failure. But it was not a failure. Some one says that Stephen's mission in this world was to deliver only one speech of half an hour. But if his words had

reached or impressed no other life, they fell upon the ears of Saul, the persecutor, and he never forgot them. Stephen died, and Saul was converted. Stephen's preaching was stopped, but Saul was called to take up his unfinished work. We owe St. Paul to Stephen's martyrdom.

Stephen's dying prayers were like his Master's. He prayed first, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." To Stephen, dying was only breathing out his soul into the hands of Jesus Christ. He knew it was not death, but life, that was before him. His body was being mangled and broken, but his spirit, his real self, could not be harmed. Beyond the strange mystery Jesus waits to receive the departing spirit. Death is only a gateway through which the soul passes, and then life and glory burst upon the vision of the emancipated spirit.

Stephen's other prayer was also like his Master's. Jesus prayed for His murderers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Stephen, with the same spirit of forgiveness, pleaded for his murderers, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." It is the old lesson of love for enemies taught over again.

Very beautiful is the picture of the end as given here: "When he had said this, he fell asleep." Sleep is death's new, sweet name. What a picture of peace the word suggests, right here in the heart and fury of the mob! In the midst of all the wild scene Stephen fell asleep.

We think of a tired child creeping into the mother's bosom and falling asleep. Sleep is not a terrible experience, is nothing to be dreaded. We sleep when we are weary, and we are refreshed. Sleep is not the cessation of life. We expect to awake after we have slept. As we part for the night, we do not say, "Farewell," but "Good-night," for we expect to meet again in the morning. This beautiful Scriptural designation of death tells us, therefore, of life beyond, of resurrection, of immortality. We shall awake from this sleep of death and our life shall go on again. We shall awake refreshed, lying down weary, and rising strong; lying down sick or old or deformed, worn-out,—rising well, young and radiant in heavenly beauty.

"Say not 'Good-night,' but in some brighter clime
Bid me 'Good-morning.' "

The last scene in our passage shows us the burial of Stephen. It was quiet, but impressive. He was greatly beloved, and the sorrow over his death was sincere. His body was laid away in the grave, but they could not bury his influence. Martyrdom did not destroy his life. No doubt he did more by dying than he could have done if he had lived on for years, preaching Christ.

CHAPTER IX

THE DISCIPLES DISPERSED

Read Acts VIII: 1-17

THE first glimpse we have of Saul is in the martyrdom of Stephen. The record is that he was consenting unto Stephen's death. He was present, not merely as a spectator, but as one who approved of what was done and was instrumental in it. Yet this is the man who afterwards became a glorious apostle, the most influential of all, who wrought in the founding and extension of Christianity. An artist has painted him as walking by Stephen's side with melancholy calmness. He consents to the martyr's death from a stern sense of duty, his countenance contrasting strangely with that of the Jewish rulers and the merciless mob surrounding him on all sides. We know it was St. Paul's conscience that made him a participator in this martyrdom. In another place he tells us that he verily thought within himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus. We learn that one may be very conscientious and yet very wrong. Conscience needs a guide—the Word of God.

Evidently Saul's zeal as a persecutor was ter-

rific. It is probable that Stephen's speech made him more bitter for the time. He was driven by it to the fiercest frenzy in his determination to crush out Christianity by destroying every follower of Christ. He spread desolation everywhere. His activity as a persecutor is indicated in the words, "Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house, and dragging men and women committed them to prison." His name became a terror to Christians wherever it was heard. This terrible bitterness magnifies the grace of God which saved such an enemy and made him afterwards such an apostle of Christianity. St. Paul during his ministry continually referred to his own salvation as assurance that no one can be so far away from Christ that upon repentance and faith he would not be saved.

"They therefore that were scattered abroad went about preaching the word." We would say that men driven away from their homes by persecution would be so frightened that they would not think of preaching, but would try only to hide from those who sought to kill them. But these men did not try to hide. They had the peace of God in their hearts, even amid all the dangers. Their earnestness in behalf of Christ grew the more intense the more they suffered for Him. We are reminded of that wonderful verse in the Twenty-third Psalm which tells us of God spreading a table for His people in the presence of their enemies. They were not afraid to speak

of the gospel which had cost them so much. They were compelled to leave Jerusalem, but their voices were not silenced. They had suffered for Christ's sake, but they would not give up Christ. The life of Christ in a true Christian cannot be quenched or suppressed. It is like a bubbling fountain which flows everywhere. We should be so full of love for our Saviour that in school, at work, at play, in the quiet of our own home, and wherever we may go, our faces shall shine with the brightness of the indwelling peace, and the love of Christ shall find expression in our words.

We come now to an important point in the history of the development of Christianity. Until persecution began there had been no effort made to carry the gospel out into the world. But the dispersion of the disciples became a great missionary movement. Philip was one of the seven men chosen to assist the apostles. He became a great preacher and had an important place in carrying the gospel to the world. "And Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and proclaimed unto them the Christ." Philip was one of the coals of the holy fire which the winds of persecution scattered. The fire was not quenched, however, by the winds, but was only fanned into intenser flames and greater brightness. The enemies of Christ thought to put out the fire of Pentecost but they only scattered it far more widely. Philip considered the misfortune, as men would have called it, a providence. Perhaps he had heard

the word of Jesus which said to the disciples, "When they persecute you in this city, flee into the next." They were to flee, but not to cease their work. When Philip could not preach longer in Jerusalem, he went and preached in Samaria. He had a religion that could travel and not lose its energy and force. We ought to get the lesson that wherever circumstances send us we must continue our work for Christ. Wherever we go, whether driven by trouble, or drawn by affection, we must work for Christ. The captive maid in Syria still witnessed among the heathen for the God of her land, and the captive boys in Babylon did not forget their religion.

Philip's preaching was acceptable to the people. He was a Jew, but the Samaritans welcomed him among them. "The multitudes gave heed with one accord unto the things that were spoken by Philip." He was the voice of God to them, and they recognized it and listened to it. There is an exhortation in the Epistle to the Hebrews which says, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." Too many people refuse to hear the words of God which are spoken to them. Ofttimes we refuse, merely through neglect or inattention, because we lack interest in the things which are spoken of. Sometimes we refuse willfully and persistently. In either case, we should remember that we are refusing to hear the voice of God. God speaks to us in many ways, in His Word, by His Spirit, in His providences, through our

conscience. If we listen to every word that God speaks to us, and promptly obey it, the voice will become more and more clear as we go on through life, and we will always have divine guidance. But if we refuse to hear, the voice will speak less and less clearly, and by and by we shall cease altogether to hear it. It is a serious thing to refuse to hear the Word of God. God speaks to us that we may save our souls and comfort our hearts. We rob ourselves if we refuse to hear what He has to say to us.

Philip had power to work miracles, which proved that he was sent of God. When the people saw these signs they knew that he was God's messenger, and they were impressed by his words. If we are to speak to God we, too, must be able to show signs to attest our message. We cannot work miracles—casting out demons, curing the sick, making the lame to walk. But there are other things we can do. We may show in our own life that we have learned Christ's lessons for ourselves. We must be full of good works, ready for acts of kindness and self-denial, ready to serve others, not demanding that others should serve us. We must be sympathetic, as Jesus was, with those who are in trouble, and with those who have fallen in sin. We must be good in character and life. If one is dishonest, untruthful, ungentle, bad tempered, selfish, or mean, he will not get people to listen to his words, however beautiful they may be.

“There was much joy in that city.” There is always joy where Christ is received. The song of the angels the night Jesus was born had its note about joy. Ever since, wherever Jesus has gone He has carried joy. There was joy in Samaria because of the blessings which had come to the people through the gospel. Many were saved. Many were healed of sickness. Many were comforted in sorrow. The new life upon which they entered brought joy. Their homes became happy. The love in which they began to live made new joy. We should be rejoicing Christians. We should try to carry joy to others by carrying Christ to them. In the olden days in Egypt they said that when the morning light first swept over the chords of Memnon, the harp gave out sweet and gentle music. Whenever the love of Christ sweeps over a human heart its chords respond in grateful music.

“Peter and John . . . prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit.” It was not easy at this time for Jews, even though they were apostles, to pray for Samaritans. There had always been a bitter feud between these two peoples. But wherever the grace of God goes it changes men’s feelings toward each other. It causes men to love their enemies, and to pray for those whom they had hated before. The Jews and Samaritans had no dealings the one with the other, but here we see Philip, a Christian Jew, going among the Samaritans and preaching

Christ to them. Then we see the two apostles, Peter and John, also Christian Jews, sending men down to help Philip and to confirm his work among these same Samaritans. And we see Peter and John praying God to give to these Samaritans all the gifts of the Holy Spirit which He had given to the Jews. We remember, too, that John once wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan village because the village had rejected Christ. But now John is intent on calling down another kind of fire—the fire of the Holy Spirit—to save, not to destroy. We should want our worst enemies to become Christians, and should pray for them and do all in our power to bring down heavenly blessings upon their lives.

CHAPTER X

THE FIRST ETHIOPIAN CONVERT

Read Acts VIII: 26-40

STEPHEN was gone; his voice was hushed, but another worker rose up and took his place. "God buries his workmen, but carries on his work." It is instructive to study the character of Philip, as it comes out of this story. He must have lived near the heart of Christ, for we see him here in communication with heaven. Those who are far away are not called for important work. Dr. Bonar says, "God always uses the vessel that is nearest to him." Another good thing in Philip was his promptness in obeying the voice of God. God cannot use those who loiter and take their own time to do His errands. He must have servants who will go instantly, "minute men," ready at an instant's call to go to the end of the earth.

Another good point was Philip's self-denial. He was doing a great work in Samaria. He was popular. People gathered about him, throngs flocked to hear him. It was not easy to leave his great field in Samaria, with so much of encouragement and success, and go away into a desert, alone, with nothing definite marked out

for him to do there. Yet Philip went as cheerfully on his long, lonesome journey as he would have gone to preach to the largest crowd in Samaria. We should never raise the question of what is pleasant to us when God gives a command. Our only desire should be to do His will. We do not know what is large or small in the work of the Lord. The desert call seemed small, only a desert road, and one man, but Ethiopia was back of it, and it may be that the results of that one bit of obscure work surpassed all the other work of Philip's whole life. In any case, that is not, is never, the question. The only matter is, What does God bid? Philip was also tactful. It required considerable courage and skill for this plain evangelist to speak to the great man riding in the chariot. Many a person with zeal lacks wisdom and blunders so in God's work as to do harm rather than good in trying to win men. Philip also knew his Bible. When he found the noble traveler puzzled over a text, he did not have to take time to look up its meaning. He had himself studied the Bible before, and knew its teachings, and was ready, therefore, at a moment's call to make plain the meaning of the difficult passage. Those who would do Christ's work must know Christ's Book.

A man was wanted for an important errand, and a messenger came to Philip and bade him to drop his work in Samaria. The incident suggests the close connection between heaven and

earth. The Christian work in this world is directed from heaven. If we are living as we may, as we should, we are always receiving messages from Christ, bidding us to go here or there and do this or that. "But an angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza: the same is desert." Why did not the angel go himself, instead of calling Philip away from his important work? The answer is that angels are not sent on such errands. They are ministering spirits, doing Christ's bidding in the great work of redemption, but they do not preach the gospel. How could they preach? They have not been redeemed, and how could they tell the lost of the love of Christ and the blood of redemption?

Christ makes His redeemed ones the messengers of the gospel to others. They know what sin is, and understand the need of salvation. They know what Christ has done for them, and can tell others what He will do for them. We should be ready every moment to speak to others of Christ and His love. If we are led to think of another, to be anxious for his salvation, and to pray for him, it is certain we have an errand to that person and that God wishes us to be the messenger to carry the very blessing we are asking Him in our prayers to send. We should hasten with our message. There may not be a moment to spare. Christ's errands are exactly timed. If

Philip had loitered he would have missed the Ethiopian. It seems strange that Philip should be called away from the great work he was doing. Multitudes were awaiting upon his ministry, and his work was very successful. It certainly was a trial of Philip's faith. But he was not careless in his obedience. He went where the Master bade him to go, and he went immediately. He asked no questions and made no objections. God often sends His servants on what may seem to them strange errands, but He always has some purpose in doing so. No errand of God is useless.

At last Philip found his work. His sealed orders were opened. "And the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot." He had been sent to explain a text of Scripture. Did it not seem a mistake, however, to call him away from hundreds, to speak to one? One answer is that individual souls are dear to God. Another is that this one man was from the "uttermost parts," and if he himself had the gospel, he would carry it back to his own land, thus becoming a missionary. We never can know what is our most important work any day. Perhaps more may come from five minutes' casual talk with some stranger, when we think we are wasting our time, than from a sermon preached to a thousand people. The true thing is to put ourselves into God's hands to do whatever He may send us to do.

Philip was eager now to do what he had been sent to do. "Philip ran to him." Philip was not afraid to open up the subject of religion even with a stranger. This man in the chariot was a man of high rank, and Philip was a plain man. The traveler was busy reading, too, and might not care to be interrupted. Yet when Philip was bidden to join himself to the chariot he promptly obeyed. We should be ready always to obey the impulses of the Spirit of God in our hearts. Suppose Philip had excused himself, on the ground that he was not acquainted with this man, or that the man might not welcome him, or because of his own shyness, what an opportunity would have been lost! We should ever keep ourselves ready for instant service wherever God may send us. The destiny of other souls may depend upon our prompt obedience, and they may be lost through our failure.

"Understandest thou what thou readest? . . . How can I, except some one shall guide me?" Now we see why Philip was sent away along this lonely road. Here was a human soul crying out for light. God heard the man's cry and took him away from a great work, sending him to answer a heart's wish. God always knows when there is a soul anywhere longing for salvation, and in some way He will send the blessing. This noble traveler is an example of a sincere seeker. He went to the right place when he opened his Bible to seek light. He was a

humble seeker, for he was not ashamed to confess that he could not understand the Scriptures and to ask a plain wayfarer to tell him. He was teachable, for he was ready to receive the explanation Philip gave to him. He was a believing seeker, also, for the moment he understood the text and learned who the Messiah was, he accepted Him and began to follow Him.

“And Philip . . . beginning from this scripture, preached unto him Jesus.” A number of years since a researcher of art in Italy found a clew to a valuable portrait of Dante which had been lost. He had reason to believe that it was on the wall of a room then used for rubbish. He cleared out the apartment and began to experiment on the wall. He removed bits of whitewashing and plaster and last came upon the surface where the picture had been painted. He then carefully stripped off the washings and coatings, disclosing at length Giotto’s portrait of the sad, thoughtful face of the great Tuscan poet. So the picture of Christ lay in this ancient prophecy in all its beauty, but the Ethiopian prince could not see it until the evangelist had stripped off the veils and coverings, when it burst upon him in all its tenderness and grace. The Bible needs explanation. That is the teacher’s work—to show Jesus in the Scriptures to the pupils who bend with eager interest over the holy page.

The traveler was intelligent and quickly un-

derstood Philip's explanation. He had a good teacher, too, and at once wanted to confess Christ. "The eunuch saith, Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" He did not propose to be a secret disciple, but desired to make open confession. The moment the vision of Christ is opened to any soul, there should be, first, instant acceptance, and then, at the earliest possible moment, public confession. Some people imagine they can be good Christians without taking an open stand. But confession is a large part of faith. We should wait for nothing. Fuller instruction will come afterwards.

"He went on his way rejoicing." He did not give up his journey and go back among the other Christians because he was now a Christian. He went on his way to his own country, and probably continued in his place as the queen's treasurer. A newborn Christian is not to give up his pursuit in life because he has given himself to Christ. Of course, if the pursuit is a wicked one it must be given up; but if one's occupation is right, he is usually to stick to it, carrying Christ with him into it. A carpenter when converted is ordinarily to continue to be a carpenter with Christ. Another thought suggested here is that Christ gives joy. This man went on his way rejoicing. Some people think religion would rob them of joy. Certainly it did not have this effect upon this Ethiopian. Life was all changed for him after he had received Christ. He went on

his way, but his heart was full of song. He was like one of those clocks with a music box hidden in it, that plays a sweet tune each time the clock strikes the hour. The clock does not stop to give the music, but keeps ticking on and making music at the same time. The Christian goes on in his work, but while he works his heart sings, and the songs make the way shorter and the burdens lighter. At the same time they give cheer to others on whose ears they fall.

CHAPTER XI

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

Read Acts IX: 1-30

BEFORE conversion Saul was as intense in his zeal for the destroying of Christianity as he was after his conversion in his efforts to extend the power of Christ. From place to place he went, from house to house, seizing men and women, casting them into prison and punishing them. This was the sort of man Saul was the morning of the day of his conversion.

Why was Saul so bitter against Jesus? What was the reason for his opposition? He was a loyal Jew, and Jesus had been crucified by the rulers of his people as a blasphemer. In this hatred of the rulers of his nation to Jesus, Saul sympathized. That such a man should claim to be the Messiah foretold by the prophets appeared to Saul proof that He was an impostor. According to Saul's thought, Jesus had fulfilled none of the Jewish expectations regarding the Messiah: He had established no kingdom; He had wrought no deliverance for His people. Thinking of Jesus in this way, Saul readily conceived that He was an impostor and that belief in Him as the Mes-

siah was heresy, which he as a true Jew was bound to do all he could to stamp out. Saul was conscientious in his opinions concerning Jesus and in his work as a persecutor.

In his journey Saul was drawing nigh unto Damascus, intent upon his errand of finding and seizing all disciples there. We can imagine the terror of the Christians at Damascus as they heard of the approach of the terrible persecutor, whose name spread dismay wherever it was heard. No doubt they were praying God to stay his progress. We can imagine also what passed in the mind of this traveler as he journeyed along the way. He never had forgotten Stephen's words before the council, or Stephen's death, with the prayer that he made for his murderers with his last breath. In all his terrible work as a persecutor Saul had also seen many glimpses of Christian life in the homes he had entered. Stephen was not the only man of those Saul had met in his warfare on Christians who had shown the gentle and kindly spirit of the Master. He must have seen sweet faith and gentle trust which deeply affected him. Is it not almost certain that doubts of the rightness of his own course troubled him? The words of the Lord to him about kicking against the goad seem to indicate that Saul had really been fighting against his own convictions, especially the later days of his persecuting work. Thus he was prepared for the sudden appearance of Jesus to him in the way.

He had almost reached the end of his journey when a strange thing happened. "Suddenly there shone round about him a light out of heaven." It was more than light—it was the glory of a person, the divine person of Christ. In the dazzling brightness of the great light Saul fell to the earth. As he lay there he heard a voice, calling him by name, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Every word was emphatic. "Why?" What had Jesus done to Saul to deserve such treatment? If He had been a tyrant while on the earth, if He had gone about burning towns, desolating homes, crushing the weak and the poor, and causing pain, poverty and sorrow, there would have been some excuse for Saul's bitter, relentless enmity. But Jesus had gone about only doing good. Why had Saul so fought against Jesus?

"Why persecutest thou me?" The question was personal. Saul had to stand face to face with the glorified Jesus and answer why he, Saul, was His enemy. Every human soul stands in a personal relation to Jesus Christ. We cannot lose ourselves in any company. The question is always a personal one—"What think ye of the Christ?"

"Why persecutest thou me?" Saul had not personally persecuted Jesus—probably he had never even seen Him. But one who lifts a hand against any of Christ's disciples, lifts a hand against Christ Himself, for Christ makes com-

mon cause with each one of His people, even the lowliest. "I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; . . . Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me." He who wrongs a Christian, wrongs Christ.

Saul saw before him the glorified form of Jesus. He was amazed, and asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" He never had dreamed that the lowly man who went about through Galilee working miracles and teaching the people was indeed the Son of God, the Messiah. He had thought Him only a man, an impostor. But now he saw before him a glorious Person, the most glorious he had ever seen, radiant in divine splendour. Then, when he asked, "Who art thou?" the answer came, "I am Jesus." This divine Being was the lowly Jesus whom Saul was persecuting. Instantly he saw the terrible mistake he had been making. This Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Son of God.

But he resisted no longer. His opposition was over forever. In one of the other accounts which Saul gave of his conversion we are told that the first question, "Who art thou, Lord?" was followed by another, as soon as he heard the answer, "What wilt thou have me to do?" This question implies full surrender. He asked at once for his duty, entering the service of this new Master immediately.

To the question, "What wilt thou have me to do?" came the answer, "Rise, and enter into the

city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” He was not to lie there in the dust, defeated and broken. This was not to be the end of his life. Jesus had not meant to destroy him, but to save him and call him into service. He must rise up. When God finds us in our sins, we are not to lie down and weep inconsolably over the ruined past. No matter if the best part of life is gone, we may not, we dare not, spend one moment in mere idle tears and regret over it. We should rise instantly, turn our faces resolutely away from our wrong and wasted past, and put into the days that remain all we can of strength and beauty.

God guides us one step at a time. Saul did not learn that moment what his whole mission would be; he did learn, however, the first step of obedience. He was to go into the city, and when he got there he would learn more. When a young Christian begins to follow Christ he is not likely to be shown his duty for his whole life. He will be shown one step, however, and if he takes that, another step will be made plain, and another, and another, and so on, step by step, till he has reached the end of a noble and beautiful life.

“I do not ask to see

The distant scene—one step enough for me.”

The part of Ananias in the conversion of Saul has interesting lessons for us. Why did not Jesus Himself complete the work without calling in

any man to help Him? We do not know, excepting that it is usually His way to use human helpers. Ananias was startled to receive the command, "Arise, and go to the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one named Saul, a man of Tarsus." It brings Jesus very close to notice how intimately he was acquainted with all that was going on in the city. He knew the names of the streets and where each person lived or was even temporarily staying. Christ in heaven to-day knows us by name and is familiar with the most intimate events of our lives. He knows the house we live in, and the street, and knows our present desires and needs, and hears our prayers.

No wonder Ananias hesitated when he was bidden to go to meet the terrible scourge of the church. He had heard a great deal about Saul and had learned to dread him. But the Lord assures Ananias that there will be no danger in his going to find Saul. "Behold, he prayeth." This was evidence that Saul was not now a dangerous man. Not only was he praying, but he was praying for just the help Ananias could bear to him. Further, Ananias was assured that this very Saul, who had been such a terrible persecutor, was a chosen vessel for Christ, to bear His name before Gentiles and kings.

CHAPTER XII

PETER AND CORNELIUS

Read Acts X: 1-20

It was not easy for Peter to go to the house of Cornelius. All his life he had been trained to Jewish exclusiveness as part of his religion. It was hard for him to forget all this and to regard the Gentiles as having as much right to receive the gospel as his own people. Yet Peter accepted the teaching when it was made plain to him, and went promptly on his errand. We should keep our minds free from prejudice and open to the truth, whatever way it may come to us.

Cornelius is an interesting man. The New Testament centurions are all worthy men. We call Cornelius a heathen, but some modern Christians might learn from his life and character. He worshiped God. His home was a home of prayer. He gave alms generously to the poor. That his religion was not of the formal kind is evident from the fact that his prayers reached heaven and found acceptance with God. The angel came to him to assure him that his prayers had been heard and that they were about to be answered. We may be quite sure that he had been praying

for more knowledge of God and of heavenly things. Wherever there is a human soul longing for God and for light, the fact becomes known in heaven and the answer comes.

To Cornelius the angel said, "Send men to Joppa, and fetch one Simon." Why did not the angel himself tell Cornelius what he wanted to know? Angels do not preach the gospel. Only one who has been redeemed can explain redemption to one who wants to understand it. The angel could only tell Cornelius how to have his longings satisfied. He must send to Joppa for a man.

While the messengers were nearing Joppa, Peter also was having a vision. Nothing less than this could prepare him for going on the errand to the Roman's house. His vision was calculated to show him that now, since Christ had come and died and risen, the distinction between Jew and Gentile was wiped out. When he saw the herd of beasts of all kinds in the sheet let down from heaven and heard the command to kill and eat, his Jewish exclusiveness was so ingrained that he at first objected to the contact with what he had been taught was unclean. But most emphatically the objection was answered, "What God hath cleansed, make not thou common." The emphasis is on "God" and "thou." Peter was not to set up his standard against God's. Of course, the lesson was not merely about meats. The mingled herd in the descending sheet was

a picture of the world with its nations. The Jews thought none "clean" but themselves. But the blood of Christ had cleansed all nations, so far at least that all were invited on the same terms into the family of God. The lesson is yet before us to be learned or better learned. While we treat the Chinese as we do, while we make distinctions on social lines, while we turn away with revulsion from anyone, even the basest, who wears the divine image, we have yet to learn what this vision means.

The vision and the duty came very close together. The lesson was taught in the vision; now, instantly, came the divine call to put the lesson in practice. Peter had been shown that the old walls and distinctions were to be broken down. Just what the lesson meant, he could not make out. He was sitting, then, on the roof of Simon's house, perplexed over the strange vision, wondering what it could mean. Was the gospel to be given to all nations alike? That seemed to be the teaching of the vision. But was it? Just then there was heard the tread of feet on the pavement below. "Three men seek thee" the Spirit whispered to Peter. "Go with them, nothing doubting: for I have sent them." In a little while Peter was on his way with Gentile messengers to the house of a Gentile.

There is an illustration here of the way God often first shows us our duty, and then calls us out to do it. He gives the vision, and the vision

pictures the task. The vision carries in it a bit of God's will for you. You cannot but work it out in the duty of the moment, or prove disobedient. There comes to your knowledge in some way a story of human need or sorrow of some kind. The vision is before you. It has in it a call to a new duty. Immediately a voice begins to bid you go and minister to the trouble or sorrow. The duty springs out of the vision. So it is continually in life. Visions are always coming; almost every Bible verse we read brings up a conception of moral beauty which we are to try to attain, nor hints at a task which waits for our hands. God sends the calls to duty, and we dare not disregard them.

When Peter reached the house he was cordially welcomed. He asked why he had been sent for, and it was told him what had happened. "Forthwith therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all things that have been commanded thee of the Lord." The attitude of Cornelius was beautiful. He believed that Peter was the messenger of God to him, and he was ready to hear, with reverence and love, whatever message this messenger might give.

That Peter was ready now to speak his message appeared from his words: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons." It had cost Peter a great deal to learn this lesson.

Up to that time he had thought that God was a respecter of persons, that He had a special regard for the Jews, and that the Gentiles had but small place in His favour. In that wonderful vision at Joppa God had taught him the truth that now all nations were alike before Him. We should learn well this lesson for ourselves. God never asks to what country a man belongs. He looks upon the heart and judges men by their character. He hears the cry for mercy and help from any one of His children, never asking to what country or to what rank they belong. No royalty, greatness, or beauty will count in God's sight if the heart be wrong; and no poverty, lowliness, or humbleness is a blemish if the heart be right.

Peter's conversion from the narrowness of Judaism to the wideness of Christianity was very remarkable. In his words to Cornelius he makes it very clear that the gospel is for all men. God loves the world, and not merely a little handful of people in the world. He desires all to be saved, and the gates of the gospel are opened to men of every nation. "In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him." The way of salvation is just as open for the lowest heathen as for one of the "four hundred" of the metropolis. Yet the way is not open to anyone until he gives up his sins and turns his heart to seek God. The only condition of salvation is the acceptance of the divine way.

Peter made plain to Cornelius the way of salvation by Jesus Christ; he told of "the word which he sent unto the children of Israel, preaching good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all)." This was the gospel which had come to the Jews, and the same gospel Peter was now bringing to the Gentiles. He recounts briefly the story of the life of Jesus Christ. He then declares that "every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins." Cornelius, good man though he was, prayerful, obedient, upright, needed Christ and must accept Him as his personal Saviour. There is no place to bring our sins for pardon and cleansing but to the cross.

As on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples, so now upon these Gentile disciples the same Spirit fell. Thus the promise of Christ was fulfilled to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. At once those who believed were baptized, and thus the Church began among the Gentiles.

CHAPTER XIII

GENTILES CONVERTED AT ANTIOCH

Read Acts XI: 19-26

AFTER the death of Stephen, the believers in Christ were scattered throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria. And as they went they preached. Some of the scattered Christians—men of Cyprus and Cyrene—when they reached Antioch, began to tell of Jesus to the Greeks. These men do not seem to have been ministers or men set apart as preachers. They were what we call laymen. But they were men full of the Holy Spirit and who could not repress within them the fire of love for Christ. We must not think that because we are not ministers or elders or Sunday-school teachers, therefore we have no commission to speak the Word of Christ. Every Christian ought to be a witness for the Lord Jesus wherever he goes. "He that heareth, let him say, Come." Every Christian man and woman, boy and girl, who knows of Christ should go out and tell of Him, and keep telling of Him all the week.

We know that God blessed their labours, for it is said, "The hand of the Lord was with them." The hand is that with which one works. The hand

of the Lord means the power of the Lord. These men did not go in their own name, with only their own strength. They had faith in Christ, and wherever they went Christ went with them and wrought in them. When they spoke, His power was in their words. We must not think that this was simply a blessing for the apostolic days; it was as much for our own days as it was for the time in which this story belongs. Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all the world, to preach the gospel to every living creature, and He gave them the promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." The hand of the Lord did not work in those days independently of His disciples. It was not an invisible hand that did the mighty acts. Christ wrought through His disciples. The instrument is human, but the power is divine. St. Paul tells us in one of his epistles that we are coworkers with God. When He bids us do anything, we are to go and do it, and then He works with us. A mother cannot change her child's heart, but if she teaches it the words of Christ there is an unseen Hand working with hers, in her words and in the influence of her life, which does the mysterious work upon the child's heart. When a young person goes with a few flowers to a sick room, and speaks a few kind words, doing all in Christ's name, Christ Himself goes, too, and His Spirit works through the beautiful flowers and through the kindly words to comfort and bless and help the

sick person. If only we have faith in Christ and do His will, His hand will always be with us to help us.

Word of the activity of these volunteer workers was taken to Jerusalem, and the church there sent Barnabas to inquire about them. "Who, when he was come, and had seen the grace of God, was glad." Barnabas was glad because he saw that God was working in that church. It should always make a Christian glad to see people listening to the gospel and accepting its message. We should notice here that the work which pleased Barnabas was not his own, but that which others had been doing. Sometimes people do not rejoice when they find the work of others blessed and prospering. It makes them envious. This is a bad spirit. Barnabas rejoiced when he saw that the blessing of God attended the work of other preachers, even of plain, common men. We should learn this lesson. Boys and girls in school should be glad when other members of their class succeed, and should never be envious of them. Teachers should rejoice when they see the class of another teacher growing, interested and prosperous. Business and professional men should be pleased when they hear that associates are doing well. The success of others should never make us envious. It should only stimulate us to do better work ourselves if we possibly can.

Barnabas was glad to coöperate with the workers whom he had been sent to investigate.

He exhorted their converts, "that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." This was good counsel. They had begun well, listening to the voice of the preachers and accepting Jesus Christ. But beginning well was not enough. They must continue to follow Christ. They must cleave unto the Lord. The words are very suggestive. They must not let go their hold upon Christ. There would be many things which would try their faith, but they must still cling to Christ. The word "purpose" is important. Mere emotion is of small account in this world, where life is oftentimes so hard. It takes purpose, fixed purpose, to enable one to continue faithful. We have an example of purpose in Daniel—he purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat and drink. He made the purpose and he stuck to it. It is quite important that young Christians should have purpose, purpose of heart, and that they shall cleave to the Lord through all temptations, through all that might loosen their hold or tend to draw them away from Christ.

The passage gives a word of commendation concerning Barnabas. It is not often that the Bible pays compliments. It tells the good things men do, but it says very little about the men in the way of praise or commendation. Here is an exception, however. The Book says Barnabas was a good man. Goodness is better than greatness. When Walter Scott was dying, he said

to a friend who stood by him, "Be a good man." Many men are great and not good. Their fame is widespread, and their names go everywhere, but they are not good. Goodness means excellence of character. The name God is simply a contraction of the word good. Goodness is Godlikeness. A good man is patient, gentle, kindly, humble. All the Beatitudes live in him and work out their beauty in him. He is full of gentle ministries—Jesus went about doing good. Whatever else we may be or may not be in this world, we should all try to be good. Thus we shall please God and bless the world.

Barnabas showed his goodness and faith by going after Saul. Together they remained in Antioch, helping the people. For a year they laboured. This work was successful. Many believed. The lives of the converts were so different from their unbelieving neighbours that they were called Christians—the first time this name had been used. It is supposed that the name was given them in mockery or contempt by the heathen people of Antioch. They were all the while using the name of Christ in their conversations, in their prayers, in their hymns, in their exhortations. The name was so continually upon their lips that those who heard them began in jest to call them "Christians." But the name clung, and is now used universally to describe those who follow Christ. It may not be the very best of names. Perhaps disciples is better—disciples

means learners, followers. We should all be disciples of Christ and should ever be learning of Him, growing in grace and likeness to Him as we follow Him. Perhaps believers is a better name. It carries in itself the thought that we are saved by believing on Christ. It is faith that works the victories in this world. Perhaps followers would be better. To follow Christ is to accept Him as Master and to cling to Him in obedience and devotion wherever we may go. But the word "Christian," given at Antioch as a sneer, is now used everywhere. It is full of meaning. Those who are Christians should be like Christ. They should represent Christ in the world. Those who see them should see the image of Christ in them.

CHAPTER XIV

PETER DELIVERED FROM PRISON

Read Acts XII: 1-17

ONE day James and John asked Jesus that they might be given exalted positions in the Master's Kingdom. Mark X:37. They knew not what they asked. It was only a few years later that Herod killed James with the sword. So James got, sooner than he expected and in a way far different from his thought, to his place at the right hand of Jesus. Verily we do not know what we are asking for when we pray for nearness to Christ, or for high places in His Kingdom. Yet James has never regretted the path by which he ascended. His work was soon done, but death was no calamity to him, as it only exalted him to his home in glory. There were two doors to that prison. One opened out into the city—the way Peter was delivered; the other opened upward into heaven—the way James was taken. We pray for our friends in sickness, that God would restore them to health. Again, there are two ways in which the prayer may be answered. God may heal our friends with bodily healing, and restore them to us in this world; or He may take

them up into heaven, into eternal health and blessedness. A man who had been an invalid all his years was near death. A friend asked him how he was, and his answer was, "I am almost well."

When Herod saw that his action in taking the life of James pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. He was one of those rulers who was swayed by public feeling. Nor have we to go among the rulers to find the same spirit. There are plenty of people everywhere who have no settled principles of their own, who do not stop to ask what is right, but who do wait to know what their neighbours will say or think. Even young children very soon begin to be governed by the fashion. We had better get the lesson here, that the true thing is always, not what will please the world and win the approval of our fellow men, but what God would have us do. Men who follow public opinion are like ships which are propelled by sails—going whichever way the wind blows. Those who are governed by principle are like the vessels with fire and water at their heart, which do not depend on the winds.

Peter, therefore, was kept very securely in prison. Herod treated him as a dangerous prisoner. He not only had him in prison, with doors and bolts and bars, but he had sixteen soldiers to guard him, four at a time. To two of these he was always fastened by chains on his wrists, one chain binding him to each soldier, so that he could not move without disturbing the soldier.

Why were such extra precautions necessary to guard such a poor, defenseless man as Peter? Had Herod heard the story of a former imprisonment of this same man, when the doors were miraculously opened and the prisoner released? Did he mean to defy the power of Peter's God when he put double chains on him and kept four armed soldiers on guard about him all the time? So it appears. No doubt the wicked king thought his plan perfectly successful. To-morrow the execution would take place. Men plot against God, but He that sits in heaven laughs.

While Peter was in prison, his friends were praying earnestly for him. To Herod's power and the strength of his prison walls and chains, and the vigilance of his soldiers, they opposed only the quiet power of earnest, importunate prayer. They made no appeal to public diplomacy, nor did they think of using any force to rescue their friend from prison. They stormed the prison through the gates of prayer. The sequel proves and illustrates the power of prayer. Men talk about the invariableness and unchangeableness of the laws of nature as if God had no control of affairs in His own universe. We need not give ourselves any trouble about how He can answer our prayers—we must leave that to Him; but we may as well settle it in our minds once for all that the God to whom we talk in prayer can do whatsoever pleaseth Him. He can always find some way to help us or bring deliverance

when we are in trouble. We must not conclude, however, that He will always save us from danger, as He saved Peter. No doubt the disciples prayed for James, too, when Herod seized him, and yet he was beheaded. The prayers were answered in a different way; he was supported in the trial of martyrdom, and his release was not through the iron gate into the streets of Jerusalem, but through the gate of pearl into the streets of heaven. If Peter had been executed, who could have said that the prayers of his friends were not answered? God knows how best to answer our requests, and all true prayer submits even its most earnest petitions to the divine will.

The Bible story tells us most realistically, "the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains." There is something very beautiful in this picture. The time is just at hand for Peter's execution. To-morrow he is to be brought out to die before the people. How is he spending his last night? We are permitted to look in upon him in his prison. There he lies on his cell floor. Two chains bind him, wrist to wrist, to two guards. But there is no evidence of distress in that cell. Peter is sleeping in quiet confidence and peace. If we could look into Herod's palace, it is not likely that he, on his soft bed, with his luxury and liberty, slept that night half so sweetly as did Peter in his prison. This peace is possible to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ. "Thou wilt keep him in

perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." In a great freshet on the Ohio, some men in a skiff saw in the center of the broad river, amid the wreckage of houses and fences and forests and fields, a baby's cradle floating. Rowing to it, they found the baby sleeping there as sweetly as if it had been lying in its mother's bosom. So in the wildest storms the believer may rest in the love and power of Christ.

As Peter prayed, "an angel of the Lord stood by him." Tarry a moment to think of the ministry of angels. It is a wonderful thought that these good spirits from heaven are continually bringing help to God's people on the earth; that they serve the saints in countless ways. They can go anywhere, through closed doors and prison walls. They move noiselessly and unseen. They can fill even a cell with light. They can knock off fetters and open doors and lead us out of the worst perils. They are our friends if we are Christ's friends. No doubt they help us continually, although we know it not; and preserve us from danger, although we are not always aware of it. The most real things in this world are the unseen things. I believe in the actual presence and help of angels. They wait on us, and guard our home and guide our steps.

"Flitting, flitting, ever near thee,
Sitting, sitting, by thy side,
Angel beings guard and guide,"

As the angel stood by Peter, "a light shined in the cell: and he smote Peter on the side, and awoke him, saying, Rise up quickly." Wherever Christ's messengers go there is light. They carry the light in their own faces. They are God's shining ones. Keble fancies that the apostle was dreaming in his last sleep, as he supposed, of the release coming to him on the morrow, and thought the angel's arousing that of the executioner come to call him out to die.

His dream was changed—the tyrant's voice
 Calls to that last of glorious deeds;
 But as he rises to rejoice,
 Not Herod, but an angel leads.

Notice here by way of illustration that many people are bound with chains—bound to other men, too, oftentimes, and led by them whithersoever they will. But to such Christ's messenger comes, as the angel came to Peter, bidding them arise. And if they obey, the chains will fall off.

In eight words we are told the sequel. The angel said to Peter, "Follow me. And he went out, and followed." That is all we have to do in this world—simply to follow Christ, or the guide He may send to lead us. We have nothing to do with opening the way; our part is only to follow implicitly and unquestioningly, and He will always open the door for us. This lesson is worth heeding. Here is a Christian man in sore perplexity. He cannot free himself. He

can see no way out of the entangling circumstances. He is just like Peter that night in his prison, doors bolted, chains on his hands, stern guards encircling him. Is there any way out of such environment? Yes, Christ can lead him out. All that is needed is complete surrender to Him, and simple, unquestioning, absolute obedience and childlike following where He leads. Chains fall off when He bids us rise and obey. Prison doors open when we follow Him. Our only duty is obedient following; He does all the rest.

Peter did not understand at first who the friend was that was taking him out. Then he said, "Now I know of a truth, that the Lord hath sent forth his angel and delivered me." It is not till they are gone that we recognize the angels. While they are with us we do not know them. This is true of many of the blessings God sends us. We do not prize the worth of our best human friends till they have left us. Our very familiarity with them hides from our eyes the excellencies of their character and the value of their helpfulness. They grow up alongside of us and grow into our lives so gradually and unconsciously that we do not know how much they are to us, how we lean upon them, how many doors they open for us, how their love brightens our paths. Suddenly they vanish, and then we see that they are God's angels. Their plain garb at once appears radiant with glory as they withdraw. A vacant chair is oftentimes the first true revealer of the worth of

one whose presence and love have blessed us for years.

Peter came to the house of Mary the mother of Mark. In answer to his knock, "a maid came to answer, named Rhoda." We ought to get a lesson or two for our young girls from this little maidservant. Her work was lowly—only attending the door, but she had her reward that night. She was the first to know of Peter's release. She seems to be the only one who had faith enough to believe it was really Peter. Her great gladness shows us that she loved Peter, and no doubt had been praying for his deliverance. There is one thing that every girl should learn of Rhoda—not to let her joy run away with her wits. A sensible girl would have opened the door as soon as she recognized Peter's voice; but she was so happy that she ran off to tell the good news, and left the apostle standing outside shivering in the cold. We should never in our happiness forget the practical duties of the moment.

This maid, Rhoda, waited not to greet Peter, but ran in and told that Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, "Thou art mad." They had been praying for Peter's release or deliverance from the power of Herod. Now the answer to their prayer stood before the gate, knocking for admission, and they could not be convinced that it was their friend. That is often the way with all of us. When the answer comes

to our prayers—the very things for which we have been praying—we are surprised, and cannot believe that they have really come. No doubt we oftentimes keep the answers to our prayers standing outside our doors and knocking.

CHAPTER XV

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES

Read Acts XIII: 1-13

WE are told that "there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers." There were many of these, more than were needed for the work at home. That was the reason some of them were sent out to work elsewhere. There are a great many churches nowadays that contain more Christian men and women, capable of effective service, than can possibly find work in their own parish. There are churches many of whose members are well educated, able to teach in Sunday school, to speak in public, and conduct religious services. Ofttimes only a little handful of these are actually engaged in any kind of Christian work. But this ought not to be so. Every Christian should become useful at once and continue to be useful in some way. Every church should be a missionary church. In cities, especially, there are needy places enough to occupy in them all who have the love of Christ in their hearts. Those who are not needed in the work of the Church in its own parish should find places

outside where they can help build up the Kingdom of Christ and save souls. The time is coming, too, when single churches will send out their own missionaries to foreign countries to carry the gospel there.

There seems little doubt that this church was considering very earnestly at this time its duty to the outside world, and was engaged in a special service, imploring guidance. When God wants a great work done He usually puts the thought of it in the hearts of some of His children, and then they begin to pray about it. As they think and pray the burden grows heavier continually, and at last God sends the answer. This passage gathers intense interest from the fact that here we see the very birth of the foreign missionary work of the Church. The apostles and other Christians were very earnest in preaching the gospel, but only to the Jews. The disciples were driven out of Jerusalem and scattered, and went everywhere preaching, but to the Jews only. The church at Antioch was the first Gentile church established, and it is a very interesting fact that in this Gentile church the first effort to carry the gospel to other Gentiles originated.

God is always ready to guide those who seek His guidance. To these watching, planning, praying people at Antioch He said, by His Holy Spirit, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." The Lord has a plan of work for His Church. Foreign missions

was no accident. It was not merely the result of enthusiasm of an earnest church. It was part of God's plan. The part which these two men took in it was no chance part. That, too, was in God's plan. He had chosen and prepared them for that very duty. Everyone's work is definitely marked out for him in the great purpose of God. Men are not born and trained just to pick up anything that may fall to their hands as they go through life. There is a particular something which everyone was born and trained to do. What it is we may not know till God puts the work in our hand, but He knows from the first. A successful life is one which does just the work for which it was created—whereunto God calls it. How can we know what our part is in God's plan? Only by submitting ourselves to the divine will at every point, and faithfully doing what He gives day by day. If we do this He will lead us into the work for which He created and redeemed us. The way these men proved their fitness for the new and greater work was by doing well the duties that were given to them in the lowlier place. That is the way God always promotes His servants. Those who prove themselves faithful and efficient in humble tasks will get larger service in due time when ready for it. Another point here is, that Christ wants the best workers for the foreign field. Many think that any poor stick is good enough for preaching to the heathen, but God chose the best

men for His most difficult work. The best men are needed now for the same work.

The Christians at Antioch did as God directed. They sent away Barnabas and Saul. The Church must have loved these men who had been their pastor so long; yet when the Spirit asked for them for this new work, the people did not resist the call. They did not say, "There are heathen here in Antioch; let us get them all saved first." That is the way people talk in these days. They "don't believe in foreign missions," and they are continually prating about their zeal for home missions, and pointing to the unconverted in our own towns and cities. Surely, if there ever was a time when this plea should have been urged, it was when this first missionary was talked of. Both fields are important, but the heathen countries must not be compelled to wait till there are no sinners remaining at home. There should be no rivalry between the two great interests. The one receives the best attention when the other is not neglected. A church that does nothing for foreign missionary work very soon comes to doing nothing for home or any other kind of work.

Barnabas and Saul made no objection, and they did not delay. "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit," departed. It is a good thing to be sent forth continually to our work by the Holy Spirit. Why may we not be? Whatever there may have been unusual and special in these early days of the Church, there is no doubt that the

Holy Spirit works to-day just as really and effectively as He did then. No one need go anywhere, into any field, without being sent forth by the Holy Spirit. "No pastor should accept any call to a church until he believes that he is sent there of God." Then, there is a personal sending which is also very real. The Spirit sends us each time we go forth to any work, to any duty. The guidance or the sending becomes minute, a matter of detail. A dozen times a day we may be sent forth by the Holy Spirit to some service of love, or the service may be sent to us, to our very door, to be done by us. If we learn to look continually for divine direction, and then always promptly follow and obey it, we shall never go without a blessing. The Spirit never merely sends—He goes with us and works through us.

"They had also John as their attendant." This was John Mark. He was not a preacher, or even a teacher. He was only an attendant. He went along with the missionaries to help them in any way he could. He was probably a servant to wait upon them personally. This suggests to us that there are many ways of helping in the Lord's work besides being preachers. Mark did not preach anywhere, so far as we know, and yet he was very helpful. Boys and young men get a special suggestion from this young man. If they cannot be teachers or preachers, they can be attendants, and can find a great deal to do in the Lord's work. Samuel "ministered"

unto the Lord about the temple when he was only a little child. Of course, he could not do the priests' work yet, as he was too young, but there were many things he could do—attend the doors, look after the lamps, and run errands for the old priest. So there are many things the youngest Christian can do for Christ. To be even only an "attendant" in the work for Christ is a high honour and privilege. One evening, at an open-air service, I saw a young man holding a lantern that another one, who was reading the Bible, could see the book. He could not speak in public himself, but he could help the minister by holding the light for him. There are many such ways of helping others to do Christ's work.

After a time the missionaries had an adventure. "Elymas the sorcerer . . . withstood them, seeking to turn aside the proconsul from the faith." It is a grievous sin to try to turn any believer from the faith; yet there are at all times those who try to do this. They try to put a doubt on the religion of Christ. They seek to make people believe there is no reality in the things which they believe, or they offer inducements to Christians to go elsewhere. At the present time the air is full of skepticism and doubts of all sorts. People who are unbelievers themselves try to keep their friends from coming with us. The Devil is at this same sort of work yet. First he comes with pretended wisdom and offers to guide seeking souls himself, but leads them farther and

farther away from the truth. Then, when the voice of true wisdom comes and offers to show them the right way, he interferes and tries to hinder them from listening to or believing what is said. If the Devil can only keep human souls from Christ, or can turn them away from the faith after they have heard Him, the Devil is satisfied.

Saul—"who is also called Paul"—rebuked him, and said, "The hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind . . . for a season." It was the Lord, and not Paul, who had inflicted this judgment, for we are told that Paul was specially "filled with the Holy Spirit" when he said this. The punishment itself was to Elymas an outward emblem of his actual spiritual condition. He was only a blind man professing to be a guide to others. So his natural eyes were darkened that he might be made to realize his inner blindness. There was also in his punishment a disclosure of the kind of doom those bring on themselves who shut their eyes to the holy light of truth. He is here warned that the result of such perverse refusal to see, if persisted in, will be total inability to see at all. Dr. William T. Taylor mentions in illustration the account given in Roman history of one who had been proscribed, and who, to save his life, disguised himself by wearing a patch over one eye. A good while after, when there was no longer any danger, he removed the patch, but in vain, for the

sight was gone. So, if men stubbornly shut their hearts against the truth, the light that is in them will become darkness. It is a terrible thing to resist the truth of God; it is still worse to try to lead other souls in false paths.

Paul's word was fulfilled. Immediately the sorcerer was stricken with blindness. Seeing this, the proconsul believed. So, after all, good came out of the apparition of the sorcerer. It was the manifestation of the divine power through the missionaries, in the punishment of Elymas, that led Paulus to believe. This power would not have been manifested had not the sorcerer resisted Paul and Barnabas. Thus God overruled the evil effort of this "son of the devil." He sought to keep the proconsul from believing; but became the means of compelling him to believe. Thus God is always overruling the evil of the world, and makes even the wrath of Satan glorify Him. It is better sometimes to have opposition when we try to be good. Sergius Paulus probably would not have believed at all had it not been for the sorcerer's rage and punishment.

CHAPTER XVI

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

Read Acts XV: 1-5, 22-29

It is easy to start quarrels. There are some people who make trouble wherever they go. They seem always to be watching for something to find fault with. Instead of being peacemakers, seeking ever to allay strife and bring together those who are in danger of falling apart, they go about sowing seeds of dissension and starting quarrels.

We have an illustration of this in the story of this Antioch church. Everything was prosperous and happy. But one day some strangers appeared and worked their way in among the Christians. They had come from Jerusalem. They were Christians, but not the right kind of Christians. They had not learned the large lesson of Christian love—that the gospel is for the whole world. At once they began to make trouble in the peaceful Antioch church. They told the Gentiles that they could not be saved unless they first became Jews. We should beware of the danger of trying to force others into our own way of receiving the grace of Christ.

This was a time of crisis in the history of

Christianity. It would have been easy to split the church. But wise counsels prevailed. The Holy Spirit ruled in the hearts of believers and led them to make a peaceful course. A council was called and the matter was calmly considered. This was a most important council. If the Jewish idea was to prevail, the progress of the church would be very slow. If, however, the other view should prevail, and the doors be thrown open to all, so that whosoever would might enter and enjoy its privileges, then the largest prosperity would be assured.

It is wise when Christian people have differences to get together and talk them over. If this is done in good temper and a kindly spirit, it is generally possible to reach a peaceful conclusion. That is what these Christians did. As they did so, new light broke upon the question they were considering. Paul and Barnabas told what God had done at Antioch. Peter related his experiences. James, who was presiding, made some conciliatory remarks and gave his advice. The result was that the danger was averted, all agreeing on a course which showed wisdom and love.

The decision was that a commission should be sent to Antioch with a kindly letter. There were four things it was decided they should require of the Gentile Christians. Even some of these requirements were only concessions to Jewish sentiment and not essential to the spiritual life. We should have patience with other people's opinions

when they differ from ours. Some of us are apt to be too severe with what we think mere prejudices. When persons have been brought up from infancy under certain influences and teachings, their beliefs have become part of themselves, and it is not easy for them to give them up at once. We must beware that our liberty does not become intolerant and despotic.

The treatment of the whole matter in this council shows us the beauty of mutual concession in all nonessentials. The truth must never be given up, but the truth must be held in love. We must be patient even toward prejudices, and with what we may call bigotry.

Some points in this letter we should study. A rebuke was given to those who tried to compel the Gentile Christians to do things not required by our Lord's teaching. "We have heard that certain who went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls." We should guard against meddling with the spiritual life of others. If we should judge others less, and try to encourage, cheer and build up all our fellow Christians in faith and love, we would do better service.

The letter assured these Gentile Christians also that those in conference had all come "to one accord." That was something wonderful, when we think of the difference of opinion among the members of this council when they first met. The Holy Spirit was evidently in their midst,

moving their minds and hearts, and they had love, the one to the other, which inclined them to respect each the other's opinion.

The lesson is one that should be well learned and diligently practiced on all occasions where Christian people meet together. Good men who think at all differ in opinion on most subjects. No true fellowship can be got anywhere save by mutual concession. It is not right either that all the conceding should be done on one side—both sides should vie in their spirit of tolerance. Even in the truest home, the only basis of perfect accord is mutual yielding in love. Where one stands up, in stubborn self-will, for his personal rights, and demands that all the others shall submit to him, loving fellowship is impossible. There may be the peace of despotism, but not the peace of love. ✓

Paul and Barnabas had just come back from the mission field, and they bore the marks of suffering. Elsewhere, St. Paul, referring to this journey, speaks of bearing in his body "the marks of Jesus." He was thinking of the stonings and scourgings, and the hardships and sufferings endured as a missionary.

There are things from which Christians should keep themselves—things which may not be sinful in themselves, but which would lower the tone of spiritual life and hurt the soul. One essential point of pure religion is to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. There are things we dare

not touch if we would preserve our souls in purity. There are companionships we must not let into our life, even for an hour, if we would get the beatitude of purity which our Lord promises. There are things which seem pleasant, but which end in death.

“Look, father,” cried a child, “at the beautiful berries I have found.” The color fled from the father’s face as he asked, with much alarm, “Have you eaten any of them, my child?” “No, father; not one.” And as she gave the berries into her father’s hand to be destroyed, tears were in her eyes as she asked, “Why, father, what are they?” Her father answered, “They are the berries of the deadly nightshade.” The child did not know the death that was hidden in the berries. The world’s pleasures look very attractive to the eyes of some, but oftentimes there lies deadly poison under their fascinating beauty.

CHAPTER XVII

PAUL BEFORE KING AGRIPPA

Read Acts XXVI: 1-30; also 19-32

SAUL the Pharisee, who consented to the death of Stephen (Acts VIII: 1), immediately gave himself to persecuting the Christians. Unless all he had been taught was false, every believer in Christ was a transgressor of the law, and to the support of the law Paul had devoted his life. Only when his eyes were opened by Christ did he see his mistake. This should be remembered when we are tempted to be uncharitable in our interpretation of motives which we condemn. Many of those with whose conduct Christian men and women disagree are not willfully wrongdoers—some of them are merely misguided. This does not excuse them, but it is a claim on our charity.

Years after Paul had learned his error, he told Agrippa the story of his conversion. He described the vision and told of the words of Christ, and added, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." It was a vision of Christ that Paul saw. He knew now that Jesus was the Messiah, and turned at once to follow Him.

Heavenly visions come to all young people, inviting them away from evil and from earthliness to pure, good, true and divine things. The Christian mother's teachings, as she holds her little one on her knee and talks to it of Jesus, places before the young eyes a vision of the Saviour in His beauty and grace and love. Every sermon in which Christ is lifted up sets the vision before the young listener. How often do the tears of childhood and youth flow as the Saviour is seen in mental vision on the cross! The Holy Spirit also brings the vision in all its vividness before the eyes—the lovely, suffering, dying, glorified Jesus.

Doctor Doddridge, in his life of Colonel Gardiner, describes the conversion of the wicked soldier. He was waiting near midnight, the hour fixed for a sinful meeting with another, and was carelessly turning over the pages of a religious book, when suddenly he saw before him, vivid and clear, the form of the Redeemer on His cross, and heard Him speak, "All this I have done for thee; and is this thy return?" Like Paul, he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but from that moment followed Christ. That is what every one of us should do; when we see Christ and hear His voice, we should straightway leave all and go after Him.

Not only at the beginning, but all the way through life, God sends us visions to guide us. Every time we see in a verse of Scripture a

glimpse of something beautiful commended, it is a heavenly vision given to us to lead us to the beauty it shows. Every fragment of loveliness we see in a human life is a heavenly vision sent to woo us upward. Wherever we see beauty which attracts us and kindles in us desires and aspirations for higher attainments, it is a vision from God, whose mission is to call us to a higher life. We should not prove disobedient to any heavenly vision, but should follow everyone as an angel sent from heaven to woo us nearer God.

It is thus every true artist works. He dreams dreams and sees visions, and then seeks to put on canvas or in marble his dreams and visions. Every great and noble thing anyone does is first a vision in his soul, to which he surrenders himself. All Paul's life was a struggle toward the realization of the vision that he saw at Damascus. "One thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." He saw ever before him the vision of the perfect character of Christ, and put forth every energy of his life to realize it in himself. So should we all do.

Soon after Paul saw his vision he began the work of preaching Christ, whose followers he had persecuted. He went to the people of Damascus and Jerusalem and Judæa, Jews and Gentiles alike, and "declared . . . that they should

repent and turn to God." Repenting is not merely giving up one's sins; it is also turning to God. The sinner needs to turn to God for mercy and for refuge from the divine wrath against sin. He must also return to God as a prodigal returns to his father and his home. He must turn to God in life, in obedience, in heart, in love, in spirit. A Christian is one who has truly left his sins and is now walking with God, doing God's will and growing into Christ's likeness. Therefore, repentance is not a mere passing emotion of regret. It is not mere sorrow that the sin has been found out. It is really an abandonment of the old life and an acceptance of God as the Master of the new life, and the turning of heart and soul after Him.

But Paul told the people they must not stop with repentance, they must do "works worthy of repentance." We have a right to ask every professing Christian to prove that he is a Christian. His mere statement is not sufficient. He must give the evidence in his life; and the evidence that will prove it beyond doubt will be faithfulness in every day's duties, consistency in every day's conduct, and moral beauty in all the developments of the character. Religion is very practical. Christian life is nothing if it is only a fine sentiment. It must touch and affect every part of our being. It must work into all the relations, experiences and duties of our common days.

When Paul stood before Agrippa, it was twenty-five years after his conversion. They had been years of toilsome life, amid enemies and dangers; but the heroic old apostle had never given up, never faltered, never turned aside. It was a great record, but he takes no praise to himself. The help came from God for all these years of witnessing. Many young people are afraid to set out on a Christian life, because, foreseeing its dangers, they dread them and fear that they will not be able to stand faithful and true to the end. Here is a word for all such: They shall obtain help from God for every duty, for every hour of danger, for every struggle. They need only to be faithful day by day, doing the day's duty quietly, and trusting God. This help will come from Him, silently, secretly, just as it is needed, always grace sufficient, so that they shall be able to stand year after year. God never puts a burden on us without giving us the strength we need to carry it, unless we reject the offered help. The way to obtain help of God is to go faithfully and promptly forward in the way of duty, asking for the help, and sure of getting it. It will not come if we wait to get it before we set out to do His will.

Paul explained to Agrippa that he had not abandoned his old religion for a new. Christianity is the ripe fruit of which Judaism was the bud and blossom. Moses and the prophets preached the same gospel that Paul did. The

Bible is one book. The same streams of promise and hope flow through all its parts, only that in the Old Testament they flow underground, and in the New they burst out in the sight of all men. Abraham was saved just as we are, only he saw Christ merely by faith, and dimly, a Saviour promised; and we see Him clearly, a Saviour who has come and finished His work.

Festus, who was with Agrippa when Paul told his marvelous story, said, "Paul, thou art mad." That is the way earnestness in religion is rewarded by the world. They said Christ was crazy—His own family thought He was, and once tried quietly to get Him home. Festus said Paul was insane. But who was the madman that day—Paul, who believed on Christ and was living for the invisible things; or Festus, who sat there and sneered? Who is mad now—the devout and fervent Christian, or the worldly scoffer and reviler? There is no madness like that which disbelieves in the realities of eternity and rejects the yearning, mighty love of Christ. Men really only come to themselves when they awake to their true condition as lost sinners and return to God their Father.

Agrippa seems to have been affected differently. He said to Paul, "With but little persuasion thou wouldst fain make me a Christian." Perhaps we cannot be absolutely sure whether these words were a sneer or whether they were meant to hide conviction. No matter; it was

Agrippa's one great opportunity for salvation, and he threw it away. Such opportunity comes to all. Every lost one was at one time on the very edge of salvation. Fear drives some almost to the point of fleeing to Christ. Or, the love of Christ almost wins them. Or, the truth faithfully presented and pressed into their hearts leads them almost to decision. They reach the door, but do not enter. There is a story of a prodigal who turned homeward and traversed weary miles, until he had his hand on the knocker of his father's door, and then withdrew it, and turned away again, plunging into deeper sin and shame. "Almost" is a hopeful condition. One is very near. A step more and he would be inside. Yet it is not a safe condition. A woman was lost in the mountains. All night she wandered, seeking the way home. At length she sank down and died as the dawn was breaking. In the morning they found her but a few steps from the door of the hotel which she had been struggling to reach. Close about heaven's gates millions of souls perish—almost saved, yet lost! God wants us to be altogether Christians. Almost will not avail. How terrible the thought, forever, to the lost sinner, that he was once so nearly saved, and yet lost for all eternity!

Paul's answer to Agrippa came from the heart. "I would to God . . . all that hear me . . . might become such as I am, except these bonds." It is not enough that we are saved

ourselves; we must be propagators of the gospel; we must try to save our lost fellows. Paul knew he had something which Agrippa and the others had not. Sometimes Christians forget that they are children of God and heirs of God, that they have eternal life, that heaven is theirs. They go about hanging their heads in the presence of those who are not Christians, almost as if apologizing for being Christians. But even in the presence of a king, the governour, and the other people of rank, Paul was conscious that he was far richer than they were, had a higher rank. He had something they had not, and to possess which would greatly add to their happiness and honour. If all Christians had this realization of their dignity, honour and noble rank, it would greatly add to their power in impressing Christianity upon the world and in urging others to come with them into the same blessed life.

Perhaps Agrippa's answer to Paul's earnest words showed how he was impressed, "This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar." So it looked as if Paul had made a mistake in appealing to Cæsar. This made it necessary that he should be sent to Rome. It would have seemed better that he should at once be released from prison, that he might go out to preach. But there was another Hand, not a human hand, that was at work unseen those days amid the complicated movements of things. God's plan was being wrought out

in spite of, even in and through, men's enmities and persecutions. Paul had a mission in Rome. He was wanted to carry the gospel there. Had he been released at this time he would probably have been seized again by the Jews and might have fallen a victim to their rage and hatred, thus ending his work. His appeal made it necessary that the Roman Government should take him to Rome. Thus he was sure of protection and was carried to the world's capital without expense, that he might there preach the gospel. Thus Rome itself became a helper in extending Christ's Kingdom. We shall see, as we read on, what good and blessing came out of this which seemed that day an unfortunate thing, a hindrance. God's plans for our lives are always good, and we need only to help Him work them out.

CHAPTER XVIII

PAUL'S VOYAGE AND SHIPWRECK

Read Acts XXVII

PAUL had been eager to go to Rome. His eagerness was not that of a tourist or explorer, but that of one constrained by the love of Christ, desiring to carry the gospel to the world's great capital. At last his longing is being realized. He is going to Rome, but in a strange way. He is going as a prisoner. The remarkable providence in this is that he was carried on his great missionary errand at the cost of Rome itself.

Paul was the only man on the ship whose hope and courage did not fail in the storm which overtook them. In the midst of the tempest an angel stood by him and assured him that he must be brought before Cæsar, which meant that he could not perish in the sea. He was assured also that for his sake all on board should escape, though the ship should be lost.

At first sight, it seems a contradiction. Paul, noting the attempts of sailors to escape in one of the ship's boats, said, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved." Yet Paul had said before that there should be no loss of life on the

ship. He had received this assurance, too, from an angel of God. If it was the divine purpose that no life should perish in this storm, why did Paul say here that unless the seamen stood at their posts the passengers could not be saved? The divine assurance of safety did not do away with the use of all proper means for securing deliverance. Indeed, it implied that these means should be used. We say that every man's life is a plan of God—that God's plan extends to the most minute things in our condition and circumstances. We can defeat God's purpose for us—we always do defeat it when we fail to do our part. The purpose of God here was that Paul, and all with him on the ship, should reach the shore in safety; but the fulfillment of His purpose depended upon the faithfulness of those who had the care of the ship.

Paul's appeal had its effect. "The soldiers cut away the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off." The sailors had let the boat down, intending to escape in it. The soldiers foiled their plan by cutting the ropes and letting the boat drift off. Thus the sailors were kept on the ship and compelled to do their duty. There is a story of a little girl with a warm heart for dumb animals, who prayed that the rabbits might not be caught in her brother's traps. After praying very earnestly, she whispered to her mother that she knew they could not be caught. When her mother asked her why she was so sure, she said

she had destroyed the traps. We must work as well as pray.

Paul's common sense appeared again a little later. "While the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take some food." For fourteen days they had been fasting, eating but little, losing rest and sleep, and without regular food. It was very necessary that they should take food to be ready for what lay before them. We must always care for our bodily health. No matter what our danger may be, we need food. When Elijah was fleeing from Jezebel's threat, despairing because of the seeming failure of his work, an angel found him lying under a juniper tree wishing he were dead. Instead of giving him good advice, or even reminding him of the divine promises, the angel brought him something to eat. Then, after he had eaten, he slept. Food and sleep were what Elijah wanted. There are times when what persons need is not a tract, nor good advice, nor even words from the Bible, or a prayer, but comforts for their bodies, something to eat, clothes to keep them warm.

There are beautiful things in Paul's bearing during this storm. One is his calmness in the hour of danger. It was not merely his physical courage and self-control that gave him this serene composure; it was his confidence in God. He knew that the Lord ruled on the sea and in the storm, and that he was safe in God's strong hands. Like Moses, he endured as seeing Him who is

invisible. Every Christian may have this same peace in time of danger or trial. Another fine thing in Paul here is his thoughtfulness for others. He forgets himself and tries to cheer his fellows in their fear. There is no truer test of the spirit of Christ than interest in others. Another thing in Paul's conduct is his noble confession of Christ. He was not ashamed of his religion.

Paul set the example of eating. Then the rest followed. By being brave, cheerful and composed in time of danger, Paul lifted up the whole ship's company into the same confident mood. By his cheerful manner and loving interest in the others he inspired them all with confidence. There are few things the world needs more than just such influence.

The next step was to lighten the ship; the wheat was thrown out into the sea. There come experiences in life when material things must be sacrificed for the sake of higher interest. In this case the cargo was thrown overboard in order that the ship might be beached and the men's lives saved. We cannot reach the haven of eternal rest laden down with the things of this world. When a vessel was burning near the shore, and all were leaping into the water to swim to safety, there was one who tied his gold about his body, thinking to carry it to shore; but the moment he leaped into the water, he sank to the bottom like a stone. If he had been willing to give up his gold his life might have been saved.

We have an illustration of this truth in the history of the flight of Cortez, on that fearful night when the Aztecs compelled the invaders to escape for their lives. The vast masses of gold that had been accumulated were more than could be carried off, as each soldier would have to fight his way through the host of the enemy. Each man was allowed to take what he would, but their commander warned them of overloading. Said he, "He travels safest in the dark night who travels lightest." The more cautious men heeded the advice, but others were less self-restrained. Some bound heavy chains of gold about their necks and shoulders, and some filled their wallets with the bulky ingots until they literally staggered under their burdens. All who tried to carry off the gold became an easy prey to the lances of the enemy. On that fearful night, poverty itself was the greatest wealth.

Even the anchor chains were cut, and the anchors were left in the sea. Anchors are very important, but there is a time when even they must be cast off. There are other anchors which hold many people from salvation or a full consecration to Christ. Sometimes a secret sin is the chain, sometimes a human companionship or friendship, sometimes love for the world's riches or pleasures. Whatever it is that keeps a sinner from salvation, or a Christian from greater nearness to Christ, should be cut off. Christ made this very strong when He said that if our hand or

our foot cause us to sin, we should cut it off; that we would better escape into life, halt or maimed, than keep both hands and feet and perish. We should be very honest with ourselves in this matter. We should see whether there is anything holding us back from the shore of safety, keeping us out of the Church, or hindering us from getting near to Christ. If we find that there is any such thing, no matter how dear it is to us, we should resolutely cut it off and cast it away. Paul's common-sense action had commended him to the centurion in charge of the prisoners, for when the soldiers proposed to kill the prisoners, "the centurion, desiring to save Paul, stayed them from their purpose." The soldiers forgot all that Paul had done for them during the storm and, to avoid further responsibility for themselves, proposed killing all the prisoners. After a battle, a wounded enemy within the lines piteously cried for water. An officer ran to him and gave him drink. Refreshed and revived by the water, the wounded man, seeing that his benefactor was of the opposite army, drew his pistol and shot him. Something like this was the spirit of these soldiers. The centurion, however, shows us the reverse spirit—gratitude. He remembered how much they all owed to one particular prisoner, and checked the evil purpose of his men, not only saving Paul himself, but for his sake all the prisoners.

The first chapter in the dramatic story is

simply told. The advice was given by the centurion that "they who could swim should . . . get first to the land; and the rest, some on planks, and some on other things from the ship. And so . . . they all escaped safe to the land." We have here a beautiful parable. The voyage itself is a parable of the Christian's life-voyage. The island represents heaven. Everything has to be given up to reach it. But it will be noticed that not one person was lost—all reached the land. However, all did not get to the shore in the same way. Some swam out, gaining the land easily, while others had to cling to pieces of board, or of furniture, thus barely escaping. So not all Christians reach heaven in the same way. Some enter triumphantly, victoriously, with song and shout; some are barely saved, gaining the shores of glory only on the shattered fragments of their earthly hopes. Happy will we be if we get into heaven at last in any way, through any difficulty or earthly loss. But it is possible for all to have the "abundant entrance," and we should strive so to live that we may secure it.

CHAPTER XIX

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Read Rom. V: 1-11

JUSTIFICATION by faith is the starting point in the Christian life. There can be no tree without a root, no stream without a fountain. The careless, unsaved ones may read about the blessings of redemption, as we have them here in our lesson, and may say, "Yes, they are very beautiful and good." But they never can possess these gifts and blessings until they have been "justified." And they never can be justified until they receive the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. Nothing but His blood can put away sin. Nothing but His Spirit can change and renew the life. When we have been "justified" our sins are put forever away. There is, therefore, now no condemnation. We stand before God as if we had never sinned. We must stop at these first words and study them carefully. They are the gate at which we must enter the Father's house, whose blessedness is described in the verses following.

After justification comes peace. Peace is a favourite word with St. Paul. He does not mean peace in an earthly sense, for he did not have

such peace. His life was full of suffering, care, toil, persecution and trial. Yet his epistles are starred all over with the bright word peace. There are several different kinds of peace mentioned by St. Paul. Here he speaks of "peace with God." This means the consciousness of reconciliation with God. We have an illustration of it in the prodigal son after his return to his father, when he had been forgiven and restored to his place. Sin separates us from God. While the feeling of guilt is in the heart there is no peace. We cannot look into God's face. But when we have repented of our sins and have confessed them and received God's forgiveness there is peace with God. Saint Paul speaks also elsewhere of the "peace of God." Writing from a prison, he exhorted his friends to be anxious for nothing, but to make all their cares known to God; and then he said the peace of God would keep their hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. This is a step further than peace with God. It is a peace which holds the heart quiet and still in the midst of whatsoever things are hard and trying in this world. It comes from nestling in God's love, and leaving all tangled things in His hands. Christ promised the same peace when He said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you." Evidently peace is a Christian duty as well as a privilege. It is named as one of the fruits of the Spirit, in the same cluster with love, joy, gentleness, goodness and meekness. The peace

mentioned here in our lesson is the beginning of all true peace. The peace of God cannot be ours until we have peace with God.

The peace of God comes through Jesus Christ, "through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace." Always and everywhere Christ is the door. We enter every place of blessing through Him. The way to peace with God is through our Lord Jesus; and here "access" into the grace of salvation is also "through" Him. To reject Christ is to reject everything of blessing and good. To receive Christ is to be admitted to all the privileges and benefits of redemption. This "access" is into all "grace." Grace is favour undeserved. What we earn by our own deeds is not grace; it is wages. What comes to us as mercy, through the love of God, is grace. "Access"—to what? To all the blessings that belong to God's children. "All things are yours," says St. Paul, in another letter. "All things are yours; . . . and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." There is the privilege of prayer—we have access to that. There is the Bible—that is ours. There is the Church—that is for us. There is the storehouse of grace—grace for life, comfort for sorrow, all divine fullness—we have access into that. There is heaven at the last—the door is open for us to enter in and go no more out forever.

Because the door is open to us, "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." It may seem oftentimes

that the present gains of faith in Christ are not very great. It may even appear as if the worldly man had the better of it here. But this is not the end. There is a future in which there shall be compensation for earth's ills and losses to all who are in Christ. We are some day to be like Christ and to be with Him in glory. This ought to cheer us in our earthly life. Those who have this blessed hope ought not to be affected by the hardness and trial of the way. There is a man journeying along a lonely road at night. It is dark. The storm beats about him. He is weary and faint, but in his heart there is a vision of a beautiful and happy home, not many miles away, to which he is going. Loved ones are there, waiting for him. There he will find shelter from the storm, food for his hunger, rest to relieve his faintness and weariness. This vision of happiness, comfort, joy and safety, a little way before him, makes him forget the hardness and discomfort of the journey. So it is that the "hope of the glory of God" should cheer us as we move through the world's darkness and sorrow and trial.

Paul reminds us that we are to rejoice also in our tribulations. This seems a hard lesson. We may learn to bear troubles submissively, without complaining; but to rejoice in them, that is something which to many seems impossible. The tree is too bitter to have such sweet fruit growing on it. But the grace of Christ is equal to this strange

task—enabling us to rejoice in our tribulations. Thousands of Christians have done it. Saint Paul himself did it. We remember his songs in the night at Philippi. This is what Christian faith may always do. The secret of it is, perfect trust in the will and love of God. No one can rejoice in pain or loss who has not a settled confidence in the righteousness of God's ways. Then he knows that the thing God sends or permits is the best thing, though it almost crush him. Some one tells how a flute is made. Here is a piece of wood. It is solid and hard and it makes no music. Then a workman takes it and cuts holes in it, and makes a hollow through it. It is by thus cutting as if destroying it that it is made into a flute which gives forth sweet music. God seems oftentimes to be destroying His children by tribulations, but He is really preparing them to give forth sweet music.

Tribulation is good, for it "worketh patience." Patience is a blessed lesson to learn. Any school in which we can learn it is a good school, and the lesson can scarcely be too costly. Patience is oftentimes learned in the school of suffering. We are there trained to endure, not to cry out in the hour of anguish, but to sing instead. Richter tells of the little bird that is shut away in the darkness to learn new strains, which afterwards it sings in the light. Many Christians are taken into the darkness and kept there for a time, while they are taught the songs of patience.

We look at patient people with admiration, not knowing what it has cost them to get this pearl of the Christian graces.

“Angel of patience, sent to calm
Our feverish brows with cooling balm,
To lay the storms of hope and fear
And reconcile life’s smile and tear,
The throbs of wounded pride to still,
And make our own our Father’s will.”

Patience is only the first link in a golden chain. It begins in tribulation—in the fire. That is where the gold is refined. I saw the men in the great smelter at Denver, bringing in the ore—rough, unsightly, without any appearance of value, and I followed the processes until they showed us the pure metals ready for use. That is the way this chain of gold begins. The rough ore of common life is taken and put into the hot furnace, where it is purified until it shines in lustrous beauty. “Patience, experience.” Experience is what we have learned for ourselves by living. Most of us do not learn much any other way. Every day’s life leaves its new lines written upon our character.

“Our deeds still travel with us from afar,
And what we have been makes us what
we are.”

After experience comes hope. The more we know of the truth and the beauty of the blessedness of hope, the more does the future mean

to us. Trying Christ makes us even the more sure of Him. Testing the promises makes us feel more secure in resting upon them. This "hope," too, is one that never shall disappoint us. One of the most pathetic things I saw in all the great West was a little graveyard near the foot of Pike's Peak, in which sleep many of the men who journeyed there with the wild expectation of finding gold. Their hope put them to shame and they died broken-hearted. Not so does ever the Christian's hope.

The ground of all our hope is in Christ, who died for us while we were yet sinners. God does not begin to love us when we begin to get good and to love Him. He loves us first in our sins, and it is His love that starts in our hearts the first glimmering of love for Him. The argument here is very strong. If He loved us in our sins so much that He died for us, surely now, when we have been justified and saved, He will be faithful to us and will keep us from falling away. Thus the cross is the abiding proof of the unchanging love of God. "If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

CHAPTER XX

THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT

Read Rom. VIII: 1-14

SOME one says that if the Bible be compared to a ring and the Epistle to the Romans be its precious stone, the eighth chapter would be the sparkling point of the jewel. It is one of the most precious chapters in all the Scriptures. It begins with no condemnation, and ends with no separation.

The very first verse tells us "There is therefore now no condemnation." This is a great word. They are not condemned, are not guilty, have nothing charged against them. How does this come? Are these people holy ones who never have sinned? If so, it can be no comfort to us, for we all have sinned. It is a word only for angels. But this is not what it means. It is not the sinless ones who are thus free from condemnation. The reference is to those who have sinned, but have been forgiven.

Those "that are in Christ Jesus" are the persons who are free from condemnation. They have sinned, many of them very grievously. But when they accepted Christ as their Saviour all their sins

were put away, blotted out. To be in Christ Jesus means to be in Him by faith and love. Then He takes away all our guilt, and when He does this it is as if we never had sinned. Our sins are remembered no more forever. Their crimson red becomes whiter than snow. The divine forgiveness is so full, so complete, so thorough, that we are restored to our place in fellowship with God as if we never had gone astray.

Those who are in Christ have a new life in them. Christ Himself lives in them by the Holy Spirit. They are filled with the Spirit and are lifted out of the old life and thus are made free from its power. Elsewhere St. Paul said, "Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." If we let the Spirit live in us and rule us we shall no longer be under the influence of the old nature, but will rise into a new life, as when one carries a plant from a cold arctic winter into a tropical summer. One writer compares this "law of life" to the antidote which counteracts a deadly poison and frees one from its "law of death." Another illustrates it by the coming of relief to a beleaguered city. The deliverer frees the people from prison and gives them a friendly government. Another uses the illustration of a balloon, which overcomes the attraction of gravitation and lifts its passengers upward. To be living under the power of the Holy Spirit is to be free from sin's terrible bondage.

Those who are still living the old life, ruled by natural desires, have no care for spiritual things. Men who live only a worldly life, a life of self-indulgence and of sin, would find no comfort in a prayer meeting or at a church service, while you, if you are a true Christian, sitting in the same pew, would find great pleasure in the worship. I knew a godly man to whom music was torture, and the finer the music the greater the torture. His friends in the same room, listening to the same music, were thrilled by it while he was made to suffer. Those who have the Spirit love spiritual things, while those who have not the Spirit are made unhappy in the presence of these heavenly enjoyments.

Only those who have received the Holy Spirit are really alive. There are men who are dead to the things of God and heaven as is the man in his coffin to the things about him. Friends sob out their sorrow beside him, but he is not disturbed by it. There are persons who never think of God or of heaven. Alive to this world, they are dead to all the things of the heavenly world and to the spiritual life—the love of God, the divine grace, the beauty of holiness, the promise of God—as dead as if their bodies were stone. One tells of seeing an idiotic child growing up in a home. All the wealth of holy affection was poured out on it. Loving parents watched with intense eagerness for some response to their great

love. But no response came. The child never became conscious of the tender love about it. So those who are devoted only to this world live amid the manifestations of the love of God, under the very shadow of the cross of Christ, and yet are dead to all this wonderful affection, utterly unmoved by it.

Those who are ruled by the Spirit have the mind of the Spirit. That is, the Spirit dwells in their hearts and they are alive. They love God and love their fellow men. They commune with God in this world. They and Christ are close personal friends. They are alive to all the things of divine grace. In their hearts they have the divine peace which is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

It does not make one a Christian to have a correct creed, or to be a member of a church. We are Christians only when we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts. If the Spirit is in us, we shall have the marks of His indwelling in our life and character. One of these marks is love, another is joy, another patience, another meekness, another gentleness, another self-control. No one can see the Spirit in us—no one can see God—but people soon know if the Spirit is in us by the way we live, by our disposition and conduct. Jesus once said to one of His disciples, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Not unless we are cleansed by Christ can we really

claim to be His. The words here are quite as strong—if we have not the Spirit of Christ, we are none of His.

If we would have the Spirit of God, we must “put to death the deeds of the body.” Our hearts are great battle fields where destinies are decided. Two forces are ever contending for the mastery—the flesh, the old nature, and the Spirit—the new life of God in our souls. If the old nature conquers, we have lost all and must perish. But if the new nature, the Spirit, conquers, then we enter life. Without Christ we can only be defeated; through Christ’s help we can be victorious. We must be careful not to make this simply a human struggle, for alone we never can contend with the power of evil. But there is a beautiful promise in this same chapter which says that we can be more than conquerors through Him that loved us. We must make sure to have Christ with us in the battle.

Those who are led by the Spirit are the sons of God. It is a wonderful thought that we can be led by the divine Spirit Himself. The Spirit leads us not from without, as in old times the pillar of cloud led the people, but by living in us and filling our hearts with right motives, feelings, desires, affections. We must open our hearts to the Spirit, for He never will force His way in. He stands at the door and knocks, and if we open to Him, He enters and becomes our guide. It is a glorious privilege to be a child of God. Here

we are told how we can enter this relation. In one of the Gospels it is said that as many as receive Christ, to them He gives the right to become God's children. Accepting Christ as our Redeemer and Master brings us into the family of God. Then, here we are told that if we yield to the leading of the Holy Spirit we become God's children. It is very plain, therefore,—the door stands wide open into the household of the heavenly Father. All who submit themselves to the divine life and love and rule, become children of God.

CHAPTER XXI

CHRISTIAN LIVING

Read Rom. XII: 9-21

Our love should be sincere, "without hypocrisy," as Paul says. A hypocrite is an actor. He pretends to be what he is not. We are not to live in this way—merely pretending to love people, speaking to them kindly words while bitterness is in our heart. Our life must be as good as our speech, our heart as good as our profession.

If our love is to be without hypocrisy, we must "abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." God hates wickedness, hates everything that is sinful; if we would be like God we must hate sin. It is not enough to love what is right and to cleave to it. This is very important, but we must also abhor that which is evil. This does not mean that we are to hate wicked people, for we are taught to love all men—we are not to hate the people, but the wickedness, being ready meanwhile to show our love in kindness and helpfulness even to the worst. God hates sin, but loves the sinner and yearns for his salvation, doing everything to bring him back to right ways. In these days of tolerance

we need to watch lest sometimes we be tolerant of things we ought to hate.

But we must not let our hatred of evil interfere with our love for others. Paul urges that we, "in love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another." Perhaps oftentimes we are too cold in our affection, at least in our showing of affection. There is something wonderfully beautiful in the way Jesus loved His disciples and friends. He loved them and He let them know that He loved them. He spoke to them of His tender interest in their life, and showed His interest, too, in many sweet and gentle ways. He commanded His friends to love one another as He had loved them. Not only should we love, but we should be tenderly affectioned. Especially in homes is there oftentimes a lack in the showing of affection. The family love each other, but their words and acts do not show it. We are too chary of our loving words.

We are to do more. We are to show our love by preferring one another. This is not easy. We like to claim the first places for ourselves. We do not like to sink ourselves out of sight when we have been doing something good and beautiful, quietly allowing some other one to get the credit and carry off the honour. It is in associated Christian work that this lesson has its special application. As long as we are clamouring for honour and recognition we have not learned this part of Christian duty. If we only knew it,

there is a wonderful comfort in caring only for the work, and not caring to have the praise of men for it.

Another thing not easy we are asked to do: we are to "bless them that persecute you; bless, and curse not." Indeed, none of these life lessons are easy. We like to pay debts of this kind with the same sort of coin we have received. Possibly we may learn part of the lesson—not to be resentful, not to try to punish others for the hurt they do us. We say we will drop the matter and not think of it any more. But this is not all of the lesson. Not only are we not to curse, but we are to bless them that persecute us. We are not to return injury for injury, nor are we to return nothing; we are to pay the debt in full, but we must pay it with love instead of hate; instead of persecuting those who persecute us, we are to bless them.

Then, we are to "rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep." The latter part of this counsel we hear about very often. It is quite natural and not very hard to weep with those who weep. We go to the house of mourning, and we feel very sorry for our friends in their trouble. But this is not all the lesson. We are also to rejoice with them that rejoice. This is not so easy as the other part of the lesson. Sometimes we are disposed to envy those who are prosperous or who have great blessings or joys; the teaching here is that we

are to rejoice with these; we are to be glad because they are glad and happy.

Those who have the Spirit of Christ must "be of the same mind one toward another." If two persons are to live together happily they must make up their minds that they both cannot have their own way all the time. One way to get along is for one to do always just what he wants, while the other yields in everything, having no mind of his own, claiming no rights. This can scarcely be called the Christian way. It makes one a tyrant and the other a slave. The way for people to live together is for both to have the same mind, each to think of the other's comfort and happiness and be glad to yield. Then the lives blend together; neither has his own way, but both consult each other's interest and comfort. Being of the same mind implies that there is no quarreling, no dissension. Both move together in unselfish love, seeking lowly things.

Paul goes still deeper into the life when he says that we are to be not wise in our own conceits. Self-conceit is a miserable thing. Ruskin says, "Conceit may puff a man up, but never prop him up." Some other one says, "Buy the conceited man at his real worth and sell him for what he thinks he is worth and your fortune is made." Nobody admires self-conceit in another. Everyone thinks it a most detestable disposition. We must think of ourselves as we appear to others. We ought to know very well that self-

conceit makes us very unlovely in the eyes of others. Humility is the grace which adorns. God loves it and men love it.

The truly humble Christian will "take thought for things honourable in the sight of all men." We represent God in this world. We have the interests of God's cause in our keeping. This makes it a very serious thing to profess to be a Christian, for people have a right to look to us to see what God is like. Besides, God has a right then to look to us for the true manifesting of His own character and will. It is very important, therefore, that in every disposition we show, in all our conduct, in all our business transactions, in all our social relations, in all our acts and words of influence, we shall show the things that are godlike and beautiful. We must be honourable as well as honest.

In God's mind, peace is a part of beautiful living. It is not always possible to live in love with people. There are some people who would quarrel with an angel. They are so selfish, so ill-tempered, so domineering, so unreasonable, that they can be at peace with none. It may not be possible, therefore, even for the best Christian to move through the world without having somebody hate him or strive with him. But the lesson is that it must never be our fault if there is quarreling. So far as we are concerned, we must be at peace with all men. Abraham pre-

served peace with Lot by letting Lot have his own way. This is a good rule.

Those who would live peaceably must not avenge themselves, but must "give place unto the wrath of God." When some one has wronged us grievously we are apt to think that we ought to punish him. He may deserve to be punished, but punishment is not our business. We are not the man's judge, nor are we the executor of God's laws against him. "Vengeance belongeth unto me . . . saith the Lord." We are to leave all our wrongs in God's hands. When Joseph's brothers implored him not to punish them, he said that he was not in the place of God. Peter tells us that when persons wrong us we are to be like Christ, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. That is, He left all His wrongs in the hands of His Father, keeping His own heart sweet and loving meanwhile, even bearing upon the cross the sins of those who were inflicting such terrible wrongs upon Him. This is what we are to do. Leaving in God's hands the righting of our wrongs, we are to do good and not evil to those who may injure us. We are never to be overcome of evil, but are to overcome evil with good—never allowing ourselves to be driven into sin by other men's injustice, but conquering men's evil with our own kindness and grace. This is the way Christ is saving the world—overcoming the world's evil by His infinite love.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LAW OF LOVE

Read Rom. XIII: 8-14

CHRISTIAN teachings deal with life. To begin with, here is a word about debt-paying. "Owe no man anything." We should never fail to pay a debt when it falls due. The person to whom we owe it expects the money at that time, and bases his own engagements upon the receiving of it. If we do not pay him, he in turn is left unable to pay another to whom he is indebted, and who can tell how many other people, in turn, will be disappointed, and perhaps left in embarrassment, because of our failure to pay our debt? Then, it is a bad habit for anyone to form—allowing debts to go unpaid. Like other habits, too, it grows easily, and soon becomes so fixed that a man thinks nothing of being in debt.

There is one kind of indebtedness, however, which none of us can help—the debt of love. We never can get it paid off. Of course, we are to pay it as fast as it falls due. But even when we do this we cannot get out of love's debt. At the close of a day we may feel that we have met all our obligations of love to all about us—family,

friends, neighbours. Yet, when we rise next morning we find all the debts of yesterday facing us again, not one of them diminished. We can do nothing but begin to pay them off again, toiling the whole day to do it.

Love includes all other duties. "He that loveth his neighbour hath fulfilled the law." All the other commandments are mere fragments of the law of love. There is an Eastern story of one who saw a cloud hanging in the sky, and while he watched, it gathered itself close down to the ground and then into a little golden urn which sat there. So all the duties we owe to others really gather themselves in concentration into the one golden duty of love. He who loves truly obeys all the commandments. This St. Paul illustrates in the following verse. "Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet," are all phases of the requirement.

Love never does another any harm. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour." Love always thinks of people's good. Whatever, therefore, injures another in any way is a violation of love's duty. What about the man who tempts a boy to drink and puts the first glass into his hand? Has he wrought no ill to his neighbour? Suppose that a few years hence this boy has become a drunkard—whose is the guilt of having started him in his course of ruin? What about the saloon-keepers, who, to make money, deal out intoxi-

cating drinks to the men—young and old, weak and strong—who come to their bar? What is the net result of the work of a drinking-saloon at the close of any year? Think of the ruin wrought in lives, in homes! Is there any good to counterbalance the evil? Are any homes brightened, sweetened, made happier, better, holier, truer, by the saloon? Are any lives made purer, cleaner, more earnest, more beautiful, nobler, more godlike, by the saloon?

There is a call here to awake. "It is time for you to awake out of sleep." The picture suggested is of one still asleep when the sun is high in the heavens. There is a great pressure of duty, but the man sleeps, indifferent to all calls. During the day we have duties which would crowd every moment if we were doing them all. But here are men sleeping away half their day, leaving their work untouched. The man who never thinks of eternity is asleep; yet he may be very busy in worldly things, a "wide-awake man," his neighbours may call him ambitious, alert, diligent, successful—but if he does not think of God and the other world, he is asleep. The world is full of such people, and we ought to try to wake them up before it is too late.

Night covers many deeds of sin and shame. When day comes wrongdoing hangs its head. We are living in the light and we should be ashamed to continue doing the things of darkness. Here again we touch the saloon business. Surely it

is among the "works of darkness." Even saloon-keepers practically admit this, for who ever saw a saloon open to the light and to all eyes, as other kinds of business are? Its windows are made dim or opaque, and its doors are made to shut quickly after a man enters. No one passing outside can see what is going on inside. This itself is a confession which puts a question on the business. If all were open to the public, as a dry-goods store, men would be ashamed to go in.

In the thirteenth verse we come again upon intemperance, "Let us walk . . . not in reveling and drunkenness." Whatever anyone may say about the Bible's position on the question of wines, there is not a shadow of doubt where it stands concerning drunkenness. It puts it down among the most debasing of sins, the most degrading, the most ruinous of all vices. Can there be anything more unworthy of a man with an immortal nature than to get drunk? Of course, no one intends to get drunk when he begins to drink. But the story is too familiar to need writing out—of the end of nine cases out of ten of moderate drinking. The only absolute safety is total abstinence.

The only true way to get rid of the wrong things in our life is to put on Christ. Being good merely by not being bad is not enough. There is a striking parable of an expelled evil spirit. He went out of the man under some pressure, and wandered, desolate and restless, through

deserts until, finding it torture not to be injuring some one, he wandered back to his old place and found the man in whom he had dwelt. He found his old house swept and garnished, but empty yet, and gathering up some other demons worse than himself, he reëntered the unoccupied house, and the last state of that man was worse than the first. It is not enough to put out the demon; we must also admit the Christ into our heart's house. Emptiness is always a condition of peril.

CHAPTER XXIII

ABSTAINING FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

Read I Cor. VIII

WHEN Paul said to the Corinthians that "knowledge puffeth up," he did not mean to depreciate knowledge, nor was he glorifying ignorance. Knowledge builds up, too. He who is content to be ignorant in this world while the stores of knowledge are so accessible, fails to grasp the meaning of life. Knowledge makes one's life broader and deeper and adds to one's power of usefulness. But there is a knowledge which makes a man cold, haughty and proud. He stalks through the world, thinking only of himself, without regard to others. He knows—and he thinks no further about it. He says it is no business of his if any weaker Christians are hurt. They ought not to be so weak. It is all nonsense for them to keep their old superstitions. They cannot expect him to limit his privileges by their narrow scruples. He is going to exercise his liberty without regard to any such childish whims. We may apply the principle to the matter of temperance. A man claims his right to take a glass of wine at dinner. He has always done it, and it has never hurt him. All about him

are those who are not so strong as he is. His example may lead them into a course which will be ruinous in the end. But he knows he has a right to his wine, and that it will do him no harm; so he refuses to think of others. They have no right to be "weak" in this intellectual age. Thus mere "knowledge" puffs up, makes one haughty, vain, coldly selfish.

But while "knowledge puffeth up," "love edifieth." Love may know just as much as knowledge does. The man who has love knows there is no harm in eating these meats. But he knows also that there are Christians only recently converted who think differently. If he asserts his privilege he knows it will grieve them, and also may lead them to violate their conscience and thus start on a course of sin which will end in the loss of their souls. This man, with love as well as knowledge, thinks of other people, and denies himself his liberty rather than harm them by his example. In the case of wine, this same man may feel just as confident as the other of the harmlessness to himself of his glass of drink; but he knows that not all are fortified as he is against the dangers of the wine cup, and he believes that Christian love requires him to deny himself rather than put the least danger before any weaker person. He does not talk haughtily about his "rights" and "liberty." He believes that it is his business to limit his privileges for the sake of his weaker brethren.

Even knowledge depends upon love—"if any man loveth God, the same is known by him." We cannot know any person truly unless we love the person. Mere knowledge sees people critically, sees their faults, the blemishes in them, the mistakes they make, the evil things they do, but sees not the good. It takes love, mingled with knowledge, to see people as they really are. We should have patience with all men. We should be charitable to all, and charity covers a multitude of sins. Our Lord's own teaching is, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." If only we would see people through eyes of love we should oftentimes find beauty where now we find only spot and stain. One of the old legends of Jesus says that as He and the disciples walked one day they saw a dead dog lying by the wayside. The disciples turned with loathing from the dead creature, but Jesus remarked, "What beautiful teeth this animal has!" He saw beauty even amid the ruin and loathsomeness of death. An eye for the good and beautiful in others is a mark of a fine, large nature. We never can be of much use in the world until we learn this lesson.

Charity should make us mindful of others who have not the same advantages as we have. Certain things may do us no harm, but those very things may do harm to others. The harm is in the influence of example on those whose "conscience being weak is defiled." Being influenced by the example of the strong Christian, they do

that which they regard as wrong. Thus they sin against God. This meat question, which disturbed the Corinthians, will not come up in our modern church life, but there are other applications of the same principle. It touches all personal liberty in matters involving no moral wrong. May a man drink wine? How richly may a Christian woman dress at church? How fine a residence may a Christian man build and live in? What games and amusements may Christian people enjoy? How far may a man by honest methods enlarge his business in a community where others are struggling for success?

There are some things which we must never yield. We must never violate a moral principle even to please some other one. We have no right to break any commandment of God for anybody's sake. It is only in matters involving no moral principle that we are to be ready to yield our liberty. It is no recommendation of us in God's sight that we do or do not eat certain kinds of food. The laws of diet are not moral laws. We must be ready, therefore, to deny ourselves things that we like if the using of them will do harm to others.

The example of the strong emboldens the weak to do that which he himself thinks to be wrong, and when a man once violates his conscience he has broken down the fence and started on a course the end of which may be destruction. It is a terrible thing to do even the slightest

wrong. Jesus said to those who cause others to stumble, "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea." Such startling words from the Master's own lips should make us tremble at the very thought of causing another to stumble. He may stumble into hell, and it will be our fault.

We must see to it that never through our knowledge, that is, through our selfishness in determining not to give up a privilege, does "he that is weak" perish, "the brother for whose sake Christ died." It does not mean that we tempt the other to some great sin, but that we forget that he may be influenced by our example. Thus we see the importance of example. We dare not strut through this world, doing just as we please, as if it mattered not, as if it were no one's affair. We must walk softly, ever asking ourselves what the effect of our walk will be upon others.

Saint Paul laid down a principle for all time when he said, "If meat causeth my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh for evermore." Elsewhere he says, "It is good not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor to do anything whereby thy brother stumbleth." This was Paul's application of the law of love. He would rather, as long as he lived, forego the exercise of a personal right, the indulgence of a personal taste, than

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run the risk of causing another to sin. It is good not to drink wine, however harmless one may think it to be, if it may make another stumble. Here we have a good temperance motive. Suppose that a man is satisfied that he has a right to drink moderately, and that he can do so with perfect safety to himself and without sinning; but suppose also that his example may cause others who are weaker to drink, and that they will drink to the destruction of their souls. What does this principle of St. Paul's say to this man? Very clearly, that he should forego his liberty forever rather than cause his brother to do wrong. The application is very wide, referring to every possible cause: "It is good not . . . to do anything whereby thy brother stumbleth."

CHAPTER XXIV

A LESSON IN SELF-DENIAL

Read I Cor. X: 23-33

INTEMPERANCE is a sore peril. We cannot at once remove the temptation from the land, but we may put into the hearts and minds of young people such principles and such motives that they may be able to resist the temptations about them and keep themselves pure and safe, clean and unspotted. Our Lord's prayer for His disciples was not that they should be taken out of the world, away from its evil, but that they should be kept from the evil.

The passage is a discussion of the question of personal liberty and duty to others—how far we may exercise our liberty, and where and how far we are required by the law of love to deny ourselves practices or enjoyments for the sake of others. This question has an obvious bearing on the matter of strong drink. Some men claim that they have a right to use wines and other liquors so long as they do not use them to excess. They claim that no one has a right to interfere with their privilege in this regard, and that they are not required to think of the influence which

the exercise of their liberty may exert on others about them. Are they right in their contention? or is there a higher law which requires them to deny themselves if there is danger that the exercise of their liberty shall hurt others, lead them to put their lives in peril?

Saint Paul says, first, that there are things which are lawful, but which are not expedient. When he says, "All things are lawful," he does not mean sinful things. These are never right. He is referring directly to the eating of meats which have been offered to idols. He is entirely satisfied himself that the meats were not affected by their being taken into an idol temple, since an idol is nothing—only a piece of wood or stone. It is "lawful" for him to eat such meats. God does not care what kind of wholesome food we eat—it is our moral acts of which He takes notice. Paul says that all such things were lawful to him. That is, so far as he was personally concerned, it was no sin for him to eat of these meats which had been carried first to an idol temple.

Yet that is not the end of the answer. "But not all things are expedient," he adds. There may be things that are right enough on simple moral grounds, and yet which as Christians it is not well that we should do. If we were Alexander Selkirks, living alone on our little island, and no other person lived anywhere about us, the question would be very much simplified. We might do as we please, then, so far as right things are

concerned. We may play our flute or keep our noisy phonograph going all night, if it gives us any pleasure, for there is nobody next door nor anybody near to be annoyed or kept awake by the exercise of our liberty. But if we have neighbours, if there is a sick person in the house next to ours, that introduces a new element into the question. "Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbour's good." We may not disturb our neighbour's rest at midnight with our piano. We may not distress the sick woman next door with our noisy phonograph. We must think of the other person, and be ready to deny ourselves any dear liberty of our own if it is going to cause hurt or give pain or trouble to another. The other's good is to be thought about before our own pleasure.

You have a right to eat any food you wish, not troubling as to whether it may have been offered to idols or not. But if some one calls your attention to the fact that certain food has been offered in sacrifice, you must stop for conscience' sake—that is, for the sake of the conscience of the person who spoke to you about it and who thinks it wrong to eat it. That is, you must deny yourself your own liberty in the matter because the exercise of that liberty would do harm to another person.

Paul gathers the whole question into one wonderful, comprehensive and luminous sentence, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatso-

ever ye do, do all to the glory of God." We are to do everything to the glory of God—that settles it all. That is one standard of Christian living. Selfishness is not, never can be, to the glory of God. We must think of the people about us, of their comfort, of their good, of the influence of our acts upon them. We must think of the weak brother for whom Christ died, and not by our liberty cause him to stumble.

It is very easy to apply the principle of this lesson to the use of strong drink. Nothing comes in here concerning the matter of strong drink in its effect upon the person himself. The man to whom this argument is specially directed is the man who claims the liberty to drink moderately, temperately, as he likes to call it. He says he has a perfect right to do so. In one sense, he has. If there were no other persons about him to be influenced by his example, if he is satisfied in his own conscience that he can drink moderately and yet safely, no one could say a word against his exercising his liberty. But if he has boys growing up in his own home, or brothers, or friends, or companions, or neighbours, who may be influenced to follow in his steps, and who may not be able, as he claims to be, to stop inside the danger line, the question is different. Then, is he not bound by the higher law of love to abridge his own liberty, to sacrifice his own desires, to deny himself his lawful indulgence, lest he might put a stumblingblock in the way of weaker ones?

But this is not the only phase of the temperance question which we must consider. In teaching children and young people, it must seem to be necessary also to present always the duty of abstaining for one's own sake as well as for the sake of others. Every boy should want to make the most possible of his life, and the use of strong drink works ruin in everyone. It does harm to his body. It injures him mentally. Then, it destroys his spiritual power. It robs him of that delicate refinement which is an ornament to the life that possesses it. It leads him into companionships and associations which are degrading and debasing. As a result, he loses his good name, the respect of worthy people, and the confidence of the community. What the final outcome will be need not be sketched here.

On the other hand, boys should be helped to realize and always to remember that a clean, pure, wholesome, self-restrained youth is the beginning of a noble and worthy manhood. The boys have only one boyhood. Some things they can experiment on, trying different ways, to see which is the best. But there is no room for experiment in living. "Youth comes twice to none." Life has been compared to an arrow which flies as it is directed on the string. If it is aimed westward, it cannot possibly fly eastward. If the life begins wrong in boyhood and youth, if it is directed toward dissoluteness and debauchery, there is little hope that it ever can be turned

about so as to attain the beauty, the nobleness, and the worthiness of an honoured manhood. Let the boys think of this matter seriously and begin right. If they do this, they will find it easy to make all their life manly and noble.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Read I Cor. XI: 20-34

WE ought to have true and right views of the Lord's Supper. It is a sacred ordinance. It leads us to think of the death of our dearest Friend, and we are reverent always in the presence of death or when thinking of death. It is the death of the Son of God of which this memorial leads us to think, and that was the most wonderful death that ever took place on this earth. When a king dies the whole land stands uncovered; what should be our emotion when God's Son bows His head and dies? The object of this death ought to add to its sacredness in our sight. He died for us, to save us.

To the Christians St. Paul wrote, "When therefore ye assemble yourselves together, it is not possible to eat the Lord's supper." Why? Because of the spirit in which they met together. There were dissensions and strifes among them. Besides, there was no reverence in their meeting. They did not understand the true meaning of the Lord's Supper. They had no thought of its sacredness. They met for eating and drinking,

as if it were a revel they were keeping rather than a solemn act of worship. It was impossible to eat the Lord's Supper in such a way as that. We have no such temptation in these days. Everywhere this sacrament is invested with sacredness and is observed reverently—at least as to form. Still, even this wild abuse is not without its lessons for us. We can truly receive the Lord's Supper only when we take it with hearts in full accord with its holy meaning. Strife and bitterness unfit us for it. We ought to have love the one for the other, without resentment, without anger, without jealousy or envy. The rich and the poor meet together at the Lord's table, and it ought to be indeed as brethren. The highest and the lowest in earthly position sit there side by side, and there should be the sweetest accord of spirit. Before God they are one. Without any of the wild orgies that dishonoured the Lord's Supper at Corinth, it is yet possible, even with all our decorousness, to make it a mockery. If we make it only an empty form, without love, without faith, without a discerning of the Lord's body, without any true dependence upon the atonement of Christ, without any spiritual receiving of the things represented in the sacred emblems, is our receiving of it anything that pleases God? Is it possible for us, when we come together thus, to eat the Lord's Supper?

The apostle went into particulars as to the sins that kept them from receiving the blessing

Jesus planned for those who eat at His table: "In your eating each one taketh before other his own supper; and one is hungry, and another is drunken." Those who stumble so at the word "unworthily" in verse twenty-seven should study this verse carefully as it gives the sense of "unworthily" as it is there used. The Lord's Supper was most sadly profaned by these early Christians. When the time came for it, while the poor people present were hungry, not having had any share in the "love feast" that preceded, another "set" were really drunken from overindulgence. It is easy to understand what St. Paul meant by eating and drinking unworthily, as he had these Corinthian scenes in his mind. Another suggestion is that the permeation of the Church with the spirit of Christ was not a sudden attainment, but was gradual. Our present high conception of what Christians should be, how they should live, is the growth of centuries. Not all the "good days" are behind us, as some croakers tell us.

Paul emphasizes the sacred character of the Lord's Supper by telling its history. Paul was not present at the institution of the Lord's Supper. He was not a Christian for some time after Christ's death. Yet he did not get his knowledge of that wonderful night from the apostles who were at the table. He received it directly from the Master Himself. This gives us a hint of Paul's relation to Christ, his intimacy with Him, and the reality of his communion with Him.

Unless we make Paul an impostor, it is one of the strongest evidences of Christ's resurrection and life in glory that He made Himself known to him and made important revelations to him. He seems to have talked with this apostle familiarly as one talks with a friend. Then Paul became a witness to us of the resurrection, ascension and glory of the Saviour.

The time of the institution of the Lord's Supper ought to be noted. It was not on a pleasant day on the seashore, when the sun was shining brightly and the birds were singing sweetly and the heart of the Master was made glad by the kindness of the people. The words, "the night in which he was betrayed," tell the whole story of the time. It was just before He went out to the Garden. He knew all that lay before Him—that the traitor had now gone out, during the passion supper, to arrange to betray Him; that before the morning He would be dragged as a criminal before the Sanhedrin, and that to-morrow before nine o'clock He would be hanging on a cross in shame. Yet, knowing all the terrible events that were to be crowded into that night and the next day, He took all the first part of the night for sweet and loving intercourse with His friends. He sat down with them at the passover meal. Then, at the close of this, He instituted the memorial supper, after which He sat and talked with them in tender, loving way, and then prayed with them and for them. All this shows the utter

self-forgetfulness of our Lord. He did not let His own approaching sorrow and death cast any shadow upon the hearts of His disciples. Instead, His love made those last hours the most sacred they had ever enjoyed with Him. There is a lesson here for us. We ought to do as Jesus did, and should never permit our grief to make us selfish. In all our own sufferings we should hide away our pain and pour only the chastened love of our hearts upon others. It comes to us from the very night of Christ's anguish. It is a memorial of His bitter sorrows.

In the midst of His sorrow, Jesus gave thanks. Then He brake the bread and said, "This is my body, which is for you." The thanksgiving that night, amid all the gathering woe, is very remarkable. Surely we should always give thanks for our mercies, even in the darkest hours of our life. No gift should be taken from the hand of God at any time without gratitude. Suppose there is a great grief in your home, or the shadow of an overwhelming sorrow is hanging over your home; when you gather at the table for the family meal, lift up your hearts and thank God for what He has given you. The Lord's Supper should be eaten always with thanksgiving, even in the darkest hour. The breaking of the bread was also suggestive. Thus, too, was His body about to be broken. We feed on broken bread. Many of our sweetest blessings come to us from or in broken things. "Bread corn is bruised." We do not

eat the wheat whole, but crushed. The alabaster box was broken that the ointment in it might flow out to anoint Christ and to fill the house and the world with the odor. We get the blessings of forgiveness and the divine grace only when our hearts are broken. "My body, which is for you." This tells us all. It lays bare the very heart of the Saviour.

Jesus asked His disciples to eat in remembrance of Him. We are very forgetful creatures. One of the exhortations of the Psalmist is to his own soul, in the One Hundred and Third Psalm, that he should not forget God's benefits. But that is the very thing we are quickest to do. We do not appreciate the true value of the monuments or memorials in keeping alive the memory of past deeds or great events. We do not know how much of our vivid thought of Christ's death we owe to the Lord's Supper, which is observed so often. The chief reason Christ gave it to His Church was that we might never forget His love, His sufferings, His death for us. One morning a young man, an Englishman, at that time living in Philadelphia and attending the church of which I was pastor, came into my study, and drawing from his pocket a letter, opened it, showing me, in among the folds, some pressed flowers. "These are from my mother's grave in England," he said. Then, with exceeding tenderness, he spoke of his mother, her sweet life, her love, her thoughtfulness, her trust in Christ, her beautiful

death. The letter he held was from his sister at home, and she had plucked these flowers from the grave of the precious mother and sent them across the sea to him. No wonder they recalled afresh all her sweet life. In the communion service we have flowers from the grave of Christ, and they bring back to us all the tender recollections, helping us to think anew of His love and its great sacrifice for us.

After breaking the bread, Jesus gave the cup, with the explanation, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." The Lord's Supper is a silent sermon, telling to the world that Christ died and that we are His followers. It is not a proclaiming of our own goodness, that we are better than others. In taking our place at Christ's table, we say to all men that we are sinners, that Christ died for us, and that our sole dependence is upon the merits of His blood. Some people shrink from a public confession as if it were a setting of themselves before the world as better than others, as if it were a heralding of their religion. But it is not a "profession of religion" that we make when we unite with the Church and come to the Lord's table, but a "confession of Christ." There is a great difference in these two phrases. Here it is a proclaiming, not of our own goodness, that we make at the communion, but of the death of Christ. We honour Christ, we humble ourselves, for we put ourselves behind the death, the cross of Christ, and hide there. We are not

seen at all—it is Christ's death for sinners that is seen.

A great many conscientious people have been sorely troubled by verse twenty-seven. They have felt themselves unworthy and have supposed that the verse referred to them. But it is the manner of receiving the sacrament that is referred to. Saint Paul was thinking of what he had spoken in the first verses considered in the chapter. In a certain sense no one is truly worthy, for all are sinners. But the gospel is for sinners who confess their sins and believe on Christ as their Saviour. All who are sincerely trusting Christ and striving to follow Him are made welcome at His table. The lesson of this verse is against all irreverence, all levity, whatever would profane the sacred ordinance of the Lord's Supper; but the lowliest Christian who is sincere and true in heart is welcome and need not fear to come.

CHAPTER XXVI

PAUL ON CHRISTIAN LOVE

Read I Cor. XIII

PAUL was speaking of the spiritual gifts which were conferred upon Christians, and there flashed upon his mind a vision of something far better than any power of healing or miracle-working or speaking with tongues. This more excellent way is the way of love.

Love is better than eloquence. "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass." One who can talk in a number of languages is regarded as an accomplished man. But one may be a good linguist and a good orator and yet not be a good Christian. To be a Christian is to have love. Love is better than great learning. "If I have the gift of phophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge . . . but have not love, I am nothing." We live in an age when education is highly extolled. The training of the mind is considered of the highest importance. But there is something better than knowledge. One may be a learned scientist, a profound philosopher, may even be a brilliant theologian, knowing the Bible

and all sacred literature and Christian doctrine, and yet be nothing as God rates men. We are measured before God by the love that is in our character. In every foot of cordage used in the British navy there is a red thread so intertwined that it cannot be taken out without the unraveling of the rope or cable. In every true character there is a red cord of love. Christian loving-kindness, which spreads warmth all about it, like the soft light or the sweet fragrance of flowers, is more excellent than the most brilliant learning.

Love is better than benevolence. "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, . . . but have not love, it profiteth me nothing." It is not the gift that God blesses, but the love which bestows the gift; not the service rendered, but the spirit which prompts the service. There is a story of a king who built a great temple, paying all the cost himself. It was built for his own glory. When the time of dedication came, it was seen that some one had rubbed off the king's name and put in its place that of a poor widow. The king was greatly amazed, not knowing that anyone but himself had done anything in the building of this temple. Inquiry was made, and the woman bearing the name came tremblingly into the king's presence. When he demanded of her what she had done in the building of the temple, she could think of nothing. When pressed still further, she remembered that one hot day, as the oxen were drawing stones past her door, she had in pity

gathered some handfuls of grass and given them to the panting beasts. Pity for the dumb animals weighed more in heaven's sight than all the king's vast outlay of treasure.

In a few striking sentences the qualities of love are sketched. "Love suffereth long, and is kind." The first touch of the pencil presents love as suffering. Love always costs. One of the first things to be learned in a Christian life is endurance, sometimes of wrong, oftentimes of injustice—not enduring merely, but patient endurance. It is not enough to bear wrong for a day or two—"Love suffereth long." Not seven times, but seventy times seven must the insult or injury be patiently borne with. Nor is it enough to endure in cold silence the injuries. "Love suffereth long, and is kind,"—keeps a gentle heart, continues to do good for evil, to bathe with fragrance the hand that smites.

"Love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly." Here is a whole cluster of bright jewels shining on the bosom of love. It does not envy. Far more than we are willing to confess does the poison of envy lurk in our hearts. Nothing can be more unloving than this spirit. Love rejoiceth in the success of others. We should train ourselves to be glad even when others surpass us.

Love is humble. It does not pose for admiration or praise, nor blow its own trumpet, nor put on airs of any kind. It does not try to get

into places it is not fitted to fill. Love does not "behave itself unseemly." This seems to refer to one's manners. Love is refined, gentle, thoughtful, considerate. If anyone makes religion unlovely, he is presenting only a caricature of it. Love is always courteous.

"Love . . . seeketh not its own." The very essence of love is unselfishness. Just in the measure that we are truly loving will we cease to think of ourselves. The motto of our Master was, "Not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

"Love . . . is not provoked." Hasty temper is so common that most people have come to think of it as only a kind of harmless weakness, a mere infirmity. Men apologize for their friends who are bad tempered, as if it were a small matter. But really it is a sad blemish on character. We have no right ever to say a harsh or unkind thing anywhere, especially in our own home. There is too much sulking and sullenness in many homes. When we feel such moods coming upon us we would better go away by ourselves, and, getting down on our knees before God, fight the battle out, not leaving our refuge until we can come back with sweet spirit and gentle, kindly speech.

Love is the most enduring thing in the world. It "never faileth." Textbooks that are a few years old are not of any use any more. Old machinery is constantly being replaced by new

machinery. "We know in part, . . . but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." We may be thankful for the little revealed now, for it serves us well on the way. The morning dawn is very welcome to the early traveler, but it is only partial day, not the best. When the full day comes the dim twilight passes. Lamps in our homes and on our streets are good at night, when darkness covers the earth. But their light is not perfect, and when the sun rises we care no longer for them and put them out. The knowledge we have on the earth serves well when it is the best we can have; but it will not be prized when heaven's perfect knowledge comes. The things we know here are but the scaffolding which men set up when they are erecting a great building. It serves a good purpose for the time. Without it the walls never could be built. But when the work is finished, men do not prize the scaffolding. They tear it down and take it away, for there is no longer any use for it. So the gifts and graces and all the experiences of earth, which serve well enough now, will be discarded and left behind when we reach the fullness of God.

Of all things in the world, love is that which will endure as the most imperishable. "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love." We should gather treasure which we can carry with us to heaven. We should paint pictures which will not fade out

as we pass through the valley. We should do things which will live in the other world when this world has vanished. Three things are named which will abide—faith, hope, love. There will always be faith, for we shall never cease to trust God and believe in His love. There will always be hope, for we shall never reach the end of growth in blessing. But greater than either faith or hope is love. Whatever else we strive for in this world, we should put love always first in our request. The one great lesson to be learned in all life is—love.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE RISEN CHRIST

Read I Cor. XV: 3-28

THERE are "first things" in the gospel, things that not only come first, but are first in importance. Not all truths are of equal value. There are some we must know in order to be saved, and there are others which one may be ignorant of and yet be saved. The truths given by St. Paul as first are those which tell us of Christ's death for our sins and His resurrection from the dead. We should be sure that we understand these great teachings. Some people in these days would like to leave out these great facts in receiving Christ, taking Him only as an example and as a Teacher. But this is not enough to save us. We need a Redeemer to take away our sins, and we need a victorious Saviour who has conquered all enemies for us—including death—and is able to save us out of all our distresses. The cross and the broken grave are the true symbols of our redemption.

The scarlet line of the Redeemer's blood runs through all the Scriptures. We find it in the law of sacrifices, which seem to have been given at the

very gate of the lost paradise. We find it in the prophets and in the Psalms, where the sufferings of the Messiah for His people are foretold. We find it in the Gospels, for the shadow of the cross fell back over all the life of Jesus. He spoke over and over of His death, and said that He had come to give His life a ransom for many. In The Acts and the epistles we find the same record running, for we read continually of redemption through the blood of Christ; of His suffering, the just for the unjust; of our being redeemed by His precious blood, and of the blood that cleanseth us from all sin. Nothing could be clearer than the declarations of the Scriptures that Christ died for our sins. This tells us what a terrible thing sin is, to require such a costly expiation. It reminds us, too, what a fearful thing it is for anyone to reject the redemption of Christ, thus keeping his own sins. There is no other way of salvation. To reject this redemption is to perish.

Just as important as Christ's death for our sins is His burial and resurrection. Perhaps we have not all thought of this. We are told much about Christ's death for us. Our hymns are full of the story of the cross. We come to Christ as sinners for forgiveness. We do not think so much, however, of the blessings that come to us from His broken grave. But if He had died only and had not been raised from the dead, He could not have been the Saviour we need. It is a great

thing for us that we have a Saviour who was dead and is alive again, alive now for evermore. One blessing is that He knows the way of death just as He knows the way of temptation and the way of sorrow, and can guide us when we come to pass into the dark valley. Another blessing is that He has proved Himself stronger than death. He could not be holden of it. During His life He met all the other enemies of our souls. He met temptations and was victorious. He encountered diseases and demons and showed His power over them. He ruled the forces of nature—changing water into wine, walking on the sea, quelling the storm. He showed Himself master over death when He called back at least three persons to life. Now He Himself met death and went down under his power, but here again He proved Himself master, vanquishing death and coming alive from the grave. Thus He conquered every form of enmity and antagonism, and stands at the close victor over all things. Hence He is able to be our Saviour who knows all about life, and who has lived victoriously through it all. He is our Friend as well as our Saviour. He is with us in all our life as Companion and Helper.

The appearances of Jesus after His resurrection, during the forty days that He remained on earth, were in order to make it very clear to human witnesses that He was really alive again. Hence He met His disciples and friends at different times and left none of them in doubt. It

was a wonderful moment to Peter when Jesus appeared to him. Peter had denied Christ bitterly, saying with oaths and curses that he did not even know the Man. A little later Jesus looked at him, and that look broke Peter's heart. He went out and wept bitterly. That same day Jesus died. The grief of Peter can be imagined. He had done a great wrong to his Friend, and now he would never see Him again to ask forgiveness. How glad Peter must have been that morning when Jesus stood before him alive! Now Peter could get forgiveness. Of the other witnesses, Thomas is one of the most interesting. He doubted when he heard that Christ was risen. He would not believe it until he could see Him for himself, and see and feel the wounds in His hands and side. Jesus gave him the proof he demanded, and Thomas was convinced. So at the end of the forty days there was a company of witnesses ready to go out and tell the world of the death and resurrection of Christ, and who believed what they told and were ready to give their lives in proof of their faith.

The last appearance of the risen Lord was to Paul himself. The effect of this appearing of Christ was wonderful. It found him a persecutor of Christians—bitter, relentless, breathing blood and slaughter against them. It changed Saul to Paul, the enemy of Christ into a friend. The whole story is told in this eighth verse, showing how the resurrection of Christ transformed Paul's

life. He became a preacher of the Saviour and of the gospel he had been trying to destroy. We learn from what this belief did for Paul, what it will do for all who will accept it.

Paul always remembered what he had done before he became a Christian. This kept him humble. It also stimulated him to work for Christ. A regiment of soldiers failed once in a battle, proving cowardly. The reproach on their good name stung them to the heart, and they waited eagerly for an opportunity to burn out the disgrace. The time came at length, and in a battle they did heroically. The recollection of their old shame became mighty energy in them. So it was with Paul. He became a far more earnest apostle, no doubt, than he would otherwise have been, because of the constant remembrance of his past life. Who has not done some things to give Christ pain? We should be all the more loyal and devoted Christians because of the remembrances in us of unworthy things done in the past.

The resurrection meant so much to Paul that he was earnest in telling others what it should mean to them. The fact of the resurrection of Christ is the keystone of the arch of Christian truth. Take it out and the whole arch falls to the ground. If the body of Jesus yet sleeps in the grave beneath the Syrian stars, we simply have no Saviour, and all the hopes of Christianity are empty dreams, with nothing substantial in

them. "But now hath Christ been raised from the dead." The resurrection is true beyond all question. Not a shadow of doubt rests upon the teaching. No other fact in all history is more certainly and indubitably established. Hence all the promises and hopes of Christianity are sure. Not one of them can fail. They all bear upon them the double seal—a cross and a broken grave. If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, our faith has an immutable foundation, our sins are forgiven, and we, too, shall be raised. There is an Eastern story of a child who saw a silver spangle lying in the sand. Picking it up, she found that it was attached to a fine thread of gold. As she drew this out of the sand there were spangles on it, and the filament seemed to be endless. She wound it about her head and about her neck and her arms and body until she was covered from head to foot with golden threads and silver spangles. So it is when we take up this one truth of the resurrection of Christ. As we lift it we find that it is attached to a thread of gold, and as we draw up the golden thread we find all other truths and blessings, promises and hopes clinging to it. To believe the resurrection of Christ is indeed to have all the treasures of redemption in our possession.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PAUL ON THE GRACE OF GIVING

Read II Cor. VIII: 1-15

PAUL wanted to stimulate the Corinthian church to give generously, and he told them what other churches had been doing. Giving merely not to be behind other people is not good giving. At the same time we should be desirous of imitating every good thing we see in others, for its own sake, because it is beautiful and like Christ.

The early Christian givers were poor, but they gave liberally, and "the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." They were in trouble, and yet the joy did not die out of their hearts. There is a legend of a golden organ in some ancient monastery which, to save it from robbers, the monks cast into a deep river. In the waters it still continued to send forth sweet music which the floods could not hush. So it is in a true Christian life. The floods do not drown the songs of joy. Another proof of grace in this people to whom Paul refers was that in their deep poverty their liberality still abounded. They were

poor, but their poverty did not prevent them from giving to others who were poorer than themselves.

A story is told of Henry Thornton. An appeal was made to him for missions, and he made out a check for five pounds. Before the ink was dry a telegram was handed to him. He opened it and turned ashy white. He said to the visitor: "I have just received bad news. I have lost thousands of pounds. Give me back the check." The visitor supposed that now the check would be canceled. But Mr. Thornton altered the five pounds to fifty, saying, "God has just taught me that I may not much longer possess my property, and that I must use it well." In time of poverty, if we must retrench in our expenses, we should not begin with the gifts which God asks of us for His cause.

These givers did not say, "I can spare this and not miss it." They gave what it seemed they could not spare—beyond their power. Then they "gave of their own accord." They did not have to be urged and besought to give, but were eager to give, and gave gladly, cheerfully.

But "first they gave their own selves to the Lord." That is where all true consecration must begin. God does not care for our gifts while He has not our hearts. It is much easier to give a little money, or to pay a visit now and then to some poor person, or even to do Christian work of other kinds, than it is to give ourselves to the Lord. But nothing comes of such giving or such

work. We are first of all to present our body a living sacrifice to God, and then God will receive the things we offer and the service we render in His name as part of our consecration.

After telling the Corinthian Christians of the good example of others, Paul spoke in praise of them. He told them, "Ye abound in everything." It is right to praise people when they do well. Hearty, cheerful, sincere commendation is good everywhere. It is good in homes. Parents would better always commend their children when they have done well. Approval encourages and stimulates to better service in the future. It is good for teachers, also, to commend their pupils who are doing what they can. Our Lord commended Mary, saying, "She hath done what she could," while His disciples were condemning her and finding fault. Too many people seem afraid ever to say a kindly word to others about what they have done. When a person dies, there is no lack of commendation; but what does the dead man care for such words? Many a time along his years, when he was weary and overburdened, if the thousandth part of the kindly things spoken by his coffin had been spoken in his ear, he would have been cheered and strengthened by the approval.

Paul wisely used commendation as an introduction to further appeals. "Ye abound in everything," he had said. "See that ye abound in this grace also," he concluded. So giving is a grace. Paul puts it down here in the same cluster with

faith, knowledge, earnestness, love. Many of us make our Christian ideal only a very small fraction of the full image of Christ. We pick out one or two virtues or graces which we think are important, and magnify these, overlooking and leaving out other things which are quite as essential. Liberality is one of the graces of the Holy Spirit which must be found in the complete ideal. A miserly Christian is a misnomer. One who is greedy, grasping, covetous, is not the kind of follower Christ wants. A Jesuit priest testified that while thousands had come to him with confession of all manner of sins, no one had ever come confessing the sin of covetousness. Does "this grace" of giving abound in us, alongside of our faith, love, meekness, gentleness and patience?

Christ is the highest of all examples. He was rich, but He became poor. We know the story of His humiliation. He touched the deepest depths of pain and suffering. Then, the object of it all we know, too—it was that we might be made rich. He lifts up all His people from the depths of sin, shame and curse, to the glories of heaven. In comparison with this great giving, how small our little penny contributions to the cause of Christ or for the relief of the poor!

It is comforting to know that Christ judges gifts by the heart: "For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according as a man hath, not according as he hath not." The widow's mites were of more value than the

largest offerings cast that day into the treasury. They were, in fact, the very smallest offerings; none gave as little as the poor widow. What Jesus meant was that in proportion to her means she had given more than anyone else of all the givers that day. The rich gave out of their abundance and had much left. She gave little out of her extreme poverty, and had nothing left. Christ's eye is always on the treasury, and He rates the contributions, not by their money value, but by their largeness in proportion to the person's ability.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT

Read Gal. V: 16-26

SAINT PAUL states a great principle in spiritual ethics when he says, "Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." He prescribes here the true rule of spiritual culture. The way to cure ourselves of bad tendencies is to cultivate the good. It was on these words that Dr. Chalmers preached his famous sermon, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection." The way to become cured of evil lusts and desires is to get the Spirit of God into one's heart. Where the Spirit is, everything is made to conform to the Spirit's life. The Spirit is love. Love is the fulfilling of the law, and love drives away all evil passion, all bitterness, all hatred. Those who walk by the Spirit will not bite and devour one another, but will help one another ever toward "whatsoever things are true, . . . whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report."

In another place, St. Paul contrasts the Holy Spirit and wine. He says, "Be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit."

Nothing could be farther apart in their nature and effects than wine and the Holy Spirit. Wine is full of riot. That is, it incites to all unruliness, all bitterness, all destructive tendencies. On the other hand, the Spirit is full of love, goodness, kindness, gentleness, and incites to everything that is Christlike and upbuilding. Saint Paul is right when he says that these—that is, the Spirit and the flesh—are “contrary the one to the other.” The way, therefore, to get rid of the fleshly appetites and passions is to become filled with the Spirit, whose influence is always toward the things that are heavenly.

It is a terrible picture of the works of the flesh which St. Paul gives in the following verses. We need not linger upon the words in detail. They describe all forms of impurity, and then include enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, envyings, drunkenness and revelings. It is not saying too much to assert that all of these are in the line of the results of intemperance. Just such things as these intemperance produces wherever it is allowed full sway. Drunkenness is a most debasing and degrading vice, and the others are of the same kind. We should note well what St. Paul says about these works of the flesh: “Of which I forewarn you . . . that they who practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God is not heaven, but the heavenly life in this world, the life over which Christ rules, and which His

reign produces in men's hearts and homes. We see at once that such works do not belong to this heavenly kingdom on the earth. We should never think of calling a man a Christian who indulges in such vices. Then, we may go a step farther and say that it is impossible also for persons who live in such debasing ways to enter into heaven itself. For heaven must first begin in our hearts. We never can enter the gates of pearl unless we have received the heavenly life and Spirit while we stay in this world.

In wonderful contrast with this most pitiful cluster of works of the flesh, we have the virtues and graces which St. Paul enumerates as "the fruit of the Spirit." These are heavenly qualities. In our daily prayer we ask that we may do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven. These verses tell us how the will of God is done in heaven, how people live who have been redeemed and are inside the gates with Christ. It is well for us to study these qualities and characteristics of the kingdom of God in this world, also, as well as in heaven itself. In the Common Version we find the word "temperance" in this shining list. In the Revised Version, however, the word is rendered "self-control." The object of Christian culture is not only to know the will of God concerning our life and character, but also to achieve self-mastery. A drunkard has not self-control. He may say that he can drink or let it alone, as he chooses, but the fact is that he can-

not. Indeed, men often make as an excuse for the debasing habit of drunkenness that they cannot help it. It is a pitiful condition when a human being, made to be a child of God, made to be Christlike in life and character, is unable to control his own passions and desires, and is swept away by every unholy impulse. But it is this condition to which indulgence in any sort of evil tends. We soon form habits for ourselves, and then our habits become our masters. When one has formed the habit of kindness, it becomes second nature, as it were, to be kind. If one has formed the habit of sobriety, of resisting self-indulgence of any kind, this quality also becomes second nature, as we say. It is easy for us, then, to refuse to do evil and choose to do good. He who has attained perfect self-control, and has the complete mastery of himself, need not be afraid of temptation. But how can one get this perfect self-mastery? It is only when Christ lives in us, His Spirit filling our hearts, and producing in us all gentle and kindly desires, all holy impulses, that we really have self-mastery.

A story is told of Henry Drummond and the way he sought to save a friend from the drinking habit. This friend's wife had appealed to Mr. Drummond privately regarding the habit of drinking into which her husband was falling, requesting him to try to save him. One day this friend and Mr. Drummond were riding behind two spirited horses which the friend was driving. As they

were about descending a hill, Mr. Drummond said to him, "What would happen if these horses got out of your control and started to run down the hill?" The man said that they could not help being dashed to pieces. "But," continued Mr. Drummond quietly, "suppose in such a case there sat one beside you who was able to control the horses and save you from the disaster impending. What would you do?" The man was silent for a moment, and then said, "I should put the lines into his hands." It was not hard for Mr. Drummond to pass to the man's own increasing danger, as he was losing the mastery over himself in his indulgence in strong drink. Christ is ever by us and we may always put the lines into His hands if we will

Saint Paul intimates that the self-controlled life is not an easy one. "They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts." Crucifixion suggests that only by nailing the desires of the flesh to the cross can they be put to death. No doubt St. Paul was thinking of the cross of Christ, and meant to intimate that only by entering into Christ's own death, by accepting Him as Saviour and Master, can anyone have the evil lusts of nature put to death. We cannot by any mere child's play overcome the evil tendencies in our lives. It cost Christ a terrible death to redeem the world. It costs any man a terrible crucifixion of self to enter into complete self-mastery and be a Christ-man.

CHAPTER XXX

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

Read Eph. IV: 20-30

THE Christian is to learn Christ. He is to go to school, where the pupils are Christ's followers. The textbook is Christ Himself. What a wonderful Book it is we have to study! How can we study it? We can study the life of Christ as we have it portrayed in the gospel. We can see how He lived, what kind of boy He was, how He treated His mother, how He treated His heavenly Father; what kind of man He was—His character, His disposition, His treatment of all sorts of people; how He endured personal injustice and wrong. It is a wonderful book—just the story of Christ's life. Then, we have also His teachings, which make another book.

In every Christian of us there are two men. Several times Paul speaks of them. When a preacher was preaching before a king, and spoke of the struggle that goes on in the breast between the old man and the new man, the king unconsciously broke out, saying, "I know those two men!" We all know them, if we are trying to live right. The problem of Christian living is to

have the new triumph over the old, more and more completely, till the old is in perfect subjection to the new. Here Paul is speaking of the outer life, and urges all Christians to put away whatever in the old manner of living is not right. When we give ourselves to Christ we ought to put away firmly and forever whatsoever is not in accordance with the commandments of our new Master.

The old cannot be patched up; there must be a new man. Nor will a new outer life do. The evil within will continually work through and soil all without. A whitewashed outer wall will never make a beautiful home while the house within is full of foulness. The only true cleansing is that which begins within and makes the heart right. Hence we are told that we must be "renewed." Not only so, but we must be renewed in the spirit of our mind; that is, at the heart of us. This is just what Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Ye must be born anew." The new life from above must enter into your heart. When the spirit is right, the words, the conduct, the disposition, the whole character will soon be right.

The new man is the Christian man. We see at once, however, that more than reformation is required to make the new man. He is "created," and only God can create. We cannot change our own heart so that we shall have only holy feelings, desires, affections. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. We have a part in it, of course. God does not work on us as a sculptor works on the

marble, hewing it into any shape he desires without any consciousness or acquiescence or will in the stone. We are not blocks of marble; we are immortal beings, and as such all work on us is wrought through our own wills, affections, desires. We are exhorted here to "put on the new man," as if it were altogether our own work. We are to listen to God's voice and seek to obey Him; then as we obey, His Spirit will work in us and produce the change which we could never of ourselves produce. We have here also the pattern after which we are to fashion our new life—"after God." God Himself is the pattern for every Christian life.

The new man will put away falsehood, and will speak truth with his neighbour. There is a story that a distinguished Englishman complained bitterly to Mr. Gladstone of some parish preacher, who in his sermon insisted upon the application of religion to a man's everyday life. This distinguished Englishman thought this was an outrageous proceeding on the clergyman's part. He thought religion should deal only with doctrines and celestial truths. But the Bible insists upon the application of religion to all our words and acts. Lying is a terribly common vice. A writer tells us that the Persians are great liars. Very likely, but they are too far away. No good can possibly come to us from our berating the Persians. But we want to let this teaching come into our own life, and cut close as it will. "Putting

away falsehood, speak ye truth each one with his neighbour." How is it in our speech? Is it always true? Do we never lie? Do we never try to leave a wrong impression on another? Do we never deceive? Lying is very hateful to God, for He is absolute truth, and whatsoever is less than truth His soul abhors. People talk about "white lies." Every lie is black. A lie is a rotten stone built in the wall of life; some day it will crumble and then the foundation will sink away. Anything built on a lie is built on the sand. We ought to train ourselves to absolute truthfulness. People are continually discussing the question whether it can ever be right to tell a lie, whether a falsehood ever can be admissible. Some people say it can, that it may be right to tell lies, for example, to save your life. What do you think about it? It is said by Longfellow:

But if a word could save me, and
 that word
 Were not the truth; nay, if it
 swerved
 A hair's breadth from the truth,
 I would not say it.

But suppose it is another person's life you could save by lying; would it be right then to lie? We have an illustration in the trial in "The Heart of Mid-Lothian," when a sister could not tell a lie on the witness stand, though a lie in one short word would have saved her sister's life. She said

she could not do it. She would give her life's blood to save her sister, but she could not tell a lie even to save her.

The new man will wish to be angry and sin not. But how can one be angry and not sin? Is not all anger sinful? No, God is angry with the wicked. We read, too, that Jesus was sometimes angry. There is, therefore, a sinless anger,—anger against sin. For example, if you see a great, strong, brutal man beating a weak, helpless woman, there must rise up in your soul a burning indignation against the act. That is sinless. But if as a result you lose your temper and fly into a passion and speak unadvisedly, you have sinned. The counsel here is that our righteous indignation against meanness, injustice, cruelty, or wrong of any kind, shall not be permitted to pass into personal bitterness, resentment, or un-governed temper. Here it was that Moses failed. He could not but feel a righteous indignation at the people's unbelief and rebellion, but he sinned when he made it personal and lost his patience and spoke the angry words. The second counsel in this verse is very interesting. We are almost sure, sometime in the pressure of life's contacts, to grow angry. If we do, we are exhorted to get the bitterness out of our heart before the sun goes down. Several reasons for this may be suggested. Anger allowed to smoulder overnight may break out in uncontrollable passion in the morning.

Then, at the close of every day, we ought to be ready to die, as we may never see another morning. We ought not to sleep, therefore, before getting out of our heart everything that is not right. This word was interpreted literally in the ancient times, and the Christians who had had any differences would hasten before the setting of the sun to confess and settle their quarrels. The using of the Lord's Prayer in the evening would seem to compel forgiveness, as we must pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

The new man will not steal. There are a great many ways of stealing besides rifling a cash drawer or picking a pocket. There have been a great many defalcations and embezzlements in recent days, but all of these were but the riper fruit of dishonesty in little ways, running on probably through years. He who steals a pin, steals—is a thief. The boy who picks up a marble that is not his, or a penny, or takes an apple from a tree, or purloins anything, has stolen. He who takes off an envelope a stamp used, but not canceled, and uses it again, is a thief. He who keeps the one cent too much the grocer gives in mistake in making change, is a thief. He who, when the conductor does not take up his fare or ticket, goes out of the car and says nothing, has stolen. There is no other word for it. We must study the matter out for ourselves.

The new man will let no corrupt speech pro-

ceed out of his mouth, but only that which is good. There is very much corrupt speech falling every day from human lips. It is a good rule for boys and men never to tell a story or to say anything in a company of their own which they would not tell or say if their mothers and sisters were present. That was General Grant's rule, and he would not permit any officer or companion to repeat any story in his presence which the person would not say if there were ladies present. The kind of words a Christian may speak is well defined here. They must be good words, that is, pure, kindly, loving, worthy; and they must be words that will edify those who hear—words that will benefit or help others, giving comfort, encouragement, incitement, instruction. Only think what havoc this rule would play with much of the talk that goes on everywhere among Christians! What edifying words did you speak last evening to your friend in that two-hours' talk you had with him? This is a large lesson.

The new man will not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. It scarcely seems possible to us at first that we could give pain to God. Yet the apostles warned the Ephesians against this very thing. Boys know what kind of things in their life grieve their mothers. The Holy Spirit is nearer to all of us than any mother can be, and has a more tender heart. Let us watch our words, our acts, our wishes and feelings, and all the motives of our life, lest we grieve the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the new man in Christ Jesus will be kind, tender-hearted and forgiving. If all these rules and exhortations about kindness and gentleness were followed out in our lives, how the world's happiness would be increased! How loving would our homes be! How delightful would Christian fellowship of all kinds be! The reason urged for forgiving each other is that God has forgiven us. Not only the reason, but also the measure of our forgiveness is indicated in this way; we are to forgive even as God forgives us. Our Lord taught this lesson in the prayer which He gave to His disciples. Every time we ask Him to forgive us we say, "As we forgive." But suppose we keep bitterness in our heart against some one; what is it we ask God to do, and how do we ask Him to forgive? There certainly is a wonderful field for quiet thought in these few verses which we have been studying.

CHAPTER XXXI

A CALL TO CHRISTLIKE LIVING

Read Eph. V: 11-21

THIS chapter is a call to Christlike living. "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children" is its keynote. This means that sin is to be avoided. There are vices that are not even to be named by those who belong to Christ; they are so vile, so loathsome. It is a black list, indeed, that is given in the fifth verse—persons who have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Perhaps we do not draw rigidly enough the line that divides between the things of God and the things of the evil one.

Our passage starts with an exhortation which calls for uncompromising separation from all unholy things. "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." We know what works of darkness are. All sin is of darkness. It shuns the light. It hides away out of sight. It lurks in the shadows. Everything that is contrary to God's commandments is a work of darkness. A Christian is to live a pure and holy life. But more than this—he is not even to have fellowship with the works of darkness; he is not to have

anything to do with them. He lives in a different world, a world whose atmosphere is the love and the holiness of Christ.

The reason for this counsel is frankly given. "The things which are done by them in secret it is a shame even to speak of." It would stain our lips even to tell of these vile things. A disciple of Christ should never allow himself to mention impure things or to think of them. He should never permit his ears to hear unclean stories. Books and newspapers which describe vile resorts and the deeds that are done in them are not fit to be put into the hands of those who are following Christ. They leave a trail of foulness wherever they go. A godly man in his old age said that when he was very young another boy drew him aside one day into a secret place and, opening a book, showed him a vile picture. He glanced at it only for a moment, but it left a blotch on his memory, like a stain on a white garment. All the fifty years he had lived since that hour he had not been able to forget that moment's unholy glance. We cannot keep ourselves too carefully from all fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.

The call to awake implies that the state of sin is a state of moral death. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead." People living without Christ resent the suggestion that they are dead. They claim to be very much alive, indeed. Many of them are full of ambition and are in the

very forefront of the world's leaders. They are active in business. They are high in the ranks of society. They wear badges of honour won in life's arena. They think the meek and lowly people are the dead people—those who do not seem to care for earth's prizes. But as God looks down upon men, those are dead who know not Him, who are unconscious of the spiritual realities about them, who live only for this world. Especially are those dead who are living in sin and for pleasure—dead while they live. The voice of God calls over all such as Christ called at the door of the grave of Lazarus, bidding them awake from the dead.

The next exhortation is a call to walk with eyes wide open. "Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise." The way is full of danger. He is very foolish indeed who goes carelessly through this world. Yet there are many who seem never to have a serious thought about life. They never pay any heed to the temptations that beset them. They have no sense of responsibility. They walk as if blind into all manner of temptations.

Another lesson is the value of opportunity. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Everyone's path is filled with blessings from heaven, but we must watch for them and take them as they come, or we shall miss them altogether. Youth is a time of special opportunities. If it be wasted, it never can be redeemed afterwards.

There is a strong lesson here against drunkenness. "Be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit." A glass of wine may seem very harmless as it sparkles on the table, but what "riot" is in it! This picture of the evil, the shame, the strife, the trouble, the harm, the wine cup contains needs no filling out. A wise oriental shiek mentioned to a young Arab prince, from whom he was about to part, a list of crimes and bade him choose the one which seemed least harmful. The young prince turned in horror from murder, theft, loss of virtue, and told the patriarch that he would choose intemperance. "You have chosen that," said the wise old man, "which will bring you all the rest."

There is always danger in wine. There still are some Christian people who claim the privilege of using it on their tables and on other occasions. But they do not know what they are doing, how unwisely they are acting, what possibilities of harm there are in what seems to them such a pleasant and innocent habit. Our nature craves stimulation, and this, men tell us, they find, when they are jaded and weary, in the wine cup. But St. Paul says that there is a better way,—instead of being drunk with wine, be filled with the Spirit, he says. There is riot in wine, but in the Spirit are all pure, holy and heavenly aspirations. If we would let the divine Spirit into our heart we should have such satisfying, such filling of the life, as would give us deep and blessed joy, the joy in which there is no bitterness.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE CHRISTIAN ARMOUR

Read Eph. VI: 10-20

A GREAT many times in the Bible we are urged to be strong. It is not mere strength of body that is meant. Of course, we should develop our body, and so obey the laws of nature as to keep well and be physically as strong as possible. But Goliath was not God's ideal of manly strength—he was nothing but a big body, with neither intellectual nor spiritual development. The strength the Bible makes so much of is strength of character—firmness of purpose, staunchness of principle, moral strength. The secret of it is faith in Christ. If we are in Him, then all His strength is assured to us to fill our weakness. In one place Paul said he was strongest when he was weakest—that is, he had most room then for Christ, and the most of Christ's strength rested upon him. Henry of Navarre, riding in front of his troops before a battle, said, "You are Frenchmen; yonder is the enemy; I am your king." Then, pointing to the white plume in his helmet, he said, "My children, if your standard falls, rally round the white plume; it will lead you to victory." We

may always be sure of victory if we keep close to Christ, rallying round His cross.

The way to be strong is to "put on the whole armour of God." It is the armour of God because He provides it. Our Captain does not send His soldiers out without furnishing them all the equipment they need. But the soldier must put on the armour. Armour hanging on the wall would not protect a man as he went into battle; he must take it down and put it on. There is armour provided for every Christian soldier. The Bible is a great armoury, and there are in it all manner of weapons of offense and defense. But it is not enough to have these pieces of armour provided in the Bible. We must put them on. The breastplate, the shield and the helmet will be no protection unless we wear them. We must put on the armour ourselves—even Christ will not do it for us. Every soldier must look to his own preparation for warfare.

God's armour is essential because "our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities." Perhaps the air is as full of spirits as the streets are of people. It is well to understand we have enemies we cannot see. There are bad men. Sometimes we see on the street a face which is full of evil, every look revealing wickedness and vileness. There are invisible beings all about us which, if we could see, would terrify us with their loathsomeness. They are demons of Satan's army. If it were not that Christ

had overcome Satan and all his hosts this would be a fearful world to live in. But they are not all evil spirits, demons, that crowd the air—good angels are there, too, guarding Christ's little ones, and they are stronger than demons. Nevertheless, we must not underrate our enemies.

The first item in the armour of God which we must wear is the girdle of truth for our loins. Having first this on, we are to stand in the face of the enemy, ready for the battle. It is not easy to stand in the presence of danger. That we may be able to stand, we should gird up our loins. Again, notice that we must gird our own loins—no one can do it for us. Truth is the girdle, and no one can get truth for us. We must read our Bible for ourselves if we would have its truths enter our heart and become wrought into our character. Truth means reality, sincerity, honesty—no one can be sincere, real, or true, for us. It is a great thing to be true through and through, with truth in the inward parts, in the character, in the soul.

Then, we must put on "the breastplate of righteousness." The breastplate covered the heart. It was made of the strongest material, so that no weapon could pierce it. The Christian's breastplate is righteousness. For one thing, this means Christ's righteousness, which makes us safe in the shadow of His cross. To belong to Christ is to be in holiest protection. When an American citizen was about to be shot

in a Spanish country, his friends threw over him the American flag. This saved his life. So Christ's righteousness protects Christ's own. Another meaning is that righteousness wrought into our character, in right principles and conduct, is a breastplate of protection for the Christian.

The Christian must put on his feet the "preparation of the gospel of peace." The soldier needs strong shoes for rough roads; the Christian needs good shoes, too, for much of the way is hard and steep. There is an old Bible word about shoes of iron, which God promises to give to His pilgrims when they have to walk over sharp roads. There is a beautiful legend of Jesus which says that one day, when He was walking beside the sea, being weary, He took off His sandals to bathe His feet in the pure, cool water. Then He murmured to Himself: "Three years, three years, and then, poor feet, the cruel nails will come and make you bleed! But that blood will lave all weary feet in their painful ways." Christ's feet bled and were hurt on the hard roads and with the nails, that we might have shoes to wear in life's rough paths.

But all this preparation will be useless unless we take up "the shield of faith, wherewith . . . to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one." The ancient shield was large enough to cover all the person, and it was made so that darts striking it would not go through it. Faith

is the Christian's shield. The evil one is always trying to wound us with his darts. These are oftentimes poisoned, or they are fiery—life's temptations are terrible. But if we are truly in Christ, none of these darts can touch us—they will be quenched in the shield we carry.

Then comes the "helmet of salvation." "Salvation will he appoint for walls and bulwarks," said the old prophet. When one is safe in Christ, one is sheltered. No evil can touch us if we are near Christ. "Your life is hid with Christ in God."

Now for the defensive armour. "Take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." All other parts of the armour are for defense. There is something for every portion of the body but the back. This suggests that the Christian soldier should never turn his back to the enemy, for his back is unprotected. The only weapon for active, aggressive fighting is the sword. It is called the sword of the Spirit, because the Spirit gives it its sharpness and power to thrust into men's hearts. Jesus Himself gave us an object lesson for the use of the sword when He met the tempter. He pierced him with texts of Scripture. We should learn to use the sword of the Spirit in the same way. A word of God will drive away the enemies.

Last, prayer is named, not because it is least important, but because it is so important. We

are in danger of forgetting that prayer is a mighty force in the world. We live in a working age. We believe in all manner of earnest activities, in full consecration of our gifts and services to God. This is well, but, after all, there is no such power as the power of prayer. Jesus made a great deal of it in His own life and in His teaching. In The Acts we find prayer everywhere, and in the epistles it is continually commanded. Saint Paul many times pleads with his friends to pray for him, and he exhorts that intercessions shall be made for all men. Here he asks for prayers for all the saints, and then for himself, not that he might be set free from his chains, but that he might have greater power in witnessing for Christ.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CHRIST'S HUMILITY AND EXALTATION

Read Phil. II: 1-11

THE people at Philippi had Paul's happiness in their keeping. They could give pain to his heart or they could give him gladness. We all carry in our hands, in greater or less measure, the happiness of others. Children have power either to make their parents unhappy or to make them glad. A class has their teacher's happiness in their keeping—if they receive the lessons and live them out, they give the teacher deep joy. A few people gave Jesus comfort and gladness by their love and kindness. We never can know what the Bethany family did for His pleasure. But the people in general broke His heart. The scene of Jesus weeping over the city illustrates this. We should always try to give joy to our friends, above all to Christ.

Christians should live together in love. There can be no sadder sight than a quarreling church. With what pity the angels and Jesus must look down upon the unseemly spectacle! One of the last prayers of Jesus for His disciples was that they might be one. One of His last command-

ments to them was that they should love one another as He had loved them—that is, patiently, helpfully, thoughtfully, unselfishly, faithfully, unto the uttermost. Wherever Christians are associated together they should be of the same mind, of the same love, being of one accord.

The secret of being of the same mind, being of one accord, is stated plainly: Do “nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself.” This happy result can be reached only by mutual yielding and giving up. It never can be attained by each one determining always to have his own way. No two can be intimately associated and live in love without cost to both. The secret of wedded happiness is in each counting the other better than himself. Sometimes there is a unity made in marriage by one being “head” and the other surrendering all rights, but that is not an accord of love; it is a unity produced by force—master and slave. The “one mind” comes through the desire of each to serve the other. So it is in all friendships. Friendship is always discipline. Two friends learn to live together in love, only by each thinking of the other and forgetting self.

There are other people, and they live all about us. We are to think of their interests. We cannot step in any direction without coming in contact with some of them. Now we must think of these others and shape our life in reference to

their interests as well as our own. We dare not go on treading as we like, picking up every beautiful thing we see, plucking every flower we find blooming anywhere. Other people have rights, and we must regard them. Besides, there is a law of love which bids us think of others before ourselves—"in honour preferring one another." We should have an interest in the prosperity, the success, and the happiness of all about us.

This is not easy. The only way to fulfill its precepts is to have in us the mind of Christ. Christ's wonderful condescension is the true type of every Christian life. Each in his own sphere should live over again the marvelous story of condescension and humiliation. We are not merely to copy Christ in His acts, but we are to seek to have the mind and the spirit that was in Him. All true life must begin within. A new heart is the starting point. There is little use in a bad man changing his habits or manners while his spirit remains bad. He is the same man still. The only true change is that which begins in the heart. "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me," is the prayer for those who wish to be Christians. If we have the mind that was in Christ we shall have no trouble in getting the Christlike life. But how can we get the mind that was in Christ? Paul tells us everywhere in the words "Christ liveth in me." We may have the very mind of Christ in us, His Spirit being the spirit that animates

us. We have but to open our heart to Him, to be willing to be made like Him, to yield our being to Him. If Christ really rules in us, we have His mind swaying, influencing, directing and controlling us.

The whole story of the condescension of Christ is in the words: "Who, existing in the form of God . . . emptied himself, taking the form of a servant." He was "in the form of God." He was God Himself. This was the starting point. It is this that made the condescension so wonderful. It is no humiliation for a man to be born. There is no special condescension even in the fact that Jesus was born in a stable and in poverty, and lived in a quiet village, working as a carpenter, and then went about the country teaching and doing good deeds, being misunderstood, and at last nailed to a cross. Other good men have been born in poverty, have worked as mechanics, have been persecuted, and have died as martyrs. If Jesus is only a man, there is no great condescension in all this. But when we look up and see Him in His divine glory, the eternal Son of God, and then think of what He did, we see the condescension.

Queen Victoria, in her summer rambles in Scotland many years since, went into the homes of the poorest people and sat down and talked with them. In one place she found a poor, crippled, old woman, and gave her money. She read a chapter of the Bible to a sick man, and then

prayed by his bedside. If some female missionary had done these things, no one would have talked about condescension, but when the good queen did them all the world was touched. So, while we read the gospel story we must remember who it was that was born in a stable, cradled in a manger, did deeds of mercy in the land, and died on the cross. Then we shall understand the mind that was in Christ Jesus.

When we recall, further, the object of this condescension, why He who was in the form of God took on Him "the form of a servant" among men—that it was to lift up the fallen sons of men and make them sons of God, then we get another thought of what it is to have this mind in us. It is to have love for others, love for the unlovely, a love strong enough to lead us to make the greatest sacrifices in order to do them good, to save them. If we would love as Christ loved, we must be ready to make the condescension and sacrifice He made.

Christ "humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death." We should think of Jesus always as God's ideal man. How different His life from that of most men! They have their worldly ambitions. They want to make a name, to get rich, or to climb to power. Jesus was here to serve, to be a blessing to the world, to do good, to live out a life of love. He so devoted Himself to this great purpose that He literally gave His life, going to a cross in love for the world.

This is the true ideal of human life. We are to hold all that we have and all that we are at the service of Christ for our fellow men.

But Christ was exalted after His humiliation. The exaltation was because of the humiliation. Service always has its reward. Those who empty out their life here will find it again. No doubt the disciples of Jesus thought He had made a fearful mistake in giving up His life as He did. We can easily imagine them, during the days that the Master lay in the grave, saying one to another: "This is terrible—such a life to end on a cross! He was so young, too! If only He had been more prudent, and had thought of Himself a little more, He would not have met this fearful death. What a waste of precious life! What a blessing He would have been to the world if only He had lived to a ripe old age!" But we know that no mistake was made, that His life was not wasted.

In one of the old prophets we read of the Messiah, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told that for the joy set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame. Jesus knew that He was not wasting His life, but that glory would come out of His sacrifice, not only for Himself, but for His people. He humbled Himself to be a servant and to die on a cross, but He went from the cross to the throne of the universe.

The law of life is the same in its application to Christ's followers. Those who give themselves up to service and sacrifice in doing the Master's work are preparing for themselves high places in glory. There is a legend of one who, when given money by a king for the building of a great palace, finding the people in sore need, spent the money in buying food for them. When the king came and found no palace he was very angry, and, sending for the builder, demanded an explanation. He then cast the builder into prison, saying, "Tomorrow thou shalt die, for thou hast been unfaithful." But that night the king, in a dream, saw a wonderful palace, surpassing all of earth's most splendid buildings. "What building is that?" he asked. "The Temple of Merciful Deeds, built for thee by the Great Architect." Then the king understood that the spending of his money in service of love had erected for him inside the heavenly gates a palace of immortal beauty. Although only a legend, its teaching is true. In a life of sacrifice and service in this world, in Christ's name, we are laying up treasures in heaven which some day we shall have.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Read Col. III: 1-15

PAUL said to the Colossians what to many must have seemed surprising: "If then ye were raised together with Christ." How could these Colossian Christians have been raised with Christ? Of course, it was a spiritual rising. The people really had been in graves, and Jesus had called them up, and they were now living a new spiritual life. Everyone who truly believes on Christ receives the Holy Spirit, comes out of his grave, and walks with Christ among the living.

Those who have risen with Christ should "seek the things that are above, where Christ is." What things? We are taught to pray that the Father's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. That is bringing heaven down to earth. The things which are above are holiness, goodness, truth, peace, love. The lessons the Bible teaches us are all of things above, the truths and principles of God's kingdom. These are the things which are unseen and yet are eternal. We are to seek to live here as we would live if we were really in heaven.

More, they must set their mind on the things that are above. Where the mind is thither the life is tending. Where the thoughts go the soul is climbing. If we think continually of low, unworthy things, our whole being will gravitate downward. But if we train our thoughts to fly away like eagles into the deep blue sky, our life will be lifted upward. To "hitch one's wagon to a star," using Emerson's phrase, may mean many beautiful things. It means, at least, to attach oneself to something heavenly, that one's life may be borne irresistibly upward.

We should form the habit of setting our thoughts on things above. It is said that many years ago, when a great suspension bridge was to be built over a wide river, a kite was sent over, carrying a fine wire across the chasm. It was not hard then to get a second and a third wire over also, and by and by the tiny thread of steel had become a great bridge of twisted strands, on which thousands of feet crossed over. So we may train our thoughts to fly across the abyss to heaven—first one thought, then another and another, until we have built a bridge for ourselves from earth to heaven. But we must begin and train our thoughts thus to fly, for nothing but such a habit will bring to us the blessing.

The Christian life is secret, and no one can see its workings: it is hid with Christ in God. You pray and grace comes into your heart. But no one sees it coming. You lean on God in your

trust, and your strength is renewed, but the process no one can perceive. Christ is the Friend whom having not seen we love, in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable.

The Christian's life is hidden also because its real beauty is not visible to the world's eyes. The artist keeps his picture veiled while he works upon it. At last he removes the veil, and men see the loveliness which his hands have been fashioning in secret. So God works in our life, in joy and sorrow, in His providence, and by His Word and Spirit. The beauty He is producing human eyes see not. "What I do thou knowest not now," He says, "but thou shalt understand hereafter." By and by, when the work is finished, men and angels shall see the marvelous beauty of Christ glowing in even the lowliest, plainest life.

A life hidden with Christ calls for the utter destruction of certain evils. It is a shameful list which St. Paul names. It makes us ashamed to think that such qualities may belong to us or may nest in our heart. Who would have thought that all these vile things are in anyone who wears the human form? Yet, where is the new life in which are not found many of these ugly things? Our hearts are naturally cages of unclean birds. What does St. Paul tell us we should do with these unholy things? He says we are to mortify them—that is, make them dead. When we find in ourselves any evil thing, we should see that it is put

to death. It is not right for it to live. Christ came to destroy the works of the Devil, and uncompromising war should be waged against all evil. He who cherishes any uncleanness in himself is nursing a viper which will sting him to death by and by.

This part of the chapter is not for the good people who are now studying it—is it? Look at the words honestly. “Anger.” Do you never get angry? Does your temper never get the mastery of you? Do you never fume with rage, even if you do not let people know of it? “Malice.” Do you never cherish a grudge, never keep bitterness against another in your heart? “Railing.” Do you never spit out spiteful things about another who is absent? Do you never rail at anyone? “Shameful speaking.” That means speaking of which we ought not to be ashamed of, which we would be ashamed of before our mother or some pure-minded friend. Do you never utter a word you would be ashamed to have Christ hear? “Lie not.” One may lie by a look, or a wink, or by keeping silence. Robert E. Speer tells of asking a Sunday school once what different kinds of sin there are. One little boy answered, “Good sins and bad sins, sir.” Then he asked what kind of sins bad sins are. Promptly the boy answered, “Lies.”

These are a few of the things which we are to put away if we have risen with Christ. It is not enough to put away the evil things of the old

life. The house cannot be left empty. If it is, the former bad tenants will soon be back again, bringing with them still more wicked companions, and the last state will be worse than the first. "To replace is to conquer." The only sure saving of our life comes through expelling sin from it and then getting Christ into it.

These are beautiful qualities which we are exhorted to put on. They all are fragments of the image of God. They each belong in the life and character of Jesus Christ. We must notice how large a place love holds among them. Indeed, all of these qualities are phases of love. The compassionate heart comes first—for the heart makes the life. A kindly heart fills the life with gentle things. Kindness has been called the small coin of love. It is always scattering benedictions. "Lowliness" is often caricatured, for there are many who try to be humble. But it cannot be put on consciously or by any effort. It must be in the heart and must work out in the life. "Meekness" is patience under insult. "Longsuffering" is enduring without complaining, keeping sweet whatever the circumstances may be. "Forbearing one another" is the power of getting along with people who are not easy to live with, getting along without being irritated, fretted and made ugly in spirit by their unreasonableness. Then comes love, which is over all, above all, in all. It is this which makes the character complete. If we truly get love into our life, all the rest will follow.

As the true result of this transformation, the peace of Christ will rule in the heart. Peace is quietness in the midst of confusion. It is gentleness in the midst of hate. It is patience in the midst of suffering and trial. It is self-mastery—rather it is Christ-mastery. We have but to think what Christ's peace was, and then to remember that it is this, His own peace, which He promises to give to us. If this blessed peace rule in our hearts, feelings, affections and desires, we shall want nothing more.

CHAPTER XXXV

PAUL'S COUNSEL TO THE THESSALONIANS

Read I Thess. V: 14-28

THE Bible touches life at every point. While its great principles cover all moral acts in a general way, it descends to particulars in many cases, giving special instructions of great value. The passage noted above contains golden counsels for the common days and for the common experiences of life.

There is a duty of warning others. We may not always speak words of commendation and approval. When persons are living in a disorderly way, that is, not living in harmony with the divine laws, they are to be admonished. We must make sure, however, that we do this in the spirit of Christ, in love, in order to help and save those we admonish. No duty requires more wisdom and more grace than that of telling others of their faults.

Then, we should always be encouragers, for there are many timid, faint-hearted people who continually need to be lifted up and helped onward. We should never be discouragers. There are those, too, who are weak and need the strength

and support which we can give them. The strong should help the weak. We should bear each other's burdens. We are also to be long-suffering to all, no matter how they may treat us. This is one of the great lessons which Jesus taught in His own life—to bear sweetly and patiently with those who are unkind and injurious. It is not easy, but we are not Christians if we are not trying to live after this law of love.

The teaching of Christ also requires us to render always good for evil, never evil for evil. This is a very practical counsel, and it is never easy to follow it. Yet it is an inseparable part of all Christian life. If one contends for the heroic in Christian character, nothing could be more heroic than this. To return love for hate, kindness for injury, is far braver than to be angry and resentful, demanding satisfaction. We should always follow that which is good; that is, we should think ever of the good of others and in all things make this our aim for them. Anything that would injure or harm another is absolutely unchristian.

Joy is never to be left out of any scheme of Christian life. We are to rejoice, not now and then only, but always. Even our sorrows should not hush the songs in our hearts. This element of joy can be only in the life in which Christ lives and rules. There is a difference in people in the matter of joyousness, but true Christian joy is not that which the world gives, nor that which

nature inspires, but the joy which comes from the heart of God and which nothing ever can overcome or destroy.

Prayer is another essential element in every true Christian life. Not to pray is not to live at all as a Christian, for prayer is "the Christian's vital breath." The exhortation to pray without ceasing may seem a strange one. It means, however, that our communion with God never need be broken, never should be broken. We cannot always be on our knees; for we have work to do, duties to perform, which we may not neglect, and which are just as sacred as praying. But we may pray at our work, by keeping always close to Christ, so that anywhere, any moment, we can look up into His face and speak to Him and get an answer.

Thanksgiving should never be wanting in a Christian life. It is not enough to observe one day in the year for thanksgiving, although it is a very beautiful thing to do. Nor is it enough to put a sentence of thanksgiving into our daily prayers, although this also is proper. It is the grateful spirit that pleases God, the spirit that is always full of praise. There should be a note of thanksgiving running through all our life. Too many of us go to God only with requests, with our burdens, our worries, our troubles; while we but rarely go to Him with any word of thanks. We are not to be thankful only for our prosperities and for the pleasant and agreeable things that

come into our days,—we are to be thankful, too, for the things that appear to us as adversities. “In everything give thanks.” That means in the sad days as well as in the glad days, when clouds are in the sky, as well as when the sunshine is pouring everywhere. It is specially said here that this is the will of God for us. This is the way God wants us to live—always giving thanks. A rabbinical teaching says that the highest angel in heaven is the angel of praise. The Christliest note is one that is always keyed to the note of praise and thanksgiving.

It is the glory of our Christian life that God lives in it. Saint Paul said, “Christ liveth in me.” A fire burns in our hearts which is fed from heaven. We live at our best only when we let this flame burn brightly in us. We are exhorted here not to quench the Spirit. Fire is quenched by pouring water upon it, or by covering it up so as to exclude the air. The Spirit may be quenched in us by sin, by worldliness, by evil thoughts, by bad passions, by resistance. To quench this heavenly flame is to put out the light of life, leaving the darkness of death within us. “Quench not the Spirit.”

We are also exhorted not to despise prophesyings. Prophecyings, in a general way, are divine teachings, the message of God to us. The Bible is a book of prophesyings. All heavenly instructions, counsels, warnings, from whatever source, may in a sense be called prophesyings.

We should keep our minds and hearts always wide open to receive the words of God and to welcome all divine influences and impressions and inspirations, whether they are spoken by the Spirit of God or by a human friend. "Speak, Jehovah; for thy servant heareth," is the true attitude of every believing heart toward the truth, however it is spoken.

Not all voices, however, that speak in this world are divine voices. Not all words that fall upon our ears are words from heaven. We should prove all things to see whether they are of God or not. Then we should hold fast only "that which is good." A traditional saying of Jesus, not contained in the gospel, is, "Show yourselves approved money changers." That is, judge carefully between genuine and counterfeit coins. Put to the test of truth all counsels that are given to you. Not all such counsels are from God. It is said by our Master, of the sheep, that "a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." We should make sure that the voice which we hear is our Master's own voice, is the voice of one who counsels us wisely, and not the voice of a stranger speaking to us in unheavenly words to draw us away from the truth.

We are accustomed to think of some things as only slightly evil, while others are very black in their sinfulness. Some persons appear to think

that if we keep ourselves from the worst kind of wrongdoing we need not be so watchful against the minor forms of evil. They will not lie, nor steal, nor swear, nor do other things which would brand them in the eyes of the community as wicked. But meanwhile they are ungentle, unkind, selfish, bad tempered, loving the world, neglecting God's work in attending to their own affairs. But St. Paul's exhortation is, "Abstain from every form of evil." We are not to pick out certain things and condemn these alone as evil, abstaining from them, meanwhile indulging in pet vices and sinful habits of our own. Whatever is wrong in even the slightest way is to be abstained from. There really are no little sins, no white lies, no slight deviations from right and purity. Even evil thoughts, our Master says, break the commandments.

The prayer for consecration in the twenty-third verse is very comprehensive. It is that we may be sanctified, that is, set apart wholly for God and God's use. We belong to God, for He has bought us with a price, and we should make ourselves altogether God's by keeping ourselves separate from sin and from the world. It is a prayer that our whole being, body, soul and spirit, shall be kept pure and holy, amid all the world's evil; preserved entire, without blame, until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It may seem impossible for anyone to realize

this high ideal of living. It is impossible for us thus to keep ourselves. But the words which follow tell us how it becomes possible. "Faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do it." We are safe in this world, therefore, when God keeps us, when His sheltering, protecting love enfolds us.

CHAPTER XXXVI

PAUL'S CHARGE TO TIMOTHY

Read II Tim. III:14 to IV:5

THIS letter to Timothy, the last product of Paul's pen, was written from the prison at Rome. In his desire to encourage the young evangelist, he gave him much counsel—counsel which is as valuable for the Christian to-day as it was for Timothy.

Paul urged Timothy, "Abide thou in the things which thou hast learned." That is what we should always do with the good things we have learned—abide in them, keep them in our hearts, then live them out. A great many people know a great deal more truth than they put into practice. The true test of knowing is doing. We really know only what we get into our experience and conduct. A young man said to his pastor at the close of a year that he had gone through the Bible five times that year. His pastor asked him quietly, "How often has the Bible gone through you this year?"

Paul reminded Timothy of his home training: "From a babe thou hast known the sacred writings." It is a great privilege to grow up in

the atmosphere of Bible teaching, to have for one's teacher a godly mother, who whispers into her child's ear the things of God's love, the counsels of heavenly wisdom. Such lessons affect the life down to its close. Those who have had such mothers should never cease to be thankful for them.

The reason for valuing the Scriptures is that they are able to make the reader wise unto salvation. There are different kinds of wisdom. A man may know a great deal of science, literature, philosophy, and be very wise in this world's matters, and yet not have found salvation. It is very clear that that is not the true wisdom which fails to show men the way of eternal life. The true wisdom is found in the Word of God, which reveals to us our need, and then tells us of God and of Jesus Christ, and of the way to be saved. This Book may not answer questions about geology, astronomy, cosmogony and history, but it does answer all questions about duty, about God, about the way of life. Some one tells of hearing a sermon in which he said the distinguished clergyman told him a great deal about the way from Jerusalem to Jericho, but did not tell him anything about the way from earth to heaven.

Paul has no uncertain word about the inspiration of the Scriptures: "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable." The Bible is the Word of God. Holy men wrote it as they

were moved by the Holy Spirit. There are other good books in the world, but none like the Word of God. We ought to read the Bible reverently, since God speaks to us in its pages. We ought to believe it, for His Word must be absolutely true. We should obey it, since what God commands must be right. We may yield our whole life to its influence, to be guided and fashioned by it. It is profitable for teaching; that is, for instruction in all matters that concern life. It is profitable for reproof. It shows us our sins, our follies, our mistakes. It is profitable for correction—to bring us back from wrong ways to right ways. It is profitable for instruction. It leads us into all true and beautiful living.

The purpose of the Bible is to make complete men of us. If we follow it in everything it will show us the right way, it will reveal to us a perfect ideal of character, it will inspire us to make the best of life.

Living according to God's Word, we must ever be conscious that we are living in God's sight. Life is very serious. We often say it will be a solemn thing to stand before God in judgment. Our common days are judgment days. We should learn to do everything as in the sight of God. This makes every act and word solemn. We should never leave God out of our life, nor do anything otherwise than we would do it if we saw the divine eye looking down upon us.

The word Timothy had received he was to

give to others. "Preach the word," Paul said to him. He was not preaching with the burning ardour which should characterize a minister of Jesus Christ. Paul sought to stir him up to do better work. Many of us need this lesson. We are living, some of us, only half-heartedly, probably the saintliest of us below our best. From this Roman prison comes the call to every young Christian to rouse his best energies in behalf of Christ.

That a minister's work may not be all soft words, Paul indicated when he told Timothy that he must be ready to "reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering." The minister is to watch his flock with a shepherd's care. If he sees any of them going astray, he is not to be indifferent, but must seek to save them. We need great wisdom, however, when we speak to others of their faults or mistakes, lest by our want of tact we only drive them further away. Words of reproof should always be spoken in tender love and unwearying patience.

One reason for the faithfulness in preaching is that there are people who, having "itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts." We often hear about the serious responsibility of the preacher, but we should think also of the responsibility of the hearer. Of course, the teacher should teach well. There is no excuse for being prosy or dull in presenting the glorious truths of Christianity. Paul urges Tim-

othy to do his part earnestly for the very reason that the people would be apt to turn away to fables instead of listening to the gospel. He must preach the old gospel in such a way that the people will be compelled to listen.

CHAPTER XXXVII

SOBER LIVING

Read Titus II

HERE we have special words of exhortation addressed to five different classes of persons—old men, aged women, young women, young men and servants. Titus was exhorted to think carefully what he should speak as a minister, so that his words should be fitting. It is serious work to teach others. Saint Paul exhorts another young preacher to handle aright the word of truth. Wrong direction has sent many a life to destruction. Those who speak for God must know well the words of God.

There is a word here for old men. The preacher was to exhort them to be temperate, grave, sober-minded, sound in faith, in love, in patience. Temperance is commended in every part of the Bible. Drunkenness is unworthy any being wearing God's image. The old men ought to set the example to the younger. But temperance in the Bible includes all the life, the appetites, the feelings, pleasures, and it means self-control.

Old men are also to be grave, preserving dig-

nity and propriety in all their conduct. They should be sober-minded, serious, thoughtful, realizing the meaning of life. We often hear about being sound in the faith. This is well. But St. Paul exhorts these older men to be sound in love and patience as well as in faith.

The second word is to aged women. They are exhorted to be reverent in demeanour and behaviour. It is not fitting to see an old woman foolish and frivolous in her conduct. She should watch her acts and words and bearing, for younger women look to the older for example. Aged women should not be slanderers, says St. Paul. Perhaps it was then as it is now, that there was too much gossip in certain companies of women. Gossip borders perilously close all the time to slander. It is a fearful thing to start or to repeat a bad story about another person. Christian women should never do it. Aged women are urged also not to become slaves to wine. They are exhorted to be teachers of that which is good. Very beautiful is a saintly old woman who has learned her lessons well and is living sweetly. She has a wide and helpful influence wherever she goes.

The young women have their word, too. Their mothers and older women are to be their teachers, training them to be sober. Over and over again this word sober is repeated in this passage. It has a much wider meaning than the sobriety which comes from abstinence from strong drink, though

this is properly included, too. Life is not merely a bit of fun from the cradle to the grave. We are in the world to do something of God's work. We are moving toward the bar of God, where we must give account of every act, and toward eternity, where we shall forever eat the fruits of the trees we plant now and here. We should live soberly, taking hold of life with earnestness, striving with all our might to do God's will.

Young women are also to love their husbands. Certainly—if not, they should never have married them. They should love their children, too, and be sober-minded, watchful of their conduct. They should be workers at home. This is a very suggestive bit of teaching. Home is the young wife's realm, and she is to do her sweetest and best work there. It is not enough for her to be active and earnest in societies outside; if she neglects her own home duties she has disappointed God. She should be a good housekeeper and a good homemaker, kind, loving, thoughtful, earnest, and filled with the Christly spirit.

The apostle has earnest words also for young men. They, too, are to be sober-minded. They should put away childish frivolities, and not trifle. Paul was writing here to a young man, and he exhorts him to be a pattern to other young men. There are several things in which this young minister was to be an example. One was in good works. We are to be interpreters of Christ, and His life was full of good works. He was also

to be grave—not long-faced, solemn-visaged, but remembering always that he was living in God's presence and must give account for all his life. He was also to watch his speech. This is important. Some young men are careless in their talk. They speak rashly, foolishly, sometimes saying false words, sometimes staining their own lips and the souls of those who hear them with indecent stories or allusions. This young man was to live so that those who disbelieved Christianity should be ashamed when they saw how beautifully, how unselfishly, how purely, and helpfully he lived. This is a noble ideal for life—that the enemies of Christ shall be compelled into silence, "having no evil thing to say of us."

There is a word also for servants. There were slaves in those days—many Christians were in bonds among the Romans. Saint Paul tells the young minister what to say to them. They are quietly to accept their bondage, not rebelling against their masters, but cheerfully obeying them. Christ always counsels His followers to submission, even when they are unjustly treated. The starling in a cage flies against the wires and tries to get out. All it does, however, is to batter and bruise its own wings and breast. It does not get out. The canary, far more wisely, when put into a cage, flies up on a perch and sings, filling its cage with song. We may take a lesson from the birds.

Servants were also exhorted to do what would

please their master, obeying, not complaining, not talking back to argue the case—

“Theirs not to reason why.”

Servants are not to purloin, but are always to be faithful and honest. In other epistles St. Paul encourages servants to do their best always, regardless of the character of their master, because it is Christ they are really serving; they should do their work as for Him, even if their human master is hard, unjust, unreasonable. Christian slaves also were to adorn the doctrine of God in all things. That is, they were to live so beautifully that by their conduct they should put honour on the names they represented.

While these counsels were primarily for slaves, they are applicable to all who are under others as servants or employees. The great majority of us have to work under a master or superintendent. Not always is this master gentle, patient, or lenient; sometimes he is unjust, harsh, severe, exacting and oppressive. But the character of the master does not modify the duty of the servant. We must keep sweet and must be faithful and gentle with the worst overseer. Other people's sin does not excuse sin in us.

In the twelfth verse there is a great teaching for all of us who bear the name of Christ. There are some things we are to condemn, that is, give up, put out of our life—ungodliness and worldly lust. There is something we are to do—live

soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. It is not enough to intend to be saintly when we get to heaven; we are to be saintly in this present evil world.

The closing words tell us what the motive for a Christian life should be—the blessed hope and appearing of Jesus Christ. He has given Himself for us—this reminds us of the cross. Then, He is coming again—this is a glorious hope, which cheers all believers in this world. Life may be hard here, with struggle, self-denial, toil and loss, but we are to live for that day when Christ will come again, when all earth's iniquities shall be made right.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

Read Heb. IX

THE Epistle to the Hebrews was written to those who felt that in giving up Judaism for Christianity they had lost much that was dear to them. The writer showed them that while the outward form was gone, Christianity had given them instead realities which were incalculably better and more glorious than what they had parted with. In this passage Hebrew Christians are shown that in place of the human priesthood, they had now as their priest Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.

In other parts of this epistle we have other words about Jesus as High Priest. The Jewish priest was chosen by God, not self-appointed. Christ did not glorify Himself to be made a high priest, but was called of God for the holy honour. Again, the human priest was to be a man of kindly sympathies, patient and forbearing, one who could bear gently with the ignorant and erring. Christ was boundless in His capacity for compassion. He knows human life, not through His divine knowledge merely, but because as man He had

tried all life. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, without yielding, always victorious. He offered prayers with strong crying and tears. Though the Son of God, He yet learned obedience by the things which He suffered. Thus He was glorified to be our Priest.

A priest is one who stands between us and God. The Jewish priest was only a type of the divine. No man can truly go to God for us or come to us from God. An ancient philosopher, of peculiar character, received a visit from Alexander the Great. The emperor stood in the doorway of the hovel in which Diogenes lived and asked if there was anything Alexander the king could do for him. The philosopher replied, "Yes, there is one thing—you can stand out of my light." One thing which our friends can do for us is to keep out from between us and the Sun, from between us and God. We need no man to be our priest. Indeed, no one can reveal God to us save as he has the mind of Christ and thus becomes an interpreter of the divine nature and the divine love and grace. Yet everyone does really need a priest—in our sinfulness we cannot go to God, neither can God come to us, excepting through a mediator. Christ came to bring God down close to us, into intimate, personal relations with us. He was indeed God Himself, revealing in a human life the grace and beauty, the love and mercy of God. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," He said. In no other way can

we see or know God but in Jesus Christ. Then, in no other way can we come to God. Jesus said, "I am the way . . . no one cometh unto the Father, but by me." In Christ we can get nearer to God than we can to any friend. No Jewish priest was ever to his people what Christ is to all His friends as their High Priest. Human priests, the holiest and best, were full of faults and sins, and could be but most imperfect revealers of God to men. But Christ is perfect, holy, without fault or blemish.

In the passage before us we have other points of superiority in the priesthood of Christ.

1. He was a High Priest of good things to come. The old dispensation was but the dim dawn of the glorious day of the new. The blessings of the gospel are infinitely greater than were the blessings of Judaism. Of these good things Christ was the High Priest. He came to bring them to us.

2. Christ ministered as Priest in a greater and more glorious tabernacle. It was only a tent, first, and afterwards a temple, in which the Jewish priests ministered, a tabernacle made with hands, earthly and temporal. But Christ passed into the true Holy Place, that is, into heaven itself. The Jewish priest stood in a little inner room, interceding before a mercy seat of gold; Christ stands in the midst of the divine glory, in the immediate presence of God Himself.

3. The Jewish priest brought the blood of

goats and calves when he appeared before God. These offerings had their use. They were pictures of the offering which Jesus afterwards made. But they had no efficacy in themselves. "For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." But Christ entered in through His own blood into the Holy Place. This offering had infinite efficacy because it was the blood of the Son of God. This is made very clear in the words we are studying. "For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" The blood of animals had no power to purify a life, but the blood of Christ can make clean the most defiled conscience. That is, the redemption of Christ purifies the life, changes it, transforms it, makes it holy. We must not think that all Christ does for us is to deliver us from the penalty of sin, setting us free from condemnation. This would not be salvation so long as the life continued sinful. He saves us from our sins in the true and full sense, putting His Spirit into our hearts as a new motive principle, to displace and replace the old evil heart. Thus we are saved from the love of sinning.

4. The Jewish priest made intercession for the people in the Holy of holies. But he him-

self was a sinner and had first to make intercession for himself. Christ, our High Priest, makes intercession, too. He made His offering on the cross, and then passed into heaven and stands before God, making continual intercession for us.

We cannot understand all that this intercession means. We know that Christ has the interests of all His people in His heart and in His hands. He does not forget any of us, nor is He ever ignorant of our need or our danger. He makes our interests His own, and speaks to His Father for us. All authority is His, in heaven and on earth, and we need never fear that anything can go wrong with us while He is thinking of us and caring for us.

In some mysterious way He presents His own blood before the face of God as a plea for us. We are sinners, but He died for us. In one place He is called our Advocate, appearing before God to look after our case, as a trusted earthly advocate stands for his client before a court of justice.

5. The superiority of Christ's priesthood is shown further in the fact that His offering of Himself once was enough. The Jewish high priests made atonement yearly, entering into the Holy of holies with blood. But Christ made only one sacrifice, and this sufficed for the eternal redemption of all who believe on Him. "Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high

priest entereth into the holy place year by year with blood not his own; else must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." We must note that by the blood of Christ is meant the giving of His life in love's sacrifice. "The blood is the life." Christ poured out His life, giving all, giving Himself, to redeem us.

6. Christ's work as our High Priest will go on until His redeemed ones are all brought home to glory. "So Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation." The meaning of this is that Christ's work for His people is going on now in heaven, and will continue until He comes again, not then as Saviour bearing His people's sin, but bringing full salvation and eternal glory.

CHAPTER XXXIX

HEROES OF FAITH

Read Heb. XI

A GREAT deal is said in the Bible about faith. We live by faith when we believe in things we cannot see and then act as if the things were true. That is what the first verse teaches us. "Faith is assurance of things hoped for." We hope that God loves us. If we become so assured of this that we take the hope into our hearts as a fact, that is faith. If we really believe that God loves us, the truth means a great deal to us. We are not then afraid of God—He is our Friend. We have many hard things to endure—losses, sorrows, sufferings, disappointments—but if we really believe that God loves us, we shall not be greatly disturbed by such experiences. If we actually believe that Christ rose from the dead, we know that we have a living Saviour who is our Friend, our Companion, our Helper, our Guide.

Faith is "a conviction of things not seen." That is, it makes us as sure of the unseen things in which we believe as if they were visible to our natural eyes. Columbus believed there was a land,

a continent, another country, beyond the sea, and the belief became such a strong conviction that he pushed out upon the sea to find the land he believed in, and sailed on till he found it. The Bible tells us of a world beyond the earth, our Father's house, home, eternal life. We cannot see it. But if we have faith, this heavenly country becomes as real to us as England is to the tourist who puts out upon the sea this month to cross the ocean to Liverpool.

“Therein the elders had witness borne to them.” The men who have won an honourable record in the past have won it through faith. People who have not faith never make much of their lives. It is so even on lower planes. We can have friends only through faith. We cannot always watch people to see if they are true to us. We cannot keep them always in our sight. When they are away from us we cannot have spies following them to see if they are friendly to us. Then, we cannot see in people the things we want in our friends—truth, goodness, gentleness, unselfishness, faithfulness, nobleness. We can see these qualities only by faith. So we can never have friends excepting by faith. All lofty attainments and achievements of every kind are reached only by faith. All true heroes are heroes of faith.

“By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God.” Nobody saw God making the worlds. Only by faith do we

know how they came into being. The Bible tells us all we know about this. We turn back to Genesis and we have a vision of a period where there was nothing but God. "In the beginning God." Then we have a vision of the earth as chaos—"waste and void," and the Spirit of God brooding over it in love as the future home of God's children. Then we have the story of creation, completed at last in man made in God's image. Whatever theory of the manner of order of creation we may accept, we know at least by faith that "the worlds have been framed by the word of God."

"By faith Abraham, being tried, offered up Isaac." Abraham's whole life from his call was a life of faith, but the supreme test came when he was bidden to give up his son, his only son. He raised no questions. It was not his business to ask why. It was God who had given the promise which centered in Isaac, and it was God who now sent Abraham to Mount Moriah to offer Isaac on the altar. He could not understand, but God understood, and that was enough; Abraham's only duty was to obey. That was faith. He accounted that God was able to raise up Isaac from the dead. Nothing that God commands us to do ever can bring harm or real loss to us. His commandments never annul or cancel His purposes or clash with them. No painful and costly sacrifice He ever demands can possibly interfere with God's covenant of love.

“By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph.” The faith of Jacob, shown in this incident, was in the way he crossed his hands when he blessed these boys. Joseph heard that the old man, his father, was sick, and he took his sons to have the grandfather’s blessing upon them before he died. Jacob loved Joseph, and he loved Joseph’s sons and adopted them, taking them in among his own sons, kissing and embracing them, then stretching out his thin, trembling hands and laying them on the heads of the lads, while he uttered this beautiful benediction upon them: “The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God who hath fed me all my life long unto this day, the angel who hath redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them.” Joseph had set the boys before his blind father, so that his right hand would rest on the elder and his left on the younger. But Jacob crossed his hands so that the right lay on the head of the younger, “guiding his hands wittingly.” Joseph tried to correct the old man’s mistake, but Jacob knew what he was doing. Ephraim, the younger, should be greater.

“By faith Joseph, when his end was nigh, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.” We are looking for faith in our study of these old-time stories. Joseph took an oath of his brothers that they should not bury him in

Egypt. "God will surely visit you, . . . and ye shall carry up my bones from hence." That was faith. Egypt had been the place of his glory, but he was not an Egyptian; he was a patriotic Israelite. He believed God's promise that He would lead His people to their own land, and he left it in his will that then his body should be carried up and buried among his people.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months . . . when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." The first example of faith was in his parents. They were led to believe that their boy was to be the deliverer of his people, and so they determined that his life should be spared. It is a beautiful story that tells of the way they preserved him and secured his bringing up, first, under his mother's care that he might be a loyal Israelite, and then under the princess of Egypt, that he might have the best education the world of that day could give him, so as to be ready to be the leader and lawgiver of his nation. The other example of faith was in Moses himself, who, when he came to know and understand the condition of his people, and their wrongs, renounced Egypt with its honours and wealth, that he might devote himself to the interests of his people. It was a tremendous cost and sacrifice that Moses made cause with his people. But faith never counts the cost. It sees the good before it and gives up everything to attain it.

“He endured, as seeing him who is invisible.” Here we have the secret of the endurance of Moses in all his noble life. He did not see God—no one ever saw God, who is invisible. But his faith made God as real to him as if he had actually seen Him. If we had the faith we might have and should have, Christ’s presence, which is promised to us continually, would be as real to us as it was to His first disciples when they were with Him in Galilee. Then we should be strong, invincible, victorious. Why should we not begin to “practice the presence of God”?

CHAPTER XL

BELIEVING AND DOING

Read James II: 14-26

JAMES was a practical man. He wanted a religion of deeds. "Can that faith save him?" That is, faith without works, faith which is only of the intellect, having no influence on the life. We are saved by faith, because the faith unites us to Christ. There is no virtue in faith itself save as it brings us into relations with the source of all blessing.

One of the figures James himself uses is the vine and its branches. By faith we became branches in Christ. As the life of the vine flows into its branches, so the life of Christ flows into those who believe on Him. They are changed, born again. They do the same kind of works that Jesus did, because He lives in them.

It is made very plain in the Bible that the faith that saves produces holy life, obedience to the holy commands. Hence any faith that does not produce good works is not saving faith. There are persons whose creed is excellent—they believe all the important truths in the Bible. Yet

they do not keep the commandments, do not live the Christian life. Can that faith save them? Nothing is more clearly taught than that only those who are holy can enter into the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God"--they and they only shall see God.

James uses a very practical illustration: "If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Go in peace . . . and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body; what doth it profit?" This is about all that a good many persons do for those who are in need. They speak courteously and kindly to them. They say: "I am very sorry you are having all this trouble, but I am sure you will find the help you need. I hope somebody will give you some clothes and something to eat." Sometimes they close their sympathetic little speech with a pious, "God bless you!" Perhaps they say, for the still greater encouragement of the needy one, "I am going to pray God to send you relief." Yet what does all this cheap sympathy amount to? It does not warm the shivering man, nor relieve his hunger. Such "love" is only an empty mockery. What a pity it is so common! True love proves its genuineness by works of mercy and kindness. Instead of saying, "Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled," it brings out warm garments and bread, and the brother or sister goes away in comfort with hunger satisfied. That is the kind

of love that profits. Love, as well as faith, without works is dead.

A little girl was overheard saying her evening prayer, and this is part of what she said: "Lord, I saw a little girl to-day. She seemed very poor. Her clothes were very thin, and she was shivering in the cold. She looked hungry, too. I felt very sorry for her. It seemed that I ought to do something for her. But it was n't any of my business, was it, Lord?"

"I by my works will show thee my faith." That is the only way faith can be shown. Faith is not some mysterious thing which saves us by magic. It is not a charm which one may wear upon his bosom to ward off evil spirits and bring good fortune. There is no such thing as faith apart from works. The belief that does not affect the life is a dead belief. If a man says, "I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," and then is dishonest, untruthful, selfish, envious, he proves that his faith in Christ is only an empty thing. On the other hand, if a man says, "I believe on Christ," and then lives a good life, true, loving, unselfish, helpful, and is earnest in doing good in the name of Christ, he is showing his faith in his works.

Paul tells us that we are justified by faith, but in the same sentence he goes on to show that the faith which justifies us works in us—we have peace with God, access unto the grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of

God. Paul's great doctrine is that of justification by faith, but no one insists more earnestly than does Paul upon good works, holy living, the fruits of the Spirit, a life full of Christ, as the outcome of this justifying faith.

We must not infer that all good works are pleasing to God, or that any man is justified by works alone. All the good work of the world put together would not save one soul. It is only when one has true faith that works count for anything. The good works which God approves are those which are inspired by faith in God and love for God. Abraham had strong faith, and his faith inspired noble life, obedience, holiness, and whatsoever things are true. So Abraham became known as the friend of God, because he trusted God so fully and because his trust was shown in his deeds, in his character, and in his whole life. We may become friends, too, if we will. A friend is one whom we have learned to trust, on whom we know from experience we may depend. When God can depend on us to trust Him, obey Him, and follow Him, then have we become God's friends.

CHAPTER XLI

THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

Read James III: 1-12

THE exhortation, "Be not many of you teachers," is a warning against the spirit which is always giving advice to people, trying to direct their lives and control their opinions and their movements. Some people are ready with advice on every subject. No question of duty in other people's lives is so delicate that they cannot settle it at once. Where wise, thoughtful men are silent, they speak out with boldest self-confidence. They are always obtruding advice unsought upon others. They understand your business far better than you do yourself. They know what you ought to do in every experience. They are as much at home in spiritual matters as in local gossip, and can tell a distressed soul what to do as glibly and as unfeelingly as they can give advice about farming or sheep-raising.

Perhaps James did not have this sort of "teachers" in mind, but it would be a blessing to the world if some of them would take his reproof to heart. There are very few people fit

to give advice to others. Especially are there few who are fit to guide others in spiritual matters. It does not matter so much if it be only the cut of a coat or the colour of a dress, but when it is the eternal interest of a soul, only one who is living near the heart of God and has learned by long and deep experience should dare to give advice. The ambition to be recognized as leaders is a sure mark of vanity. It is better to be the propeller of a ship, hidden under the water, than the figurehead, vaunting itself on the prow.

“If any stumblenth not in word, the same is a perfect man.” The tongue is the most sensitive to impression from within, and most quickly interprets the emotions and feelings, good or bad. It is also the hardest of all to control. Therefore, if we can control our tongue there is no doubt that we can control all our other members. Our tongue is the wildest and most wayward thing about us. People who in every other way live almost faultless lives are constantly stumbling in their speech, speaking words they ought never to utter. It is a wise rule in all self-culture and discipline to give most attention to those things in which we are most lacking, to strengthen the weak points, to curb the wayward elements, to put the restraint where there is the most tendency to defy control. Every tongue, therefore, needs watching. With most of us this is the weakest and the strongest point—the weakest in

its self-control and the strongest in its wild waywardness.

“The tongue also is a little member, and boasteth great things.” Two admirable illustrations of this are given. The great, strong horse is controlled by a bridle, and the largest ship obeys the rudder even in the wildest storms. What the bit is to the horse, what the rudder is to the ship, that the tongue is to the body. Not only does the speech express the inner emotions, but it reacts again upon those emotions. Thus uncontrolled speech does double harm. Evil words spoken, while they do harm to others, kindle also into still intenser flame the inner passions which first prompted them. “You cannot deliberately smirch your sister’s reputation, however bad a woman she may be, without making yourself a worse woman.” We are not done with wicked words when we have uttered them. While they go out into life on their career of hurt and injury, our own life has in it a new element of evil because of their utterance. Our duty is to get and keep our tongue well in hand; to get a rider on the horse who shall guide the fiery animal; to get a pilot on the ship whose hand on the wheel shall be instantly recognized and instantly yielded to in the fiercest gale. The tongue is capable of wonderful mastership over the life, if only it can be made servant to a good heart and a strong will.

“The tongue is a fire.” It is “the world of

iniquity." It "defileth the whole body." It "set-teth on fire the wheel of nature." It is "set on fire by hell." The old hunter lighted his pipe, then threw down the match among the dry leaves and passed on. In a little while the whole forest back of him was aflame. A kerosene lamp was upset by the kick of a cow in a stable, and soon almost the whole city was in ruins. A boy's Fourth of July firecracker carried a spark to a dry roof, and another city suffered from a terrible conflagration. A spark from a passing locomotive flew into the dry grass, and a prairie was overswept by fire. There are many people like the old hunter, throwing burning matches among the dry leaves in almost every conversation. There are men and women who are continually upsetting lamps among the hay and starting conflagrations. The tongue is a fire, and words are sparks. Ofttimes the words burn into some tender heart, almost extinguishing its life.

"The tongue can no man tame." This may seem rather a discouraging word. We must not conclude from it that the tongue cannot possibly be tamed. No man can tame his own tongue or the tongue of another, but Christ is able to get the mastery for us over every power of our own being. The story of Moses is suggestive. When he went out, at forty years of age, thinking he was able to begin his work, he had not yet mastered his tongue or his temper. God took him into the wilderness, and for forty years had him

in training. Then he came out, at the age of eighty, and was ready to become the leader and the lawgiver of his people. This may seem discouraging, too—that it took forty years to tame a man's tongue. Perhaps most of us will find that it does take a good many years to get perfect mastery over our speech. At the same time, there is nothing in us so masterful, so resistless, so perverse that the grace of God cannot bring it into full subjection.

“Therewith bless we the Lord and Father; and therewith curse we men.” It is inconsistent that the same tongue which is given to praise God should to-morrow, out in the world, speak bitter words against men. No doubt many good people are sometimes led by sudden impulses to speak words that are not true or loving to or of others. But every Christian should understand that the tongue which has been given to Christ should never speak any but Christly words. We are to be Christ to others, and our words should be Christ's words. We should train ourselves, under God's grace, to cherish only good thoughts, kindly thoughts, loving thoughts, and instantly to quench in our heart every thought of bitterness or cursing. If the evil thoughts be quenched there will be no flame of anger or passion bursting from our lips. If our heart is filled with love, our speech will not give vent to bitterness, to wrath, to anger, to scandal, to anything that is not beautiful.

“Who is wise? . . . let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom.” A man may take the honours of his class in college and be a walking encyclopedia of information, and yet have no wisdom for the ordinary affairs of life. His knowledge does him no good. One may know all the precepts of the gospel concerning love, gentleness, or patience, and yet if he does not show these qualities in his daily life the knowledge goes for nothing. Knowing how to live is good, but doing is the test of true knowing. The tongue is an index of the heart. Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh. We must, therefore, show our wisdom in our words. The kind of speech that proves our wisdom is that which is filled with the Spirit of Christ. On the day of Pentecost the disciples got new tongues. Even the gift of the Holy Spirit will not enable us to speak Italian or Spanish without the labour of learning these languages, but it will enable us to speak the language of heaven, the language of love—the soft answer which turneth away wrath, the word of blessing for one who curses, the word of gentleness in reply to rudeness, the prayer for those who persecute.

CHAPTER XLII

THE HEAVENLY INHERITANCE

Read I Peter I: 1-12

It is a sweet pleasure to be chosen to be a friend even by a true and noble man, to have a pure and loving heart turn to us and choose us from among many for regard, affection and interest. But it is far more precious to know that God has chosen us to be His friends, His children. Jesus said of His disciples, "Ye did not choose me, but I chose you." Peter wrote to the "elect . . . according to the foreknowledge of God." We are told also that we love God because He first loved us. Instead of puzzling our brains over the doctrine of "election," let us accept the sweet thought which such words as these bring to our hearts, that we are thought about by our heavenly Father and are then made by Him. How sacred it makes our life seem to think of it in this way!

When God chooses us to be His children, He also provides for making us holy and meet to be partakers of the heavenly inheritance. The word "sanctification" has two senses. It means a setting apart. The Father chooses us and the Holy Spirit sets us apart as God's. We belong to Him

and are sacred to His uses. Then the word means also the actual cleansing of the nature—making it holy. The Spirit enters into our heart and makes His home there, purifying the fountains of life and overcoming and driving out the evil of the flesh. The blood of Christ also has a part in the making holy of those whom the Father has chosen. We are redeemed by His blood. The blood cleanses from all sin. Thus the three persons of the Trinity are active in the saving of everyone who is saved. The Father chose, the Son made atonement, and the Holy Spirit purifies and sanctifies.

We enter God's spiritual family by a new birth. God "begat us again unto a living hope." In our natural state we are not ready for life in God's household. A wicked man, with an unholy heart, could never be happy in heaven. He cannot even be happy in a prayer meeting on earth. We must have holy feelings, desires and affections before we are prepared for living in a holy atmosphere. The kingdom of heaven must come into our heart before we can enter into the kingdom. So God provides that when we accept Christ, the Holy Spirit renews and changes our nature, giving us the child-heart. We see here also that it is not for anything in ourselves that God has chosen us, changed our heart, and taken us into His family, but "according to his great mercy." Mercy always implies unworthiness. We are saved through the grace and love of God.

There is a glimpse here, too, of the blessedness of the Christian's hope. It is a "living" hope. We are born again to an inheritance of life, eternal life. Our hope itself is living and eternal. Earth's best things are uncertain, and at their best are only for a time. But the hope of the Christian is immortal. It is guaranteed by Christ's resurrection. He conquered death, and all who rest upon Him live with Him for evermore.

Here we see what our living hope is. It is an inheritance, a free gift to us, something which comes to us from our Father. It is not like earthly inheritances, however, for they are liable to waste or to be lost. This inheritance is "incorruptible," that is, it is not subject to decay, but is eternal. It is "undefiled." Some earthly inheritances pass down to children stained in the getting. An honest old man, dying, said to his sons, "I do not leave you very much, but there is not a dirty shilling in it all." He meant that every penny of it had been honestly earned. This is not always true of this world's inheritances. Too often there is many a stained shilling in them. But the heavenly inheritance is absolutely without stain. It is purchased for us at the price of Christ's blood, and comes to us from our Father's hands, white with heaven's own purity. Another thing about it is that it fades not away. Earthly inheritances often fade away, leaving the inheritor in poverty. This inheritance

is beyond the reach of robber and money panic and all shrinking in values. It never can be taken from us. It is not in any banks or investments of earth, but is laid up for us in heaven, reserved there in security until we get home.

Not only is the inheritance kept in secure reserve for us, but we are guarded on the way to receive the inheritance. This is very important. The world is full of dangers through which we must pass to get to heaven. On every hand there are enemies. We never could get safely to the blessedness laid up for us if we had no protection by the way. But we are guarded by the divine power. Many people believe in guardian angels, who accompany every child of God from birth to death. We are sure at least that angels do encamp around us every night and hover over us every day. Better still, God Himself is with us always, sheltering us with His wings of love, keeping us. Our part is faith—resting in the divine keeping, simply going forward in the way of duty, leaving to God the guarding of our lives.

For a little while the Christian is to be tried. "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy cometh in the morning." We can surely bear trial a little while. Then, there is a "need be" in the trial. There is a blessing which God has to give us that we cannot get in any other way. The purifying of the gold never can be gotten without fire. Not to be cast into the hot furnace is to keep the dross. God never chastens unless there

is a "need be." Again, the grief is caused by "trials" which are testings of faith, so that it may shine at length in glory at the appearing of Christ. So we ought not to be troubled by our trials. There is a blessing in them. As the rough, unsightly ore, by passing through the fire, yields at last bright, shining gold, so our weak faith, with its admixture of self-will and pride and evil, is purified by the fires of trial, so that at last it appears before God to receive praise, honour and glory.

The love of Christ will keep us in temptation and trial. The secret of a faithful, true and beautiful life is this love of the unseen Friend. Professor Drummond tells of a young girl who became wondrously beautiful in her life and character, growing into a rare Christlikeness. Her friends wondered what the secret could be. She wore upon her breast a little locket, which she always kept closed, refusing to allow anyone to see within it. Once, however, when she was very ill, a friend was permitted to open it and found there only a little piece of paper, bearing the words, "Whom not having seen, I love." This told the whole story. Her love for the unseen Christ was the secret of that beautiful spiritual life which had so impressed itself upon her friends. The secret of the life of Moses is given in one phrase, "He endured, as seeing him who is invisible." Faith is better than sight. If we believe and love the unseen Friend, our life will

be firm and steadfast in all trial, and will be transformed little by little into the beauty of Christ. We find here two blessings coming from the love for the unseen Saviour. One is unspeakable joy, even in a life of sore trial. The other is "salvation." We need but to continue faithful unto the end to receive the full and glorious inheritance.

Both earth and heaven are intensely interested in this great redeeming work of Christ. There are wise men who are so busy in their researches into little earthly matters that they cannot get time to study the things of the spiritual kingdom of God. Here, however, we see that in heaven's sight nothing in this world so merits the thought, study and research of the wisest beings in the universe as Christ's work of redemption. The interest of the angels in Christ's sufferings as the Redeemer is very beautiful. There is a picture by Domenichino which represents the scene on Calvary, on the evening after the Saviour's body had been taken down and laid in the grave. The cross is empty. An angel stands beside the crown of thorns which lies there, feeling with the point of his finger one of the sharp points. His face wears a look of mystery and wonder. He is trying to find out the meaning of suffering. Angels in heaven know nothing by experience of pain. The artist's thought is that to this angel the sufferings of Christ were a great mystery which he was try-

ing to understand. The same thought is suggested in the words, "Which things angels desire to look into." Surely it is worth while to give thought and attention to the great and wonderful things of Christ, since even the highest angels find in them mystery worthy of their deepest study. Nothing else in all the ranks of knowledge is so worthy of our deepest study and most diligent research and investigation as is the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

CHAPTER XLIII

SALUTARY WARNINGS

Read I Peter IV: 1-8

IT was not easy for Christ to be our Redeemer. He was in this world as the Captain of our salvation, and His work here was a conflict. He came to destroy the works of the Devil. He met sin and sin's influences everywhere. It was not easy for Him to fight the battle. He resisted unto blood, striving against sin. He went to the cross for us, bearing our sin. We are His followers, and should be inspired by His example—should arm ourselves with the same mind. Jesus taught that not only He must bear His cross, but that everyone that would follow Him must likewise take up the cross. He taught that the only way to save one's life is to lose it, to hate it, to be ready to sacrifice it. We never can get through life victoriously unless we fight. The armour we need is not something to put on outside, but a holy heart and mind within. That was Christ's armour as He went through life. He had no helmet of brass, no sword of steel; His holy purpose was His armour, and He was victorious. If we have a pure heart and a holy life, the world

will have no power over us. The best armour is the armour of the soul.

We are not to understand that the Christian who has died with Christ on His cross shall never sin any more, but that he has given up his sins, repented of them, and renounced them. He used to make the sins part of the aim of his life. He loved them; his heart ran to them greedily. Now he is a Christian, he has taken Christ as his Saviour, he has found mercy. Hence he gives up the sins which he used to commit. Instead of following the devices and desires of his own evil heart, he lives now according to the will of God. This is the way every Christian should live. We should crucify the flesh—the old evil things, and let Christ live in us. This is the change that Christ works in every life that is given to Him. That is what the new birth means.

There is an old legend of an instrument which hung upon a castle wall. Its strings were broken and it was filled with dust. No one understood it, and no one could put it in order. But one day a stranger came to the castle. He saw the instrument on the wall. Taking it down, he quickly brushed the webs of dust from it, and with gentle hand reset the broken strings and began to play upon it. The chords long silent awoke, beneath his touch, and the castle was filled with rich music. Every human life, in its un-renewed state, is such a harp, with broken strings, tarnished by sin. It is capable of giving forth

music marvelously rich and sweet, but first it must be restored, and the only one who can do this is the maker of the harp, the Lord Jesus Christ. Only He can bring the jangled chords of our life into tune, so that when played upon they shall give forth sweet music. If we would make our lives beautiful, we must surrender them into the hands of Him who alone can repair and restore them.

Not a moment of life should ever be given up to sin. Life is too precious to be stained and wasted in evil. Those who are thus throwing away their life should instantly abandon all that is wrong, and turn to God and to the life to which He invites them. The time past which has been spent in sin is surely enough for such a ruinous waste. Few things are sadder than the story of one who lives in sin all his days and then, at the last, creeps back to God's feet to find mercy. One such, lying in a hospital, and near unto death, was very happy, for he had found Christ and had the assurance of eternal life. A friend said to him, "You are not afraid to die?" "No," answered the man, "but I am ashamed to die." He was ashamed because he had nothing to bring to God but a wasted life—forgiven at last, but of no service in the world.

The words used in the third verse, which describe the life of wickedness, are black with shame. We turn away from them with loathing, if we are walking in Christ's way. But we must not for-

get that these very words describe what is going on continually in thousands of places. Modern natural life is no better than was the natural life of men nineteen hundred years ago. This is the end to which sin leads. We need not go to the slums to find this picture realized; we can find it in many places which are regarded as respectable and high-toned. The encouraging note in this sad verse is that the evil things he named were things of the past of those to whom Peter wrote. The gospel of Christ saves men. It turns men's Sodoms into Edens.

Those who find their pleasures in sin's low, debasing ways cannot understand the secret of the Christian's joy. They think it must be dreary and dismal to be a Christian. They cannot conceive of any happiness in the life which turns away from sinful indulgences, which restrains appetites and passions, which curbs the natural desires. To them it seems impossible that there should be any real joy in living a holy life, in walking with God, in prayer and Bible reading and hymn singing or in Christian work and fellowship. The blessedness of the Christian life is all a mystery to those who know only this world's life, and find their pleasures in lust or passion. A prayer meeting would be to them intolerably dreary, because they know not God and have no fellowship with Him.

It is not only in this world that the superiority of the Christian's position is seen; the world to

come will also reveal this. This world does not mean the end of life; it goes on into the unseen future, and things begun here are finished there. We are sowing now, and there will be a harvest by and by, when we shall reap there what we have sown. Those who sow in the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. Those who live in unrestrained lust and unbridled passion must give account to God.

They are without excuse, for the gospel was preached "even to the dead." Some people trouble themselves about the heathen who have died without hearing the gospel. But we may safely leave them in God's hands. We need never fear that He will be unjust to any soul He has made. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" We need not fret ourselves over any such questions. Our only care need be that we who have the gospel shall live worthily of the gospel. We, too, shall have to give an account of our privileges and how we have used them. We must remember, too, that to whom much is given of the same shall it be required.

In view of the eternity on whose edge we are living all the while, we should walk thoughtfully and prayerfully. We do not know when the end of this life for us may be. This should not sadden us and spoil this world for us—that is not the way God wants us to be affected by thoughts of eternity. But we should look at life seriously and learn to live earnestly. If any day may be

our last, we should make every day beautiful enough and complete enough to be a fitting last day. We should leave none of its duties undone, none of its tasks unfinished. We should live unselfishly and kindly, so as to leave no pain or bitterness in any heart. Then, we should live in constant communion with God—a life of prayer. We need God at every point, at every step, and no day can be beautiful or complete without its portion of divine help. A day without prayer is never a good day.

'Above all things, we must be loving. Love is always the most important thing. One may be honest and truthful and just and upright and diligent and sound in the faith, and yet if he has not love his life shows a great lack. Paul tells us this in the wonderful thirteenth chapter of Corinthians. Christians should be affectionate among themselves. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Love makes us patient the one with the other. We all have our faults—our friends have their faults—but if we love them we do not see their faults. We overlook the things that are not beautiful, and see them as Christ sees them.

CHAPTER XLIV

SIN AND SALVATION

Read I John I: 5 to II: 6

EVERYONE has a message from God to announce to men. John had heard Christ speak in human words. Christ had come from the Father with a message to the world. His message was the announcement of God's love, and of God's desire to save His lost children. Christ delivered His message—He went everywhere and told it. But especially did He announce it to His disciples. For three years they lived with Him and witnessed His works. Then, among the disciples, John had the closest place. He lived near the heart of Jesus all those three years; he leaned on the bosom of Jesus, and heard even His faintest whispers. In a very special way, therefore, had John learned the lesson which Christ had come to announce. He was well prepared to go out and deliver his message.

It is the duty of every one of us to go with our message from God to others. Everyone who lives near Christ must hear the whispered word which he is to repeat. We should be ready to tell our message wherever we go. It should so

burn in our heart that we cannot help telling it—this message of God's wonderful love. A minister once climbed the stairs to a miserable garret to see a sick boy who did not know Christ. Bending over him, he said, "My boy, God loves you—God loves you," and hurried from the room. The boy was startled by the sudden appearing and vanishing again of the stranger, but he could not forget the message. It crept into his heart and stayed there, and changed all his life. We should deliver our message in burning words in every ear.

John's message was, "God is light." Light stands for everything that is beautiful and good. It is pure—God is holy. "In him is no darkness at all." Light is life-giving. All the life in the world is wooed out and nourished by the light of the sun. A friend asked Tennyson once, "What is Jesus Christ to you?" They were walking in the garden at the time, and, pointing to a rosebush, full of blooming roses, Tennyson said, "What the sun is to this bush, Jesus Christ is to me." As we open our heart and life to Christ, who is the revealing of the love of God, the life-giving influence spreads everywhere and we grow into whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are pure. Again, light reveals, makes manifest. In the darkness of the night we see nothing; but when the sun rises, all the beauty about us is manifested. A man sleeps on a mountain top, and all is blackness about him.

The morning dawns, and the glorious splendours of nature burst on his view. One might walk through a great art gallery at night and he would not behold anything. At length, however, the day breaks, and he finds himself in the midst of the loveliest creations. They were there before, but were invisible to him before the light revealed them. So the light of God makes all things visible to us.

It is an impossibility to have fellowship with God if we are walking in darkness. Moral darkness is sinfulness. It is the reverse of light and righteousness. The only way to have fellowship with God is to be like God, to love what He loves and hate what He hates. If one professes to be God's child, Christ's follower, and meanwhile lives an evil life, it is evident that he is self-deceived, or else is a hypocrite. "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" asked the Master. Jesus said of His own life, "The Father . . . hath not left me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to him." The secret of the fellowship of Jesus with the Father was unfailing obedience. We must do the things that are pleasing to God if we would have fellowship with Him. There is no way of being nearer to God, and abiding in His love, save by keeping His commandments.

There can be neither fellowship together nor cleansing, unless we walk in the light; that is, unless we are following Christ. Sin has no true

fellowship. It may have its compacts and covenants for evil ends. Pilate and Herod were made friends the day Jesus was condemned, but it was only a bond of sand which united them. Their fellowship was only partnership in the darkest crime of the ages. There may be companionship in wrongdoing, but there can be no heart-union. The only real and indissoluble friendship is that in which both are in friendship with Christ. Christian fellowship is the only union of hearts and lives possible in this world. Thrice sacred is marriage when both parties kneel together in prayer, sit together at the Lord's table, and unite in love for Christ.

Cleansing from sin is likewise dependent upon walking in the light. So long as one continues to walk in the filth of sin, one cannot be made clean. A man must leave the gutter and walk in dry, clean paths if he would have feet undefiled. There can be no cleansing from sin while we continue living in sin. It is only the forsaken sin that is a forgiven sin. It is interesting, too, to note closely the words used here. It is the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanseth. How can blood cleanse? In a way we cannot understand, the dying of Christ was the atonement for sin. We are forgiven because Jesus bore our sin. He was the Lamb of God that bore the sin of the world. "In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses." The word "cleanseth" is present tense,

and tells of continuous cleansing. If we are walking in the light our sins are forgiven as soon as they are committed, and our nature is made clean and kept clean as we go along.

No one can get off on the plea that he has no sin. There is no man that sinneth not. What, then, can we do, since heaven is only for the pure? Here is the answer: we can have our sins, all our sins, forgiven. God's forgiveness puts away not only the guilt of sin, but the sin itself. Notice that we must confess our sins if we would have them forgiven. Unconfessed sin is unforgiven sin. But why must we confess? Does not God know that we are sorry? Why need we tell Him that we are? Blessing lies in our opening our heart to God, in our recognition of our relation to Him, and of His authority over us. Sins hidden and unconfessed are full of curse. They smoulder like the fires in the heart of a volcano. Sins confessed and put away have lost their power to hurt the life. "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy."

We ought to try not to sin. "Little children . . . write I unto you that ye may not sin." We ought to live a holy and good life. But the best of us, with the most diligent care, sin, for we are all weak and human, and surely sometimes fall into unintended sins. Is there any hope for us if we do? Yes; we have an Advocate, One who stands for us before God to plead our cause,

to make intercession for us. He has a right to speak for us, for He is holy and sinless. Besides, He is the propitiation for our sins—He died for us. What, then, should we do when we have stumbled into some sin? Should we despair and give all up, and say there is no use in our trying to go on? No; we should flee at once to our Advocate and beseech Him to plead for us, that we may be forgiven. His intercession the Father always hears. If we would live thus, although we may sin many times along the way, our sins shall at once be forgiven, and we shall be restored and ever kept in unbroken fellowship with God.

We must never get the impression that we can sin with impunity because we are saved by grace and not by our own good works, or because God is so merciful and forgives so readily. Nothing is taught in the Word of God more clearly than that faith in Christ always implies surrender to Christ and obedience to His commands. There is no true faith without obedience. This is made very plain in this verse—he who claims to know God and yet does not keep God's commandments is a liar. In the ancient cathedral of Lubeck, Germany, there is an old slab, with the following inscription:

**“Thus speaketh Christ our Lord to us:
Ye call me Master, and obey me not;
Ye call me Light, and see me not;
Ye call me Way, and walk me not;**

Ye call me Life, and desire me not;
Ye call me Wise, and follow me not;
Ye call me Fair, and love me not;
Ye call me Rich, and ask me not;
Ye call me Eternal, and seek me not;
Ye call me Gracious, and trust me not;
Ye call me Noble, and serve me not;
Ye call me Mighty, and honour me not;
Ye call me Just, and fear me not;
If I condemn you, blame me not."

CHAPTER XLV

GOD'S LOVE IN THE GIFT OF HIS SON

Read I John IV: 9-16

ONE reason why Christians should love one another is because God would have them interpret His love to the world, and this they can do only by love. Anything unloving is not of God. We ought to think of this—that it is our mission to let the world know what God is like. A great many people do not know God, do not know what His character is. We know Him and we are to make Him known to others. This we cannot do merely by telling them about God. The Bible is full of revealings of God, but it is not enough for us to read the Bible to people. It does little good for us to quote texts which tell of God's goodness, kindness and holiness, if we cannot show the goodness, kindness and holiness in our own life. The only Bible we can really get others to read is the one written in our own conduct, disposition and character. People must see God's love in us. When Mr. McAll went to Paris to begin his mission work, he knew only a few words of French. All he could say was, "God loves you, and I love you." His message

was that God loved the people to whom he was speaking, but this would not have been listened to by them if they had not seen the love also in the preacher. That is, the love of God was interpreted to them in himself. We must give the same interpretation.

There is no other love like God's. There has always been love in the world. Mothers have always loved their children. There have always been tender home affections. Men have always loved their country. But these are only little fragments of love, imperfect and faulty at best. The great fountain and center of all love is God's love. It is to all other love as the sun is to all earth's little lights. God's love is love that does not depend on love to draw it out. God does not love us because we love Him—if that were true we should never have God's love. The message of the gospel is not that we should love God, but that God loves us. It makes a great deal of difference how we read the words, which love comes first. Our confidence is not in our love for God, which is very weak, faulty and ever changing, but in God's love for us. This is infinite, eternal, and never changes. Whatever our need or feelings may be, we may always be sure that the love of God is everlasting, the same yesterday and to-day and forever.

“The Father hath sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.” We think of the little Child sleeping His first infancy's sleep in the

manger, and we hear the angel say, "There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." It is because God loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

It is knowing and believing the love of God in Jesus Christ that saves us. It is possible to know it and not believe it. To be blessed by it we must believe that God loves us with an individual, personal love, and must let His love into our hearts. A story is told of a child in Luther's day who for the first time heard and believed this love. She lived in a home where only severe thoughts of God were known. The name of God was used to frighten the children. Every mention of God made the child tremble. She had learned to think of Him as her enemy, watching her to punish her. One day she found on the floor of her father's printing office a piece of torn paper with some words printed on it. Picking it up, she began to read, "God so loved the world, that he gave—" it was torn off here. She did not know what followed. But the thought that God loved was an altogether new one for her. If He loved the world He could not be such a terrible God as she had been taught to believe Him to be. "God so loved the world that he gave—" her paper said. What He gave she did not know, but if He loved enough to give anything He must be a kind and good God. So her thought ran on until, by and by, a new conception of God had taken possession of her heart. With

nothing more than this little fragment of a verse she had received a great truth, and the thought of God had become a wonderful blessing to her. She knew and believed the love that God had for her, and it saved her. This is the lesson all of us need to learn afresh.

CHAPTER XLVI

JESUS APPEARS TO JOHN

Read Rev. I:-9-20

HE appears here to John in his banishment and reveals to him many things which John was to write and send to the churches. The writer identifies himself with the Christians to whom he sends the messages—"Your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus." It is remarkable that in all the Gospel of John the writer's name is not once mentioned. He hides himself away and exalts and honours only the one Name. Here, however, he writes in his own name. The reason for this difference may be that now John is speaking as the prophet of Christ and delivering the messages which have been intrusted to him. It was proper, therefore, that he should declare who he was, that the witness might be received with the more confidence by his friends. The words "brother" and "partaker with you" show John's love for his fellow Christians. He was one of them. He was their companion in the tribulation of persecution—this drew him and them close together. The word "patience" has in it the

thought of suffering which is endured sweetly and victoriously.

John refers to his own sufferings, not to plead for pity or sympathy for himself, but to honour Christ. It was "for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" that he had been banished to the Isle of Patmos. It is an honour to be a sufferer in a worthy cause. Saint Paul spoke of the scars and other traces of trials endured as a Christian as "marks of Jesus."

In the narrative of his vision, John begins by saying that he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Here we have one of the proofs that very early the first believers began to observe the first day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection, rather than the Jewish Sabbath. Though far away from the worshiping assemblies of his fellow Christians, John was in the Spirit on that sacred day. We should all seek to be in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. During the week our hands are full of work that must be done. Unless we are watchful, the world is apt then to get into our heart and we are apt to become secularized in spirit, made worldly-minded, losing all interest in spiritual things. The trouble is not that we are in the world, but that the world too often gets into us. It is a proper enough thing for a ship to be in the sea, but when the sea gets into the ship there is an end to sailing. Christ wants us to be in the world, but He does not want the world to get into us.

On the Lord's Day, therefore, we should run our bark just as completely as possible out of the world's troubled waters into the peaceful bay of spiritual rest and enjoyment. A well-spent Sabbath will keep up the tone of the life amid the most intense pressure of week-day care.

The revelation of John came in a vision. He saw a cluster of lamps. "I saw seven golden candlesticks." Christian churches should be like candlesticks. A candlestick itself gives no light, but it holds the candle from which the light pours forth. Christ Himself is the light, but the light can shine in this world only in the lives of His followers. Every Christian should be a light shining before men. If we live worthily we make the world a little brighter. If we live carelessly or inconsistently, we disappoint Christ. We must notice that the light that shines in these churches all comes from Christ, who is "in the midst of the" seven golden "candlesticks." We can shine only by letting Christ's light pour through us.

John describes also the vision of Christ as He appeared that day in the midst of the golden candlesticks. "His head and his hair were white as white wool, . . . his eyes were as a flame of fire." The words describe the glorified Christ. When He was on the earth there was no brightness in His face as men saw Him. Once only, when He was transfigured, did the glory appear for an hour. Now, however, in heaven, all the brightness shines out unrestricted. The vision

of John gives us a glimpse of Christ as we shall see Him when He comes with clouds.

One part of this vision of Christ represented His power. "He had in his right hand seven stars." The seven stars represent the ministers of Christ on the earth. "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." As Christ held the stars in His hand, so He keeps in His hand the ministers who on the earth witness for Him and serve Him. He keeps them in His care, under His protection.

Another thing in this vision suggests the power of the living word of Christ. "Out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword." The picture seems strange at first—a sword proceeding out of the mouth. The teaching is that Christ's weapon in the conquest of the world is His Word, "the sword of the Spirit." He sets up no kingdoms like the kingdom of this world, with pomp and pageant, with armies and navies. He rules men's lives, and the sword He wields is His Word. The sword is sharp and two-edged. It cuts deep. It reveals sin and all lust in the heart. We should learn to use the Word of God with confidence in all our conflicts with sin and in all our efforts to advance Christ's kingdom.

The effect of this vision upon John was overwhelming. He fell at the feet of Christ as one dead. With infinite gentleness Jesus came then and touched him with His right hand, bidding him "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the

Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore." Here we see Jesus away beyond death, and His life has not been harmed by dying. None of His glory was quenched by death's floods. He still lives and has all the grace, gentleness and love that He had before. Neither does death injure our friends who die in Christ. It robs the believer of no beauty. Indeed, in this world life at the best is only like an opening bud; in dying, the bud opens into the full-blown rose.

Not only is Christ Himself beyond death and its power, but He is the "Living one"—that is, the only one who really lives, having life in Himself. He is the great fountain and source of all life. Besides, He has power over all the realm of death. "I have the keys of death and of Hades." Keys are the symbols of authority. Christ can open the doors of earth's prison-houses when He will and bring out His people who are under death's power. He Himself lay in the grave and then arose and came forth. In like manner, in His own time He will call up all who sleep in Him. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

Another thought suggested by Christ with the keys of death in His hand is, that He is the Guide of His people now in this lonely walk through the valley of death. He knows the way by experience and thus is prepared to conduct us over it.

CHAPTER XLVII

WORSHIPING GOD AND THE LAMB

Read Rev. V

JOHN describes his vision most vividly. "I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back." We may study this picture with great profit. The book is the scroll of the divine purposes—this much, at least, we know about it. As we look at it we learn that God has purposes for His Church, and knows what the future will be, down through all the ages to the end. This ought to be a great comfort to us, especially when we are disposed to be anxious or discouraged concerning the progress of Christ's kingdom. God is never taken by surprise. He knew all from the beginning. The world is not run by chance. God's plans are never defeated. In all that to us seems confusion His eye sees at all times order. Even the wrath of man He makes to praise Him, and the remainder thereof He restrains. The fact that this roll was written on both sides, and was entirely filled, shows that no part of the future was left in uncertainty, or unplanned for; also that no other than God has to do with the

direction of the world's affairs. When we remember that it is our Father whose purposes are being wrought out in the troubled history of this earth, we ought not to be afraid. His children are always safe in His hands.

John explains that "No one in the heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look thereon." This shows not only that no one can read the future, but also that no one can meddle with God's purposes and plans. They are in His own hands, and are hidden from all eyes. This truth should also make us very modest in our efforts to interpret prophecies and predictions concerning future events. The book is sealed and we cannot read its contents. Nothing is hidden from us, however, that we need to know in order to salvation or in order to duty; but there are great events in the future clearly foretold as to the fact that they will occur, but not foretold as to the time and manner of their occurrence. Is it the part of wise and loving faith to try to open that which lies in God's hands sealed? There is also a very practical suggestion here. The scroll of each individual life lies in God's hands, written full to the end. God knows it all down to the last moment. Each change, each experience of joy or sorrow, each danger or duty—is written down. God knows all our biography from the beginning to the end. But the book is sealed. We cannot read its contents. We can-

not know, therefore, what lies before us in the days that are to come. And surely it is better that we should go on, not knowing, since God knows, and since He is leading us step by step. To know of trials and hardships and perils and sorrows would discourage us. To know of coming defeat and failure would take the nerve out of our energy and paralyze our efforts. To know of coming joys and achievements would make us vain and self-confident. It is a great deal better as it is, and we should leave the book sealed and in the hands of God while we move quietly on in the little bit of path unsealed and unrolled to our eyes.

Then John had a vision of Jesus: "The Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, . . . And I saw in the midst of the throne . . . a Lamb." John was looking for a Lion and he saw a Lamb—a little lamb, too. This strange, double picture of Jesus as He appears in heaven is very suggestive. He was a lion in His conflicts and victories, and as such overcame all His enemies and ours. But He was a lamb in the gentleness of His character and disposition. The lamb is an emblem of meekness and of unresisting obedience and submission. As we think about Christ we soon see how true both of these pictures are. Like a lion, He has power and majesty, and is terrible to His enemies, to all who cower before Him. As a lion He met and overcame Satan, and triumphed over death and the grave. As a lion

He is able to defend us from all our enemies, and the feeblest believer is safe under His protection. He is the omnipotent God and has all power in heaven and on earth. At the same time the other picture is just as true. He is like a little lamb in His gentleness. The whole spirit of His life on earth shows this. Never was a mother so gentle to her children as was Jesus to the weary, troubled and penitent ones that came to Him. He was lamblike, too, in the way He endured wrongs and sufferings. Other animals fight in their own defense, but the lamb does not resist. When Christ was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not. And as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth. He is the same Jesus now in the midst of the throne, and it is this wonderful combination of strength and gentleness that makes Him such a Saviour. In Him we have the union of all the truest qualities of love that our hearts so hunger for—tenderness, affectionateness, patience, sympathy. Then, when we have laid ourselves down to rest in all this blessed warmth of love, we look up and see that we are in the bosom of the Omnipotence. Mere gentleness may be very weak—but while He is a lamb He is also a lion. There is a story of a cruel man who came one day with a little dog in hands, which he thrust into the cage of a great lion to see the mighty beast tear

the defenseless creature to pieces; but, strange to say, the lion did not harm the terrified dog, but took him under his protection and became his friend. He was gentle as a lamb to him, and all his lion strength was used for the sheltering and protecting of his frail charge. This very homely illustration will help us to understand the representation of Christ which we have in this picture.

The Lamb was "standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes." Here we have three other thoughts about Christ. Not only did He appear as a lamb, but as a lamb that had been slain. There were wound marks on Him, telling that once He had been dead. One suggestion of the emblem of the lamb is sacrifice. Lambs were offered as sacrifices in the ancient worship. Jesus was the Lamb of God that took away the sin of the world by bearing it Himself. So even in heaven Jesus shows in some way that once He suffered and died. Thus even in glory the fact of salvation by sacrifice is set forth to the eyes of all. Thus we are always to be reminded of the cost of our redemption. A second suggestion about Christ is in the representation of the "seven horns." The horn in the Bible is the symbol of strength, and seven is the symbol of completeness. Jesus appears there as the omnipotent One, having all power. The other symbol in the picture is the "seven eyes," which are explained in the same

verse to mean the Holy Spirit. An eye sees, and seven eyes represent the perfection of vision, seeing everywhere. The eyes of Christ are in all parts of the earth and on all events. This thought of the omniscience of Christ is terrible to the sinner, but to the Christian at peace with God it has great comfort. Christ is watching over us and is ready to fly to our help and rescue at any point. His eye is terrible only to the wicked; to those who are His friends and are saved by Him, it gives no terror to think of the unsleeping divine eye ever looking down in love.

Then came a vision of prayers—"Golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." There is something very beautiful in this glimpse of how the prayers of the saints on earth appear in heaven. They are not lost in the air, but reach heaven, and are put into bowls to be kept secure. The bowls are golden, intimating the preciousness of the prayers that are put into them. The prayers which are put into the golden bowls are gathered and preserved. Sometimes it is a great while before they are answered, yet they are not lost or forgotten, but are safely stored in the golden bowls. These prayers are as incense, and that shows how they seem to God. Incense was used in the temple worship, and divine instruction was given as to its compounding. When the incense was burned it emitted a sweet odour. The heart-prayers of earth are the true incense. One writer suggests

that the three ingredients in the incense of prayer are petition, confession, thanksgiving. Then divine fire falls upon it, and it ascends to God and is acceptable to Him. It is a very sweet thought that true prayer is as incense unto God. He loves to hear us pray.

There is more than prayer in heaven—there is song. No old song, no song of earth would do, for the world has never before seen any occasion like this. Earth's songs are too dull, too sad to be sung where all is gladness and joy. The song of heaven will be of Christ, and it will celebrate the victory which He won at His death. We shall join in the song because we owe to Christ every joy, every blessing and hope of our souls. Heaven's singing, it may as well be noticed here, will be congregational; no quartet choir will sing for the people, but everyone may unite in the song of redemption for himself. The angels, too, will join in the chorus, and all the universe will unite their voices in the ascription of praise and worship that goes up to God and the Lamb.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN

Read Rev. VII: 9-17

SOME people have the impression that very few will be saved, that the lost will far outnumber the redeemed. The Bible, however, gives no such impression. On the other hand, its representations are that immense numbers of the race will be saved. There are no lamentations in Scripture about empty mansions, or small choruses, or thin ranks in the final gathering in heaven. There is no intimation that the Father's house will not be filled, that the prepared places will not have occupants. Christ's redemption will not prove a failure; there are repeated indications that it will be a glorious success. We believe that all who die in infancy will be saved, and these include nearly one half the human race. In every generation there are millions who have confessed Christ, and doubtless there are always great numbers of true disciples on the earth of whom none know but God. As Christianity spreads over the world we may confidently hope that the number of the saved will be increased every year. There is no doubt, therefore, that

the company of the redeemed at last will incalculably surpass the number of the lost. Some writer suggests that in the end the number of the lost will not number a larger proportion to the saved than our criminals of the present make to the inhabitants of the country. John's picture, therefore, is suggestive. The multitude was one that no man could number; then it was gathered out of all nations and tribes and tongues; this shows that the gospel is to reach all the world, and that every land shall have its quota in the great host of the redeemed at the last.

“I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne.” The posture of this vast company was one of high honour, as well as of great privilege. Whatever heaven may be, it seems clear that the redeemed shall be near to God and to Jesus. Elsewhere in the Scriptures we learn the same thing. The redeemed shall see Christ as He is; His servants shall serve Him and they shall see His face. The Bible everywhere represents the redeemed as dwelling in the very presence of God in heaven. They shall live always where they can have constant communion with Him and where they can enjoy forever the blessedness of His love. Another thought, suggested in this picture, is in the attitude of the redeemed. They stand before the Lamb. This probably indicates readi-

ness for service. Heaven is not to be a place of idle rest, but the saved will have work to do. These powers of ours are not being trained so carefully here to be folded up and laid away in idleness through all eternity. We are to be as the angels in heaven, and they are engaged perpetually in service before God's throne. What our work will be we cannot tell, but we may be sure it will be suited to our enlarged capacities and powers in the heavenly life. Probably we have a hint of the work of the redeemed in the coming to earth of Moses and Elijah at the time of Christ's transfiguration, to minister to Him and cheer Him in His way of sorrow. May it not be that in the eternal ages all the redeemed shall be similarly employed in carrying blessings to other spheres?

“Arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands.” Here we have a glimpse of the redeemed in heaven. For one thing, their white robes indicate purity. There will be no sin in heaven. Before entering the gate every stain will be washed away in the blood of the Lamb, and the saved will be made perfectly whole. We groan here under the humiliation of our faults and blemishes, our many infirmities and imperfections, and our corrupt hearts, which keep our lives always blotched and stained. We never can get clear of this burden in our present life. The holiest saint can never have a perfectly white robe on this earth. But here we have a glimpse

of a day coming in which all who reach heaven shall be entirely free, and free forever, from every stain of sin. The garments of the redeemed shall be white, without one spot. Our hearts shall be thoroughly cleansed. They shall leave behind them all corruption, and shall never again have a sinful thought or feeling or desire, but seeing Christ as He is, shall be like Him forever. The white robes indicate not only purity, but glory. On the transfiguration mount we see two heavenly inhabitants on a mission to earth, and we are told that they appeared in glory—in glorified forms. They were saints in their everyday heavenly dress. Here our bodies are dull, and their beauty is marred by sin; but the spiritual body will be glorious, like Christ's. The palms in the hands of the redeemed probably indicated joy and rejoicing. Heaven will be a place of great happiness and of blessed triumph. There will be no tears there, and no defeat, no failure. Those who have been always sick here will be well there; and those who have failed here in all their earthly life will be among the victors there.

The occupation of the redeemed in heaven will be praise. Their praise will be for salvation. They will never forget in their blessedness that they owe it all to God's mercy, and Christ's sacrifice on their behalf. They will always remember what they were by nature, and how they were redeemed and lifted up to glory at a great cost. We should notice here, also, that Jesus is wor-

shipped with the Father in heaven. Some people tell us that Jesus was only a good man; but would all the redeemed in heaven worship a mere man?

We have a glimpse of the redeemed in heaven. Throngs of angels mingled with them. The angels were not redeemed by Christ, as men have been, for they never sinned nor fell, and therefore they needed no redemption. Yet they are deeply interested in the salvation of sinners, and help God's saints in their earthly struggles and dangers. They are ministering spirits, who on earth minister to the heirs of salvation. They guard the children, and help the poor and tempted, and strengthen weak souls. They are bright, holy creatures, and it will be great joy to meet in glory these friends that we have never seen, but who have seen us have done so many beautiful things for us.

Note well the question and answer of the thirteenth and fourteenth verses: "These that are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence came they? . . . These are they that come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes . . . in the blood of the Lamb." They are not those who have lived in palaces and have never known pain or trial. Heaven's people are those who have had much suffering on the earth. Some of them had to pass through martyr fires; some of them had to endure sore persecutions; some suffered poverty and sickness; some

were wronged and oppressed; some had trial and mocking and imprisonment and cruel scourging. The way to heaven is not always an easy way. "Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom." But here we see how the saints passed through all this tribulation and are not offended by it. It does not leave them crushed and broken. They stand beyond it all—glorious. There is an antidote to all these tribulations: washing in the blood of the Lamb removes all the scars and marks of pain and sorrow.

There will not be a want of any kind in heaven that is unsupplied. The ills of earth are past forever when we reach that glorious country. In this world life at the best is one of hungriness and thirsts. Even if the bodily wants are all met, there are mental and spiritual cravings that never can be supplied here. But in heaven all these desires shall be satisfied. Our minds shall hunger no more, because we shall know even as we are known. Our soul's cravings shall all be met, for in God we shall have all that we need.

Jesus will be their Shepherd in heaven as on earth. He called Himself the Good Shepherd, and we see there that He is a faithful shepherd to His sheep in this world. He seeks the wandering and the lost, and bears them back to the fold. He feeds and leads and shelters and defends all His flock with loving care. He gave His life for the sheep—dying to save them. Here we see Him continuing the same tender care in the

heavenly life. He will never have to give His life again for the sheep in that new home. He will never have to defend them from danger, for there will be neither enemy nor danger there. He will never have to bring back any wandering or lost ones, for there none will wander away, nor be lost. He will be with them as their continual companion and friend. He will be their guide, leading them from joy to joy, from blessing to blessing, to the trees where heavenly fruits grow, and to the fountains of the waters of life.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE HEAVENLY HOME

Read Rev. XXII: 1-11

IN the early pages of the Bible we have the story of paradise lost. In the closing chapters we have paradise regained. Between the two pictures we have the story of Christ's redemption. All we can do at present is to glance hurriedly at some of the features of the restoration. The new Jerusalem is a city. A river runs through it. The waters of earth's rivers are stained and impure, but these waters are pure, clear as crystal. A river is a great blessing in a country. It bears refreshing, fertilization and renewal where it flows. It quenches thirst. A wilderness has no water. This world is described in the Bible as a dry and thirsty land where no water is. A country without water is a dreary place to live. Man and beasts suffer from thirst; vegetation will not grow. Plants and flowers dry up and wither. A river flowing through the holy city suggests that there shall be no thirsts unsatisfied. Nothing shall wither. No flower shall fade. The water is the water of life. This suggests the spiritual nature of the blessings pictured.

The source of the river is suggestive. It flows

“proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” There is a strange legend of the Valley of Chambrá. The water which had supplied it failed. Everything was parched and burnt up. Birds and beasts and men were dying of thirst. The oracle said that if the Princess Reni would give her life for her people, the water would flow forth from her grave. When she heard this she answered, “Here am I,” and gave herself gladly to the sacrifice. Then from her grave there burst out a great stream of water, which flowed into all parts of the valley, carrying refreshment to every plant and flower, and supplying drink for bird and beast and man. This heathen legend is a beautiful illustration of the redemption of Christ. The world was dying of thirst, and there was no hope of blessing. Then God gave His only begotten Son, and Jesus Christ gave Himself in death on the cross, and from His open grave there poured forth the streams of the water of life which carry blessing wherever the gospel goes.

There is more of this picture of the garden city. On the banks of the river grows the tree of life, another feature of paradise restored. This tree of life bears a great variety of fruit. Each month has its own fruits, so that at no time in the year will those coming to the trees go away unsatisfied. You remember that Jesus Himself once went to a fig tree to find food and found only leaves. But this will never be true of the

trees that grow beside the river of life in the New Jerusalem. There is also great variety of fruits, so that every form of hunger will find satisfaction. Every longing, every desire, every craving, every need of every life will be fully met.

Even the leaves of these trees are for use. They possess medicinal value. May we not think of the pages of the Bible, the messages of the gospel, and all Christian literature as leaves of the tree of life, scattered abroad for the healing of the nations? Think what blessings these leaves, bearing on them the words of God, have been to the world wherever they have gone! They carry comfort to the sorrowing, strength to the weak, cheer to the discouraged, knowledge to the ignorant, inspiration, hope, joy, life to all. Doctor Fairbairn speaks of the words of Christ as a handful of sweet spices cast into the bitter waters of this world, sweetening them. These leaves of the tree of life, likewise scattered through the nations, work healing and blessing everywhere.

The new city of God, while it has in it all beauty and good, is characterized also by the absence of things that mar the happiness and joy of the earth. "There shall be no curse any more." Sin is the cause of all curse, and there will be no sin in this holy city, and consequently none of the bitter fruits of sin. "There shall be night no more." Night is caused by the withdrawal of the sun's light, and Christ is the light of this new city. His light never fails and never

hides itself. Night is a symbol of ignorance, of superstition, of all evil, and none of these shall be found in the regenerated life. In the twenty-first chapter of Revelation we are told that there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any pain; and no one ever shall be sick there. These, too, are miseries and evils that follow sin, and when sin is excluded, all its baleful consequences are also excluded.

Those who dwell in this new city shall have privileges and enjoyments of which they have never even dreamed in the present world. "The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein." It is thought to be a high honour to live close to earthly kings and great men. It is an infinitely higher honour to live close to the throne of God. This means continual blessing, everlasting joy, divine companionship. It will be a safe place to live in, for nothing can ever go wrong beside the throne of God, the center of all power and also of all love.

This new life will not be one of idleness. Those who live in this city will not spend all their time in rapturous enjoyment, in ecstatic peace. They will be active. "His servants shall serve him." Love always serves. In what ways Christ's friends shall serve in heaven we do not know. There will be no human need to relieve, no sorrow to comfort, no sick to visit, no hungry to feed in that land of life. Perhaps,

however, they will be sent to other worlds, where such needs shall exist as exist now in this world of ours. They will also be admitted to Christ's immediate presence. Their hearts will be pure, cleansed from all sin, and they can look upon the face of God and live.

Another blessing will be that Christ's name shall be on their foreheads. The name means the character—and the likeness of Christ shall appear in His friends. When they see Him they shall be like Him. It is noted that this divine beauty is said to be on the forehead, where others can see it, and where they themselves cannot see it. This is a mark of all true excellence—those who possess it are unaware of the radiance. "Moses knew not that the skin of his face shone."

These promises are not mere impossible dreams. The words are faithful and true. Not one of them shall fail of fulfillment. They are fulfilled in a sense in the Christian life in this world, in everyone who believes Christ and follows Him. The holy city descends out of heaven from God. Heaven must come down and begin in us, in our hearts, in the present life, or we never can enter into heaven above. The words are fulfilled in a measure also for everyone who, dying in Christ, passes into the presence of God. The full and final fulfillment, however, will be at the end of all things, when Christ shall come again, and gather all His own into one great company in the New Jerusalem.

CHAPTER L

THE GREAT INVITATION

Read Rev. XXII: 11-21

THE character with which men reach the judgment will be their permanent character forever. The man who lives in sin, refusing the cross of Christ unto the end, is making his own destiny. Habits of sin make the whole life sinful. It is this that gives such solemnity to life. The seeds of our future lie in our present. Out of our little acts habits grow; from our habits character springs; and character fixes our destiny, for everyone goes to his own place—that is, the place for which he is fitted by his life on the earth. He who has learned here to sin will continue to sin forever. Eternal death is simply eternal sin, with the punishments and consequences thereof. The punishment of the wicked will not then be an arbitrary punishment, but the natural result of their own choices and acts in this life. Another thing which seems to be taught very clearly is, that this final fixing of character takes place at the close of the life on earth. Nothing but the divine grace can change the tendencies of a sinful life, regenerating it, and

making that holy which was wicked; and when sinners pass out of this world they pass away from the sway of grace, and the unrighteous shall do unrighteousness forever.

“As the tree falls, so must it lie;
As the man lives, so must he die;
As a man dies, such must he be
All through the ages of eternity.”

In the words, “He that is righteous, let him do righteousness still,” there is a hint of the nature of the heavenly home. The same good things we have learned to do here we shall continue to do there. Righteousness is the doing of right things, and the righteous life is one that has been transformed by divine grace into Christlike character. This word says simply that those who have learned here to do righteousness shall continue in the other life to do righteousness. We shall still obey God there, and do His will—only we shall be more obedient, and shall do His will there better than here. We shall never in the smallest thing disobey or cross God’s will. We shall love God there, and love each other, and our life shall be a perfect brotherhood; heaven shall be a perfect home. It will still be more blessed there to give than to receive. They shall still be chief there who shall serve. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, meekness, gentleness, goodness, truth will still be fruits of the Spirit there as they are here. Life in heaven will not be so strange to

us as we think, if we have learned to do God's will in this world. The "everlasting life" begins the moment we believe on Christ. While we remain here it is hindered and hampered by the limitations of earth, but in all true Christian experiences there are intimations of what the full blessedness will be. When we reach heaven, the life begun here will go on, only without hindrance, limitations, or imperfections, forever.

It makes a great difference, therefore, how we live in this world. There is an impression in some people's minds that they can live in sin all their days, and then by a few tears of penitence and a few cries of mercy in a dying hour can change all the course of their life and spend eternity in heaven. This verse does not favour such a view. The future life is the harvest of this life. Men will be judged by their deeds. The New Testament everywhere teaches the same solemn truth. This does not mean that salvation is of works. We are saved by grace, but grace changes the life and makes us holy. There is no evidence in the unregenerate life that Christ has wrought there at all. Of course the deathbed repentance may be genuine, and if so, it will avail. One repentance in the hour of death is recorded in the gospel, but even then the man lived long enough to show that his repentance was true, that his life was indeed regenerated. Christ can any time work the same miracle, changing the heart and transforming the life in an instant; but this

is not the usual way. "To die is gain" only when we have been able to say, "To me to live is Christ."

Only those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb can ever enter the gates of the city. What is it to wash one's robes? It implies sinfulness and guilt in every life, which must be removed before heaven's gates can be passed. Without holiness it is impossible to see God, or to dwell in His presence. The words imply also that nothing but the blood of Christ will remove the guilt or the pollution of sin. We must accept Christ's atonement for the cleansing of our guilt, and depend altogether upon the merits of His sacrifice for our salvation; and we must depend altogether upon the Holy Spirit for the renewing and cleansing of our natures. It must be noticed here also that we ourselves must do the washing. That is, no one is cleansed of sin's guilt or pollution excepting those who voluntarily turn to Christ and accept Him as their Saviour. This shows us at once where the responsibility rests. After all that Christ has done in making at such great cost the glorious salvation for sinners, none can enter into heaven save those who by their own will come to Him and wash their robes in His blood.

It is well enough sometimes to study heaven from the outside. We often talk about what it will be like inside, who will be there, what they will do, how they will live. Here we get a nega-

tive view. So there will be a "without." Some people would have us think there will be nobody outside of heaven, that all will somehow get inside. This verse does not favour such a view. It certainly was not so in John's vision. In another place we learn that heaven has twelve gates. So many gates indicate abundance of entrance room. From whatsoever point you approach heaven, there is a gate before you. Yet the fact that there are gates indicates that there are conditions of entrance, and that men cannot flock in indiscriminately. We have just learned in the previous verse that only those whose robes are washed, or those who do God's commandments, can enter these gates. Then here we see who are excluded. There is admission for the worst of sinners, but not while they remain sinners; they must be washed and sanctified and made meet for the heavenly inheritance. A casual glance over the description of those without shows the kind of company they will be in who reject Christ and heaven. Who wants to live forever in such society? It would be worse even than living forever in a state's prison, among convicts. It would be well, too, to take a glimpse of the excluded characters described here, to see whether we are in danger of being kept out.

The invitation to enter heaven is wide and free. No one will be shut out for want of room, or because there is no invitation for him. Those who are finally lost will be lost simply because

they will not be saved. Through the whole New Testament Jesus labours to show men that His salvation is for all who will take it; it is even pressed upon all. Every page of the book glows with invitations. Even here, as the volume is about to be closed, the invitation is given again in the most earnest, affectionate, beseeching way. As we come to the last words of the Bible, and find this blessed invitation here, we should ask ourselves whether we have accepted it or not.

The Book closes with a benediction. Its last word is grace. It is interesting to compare with this the last words of the Old Testament—"Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." The old volume ended, leaving a threat of curse hanging over the earth. The New Testament, however, closes with a benediction, a message of grace and mercy. As the sunshine floods the fields and hills and waters, so the love of Christ is poured out upon the earth. God's thoughts toward men are thoughts of peace. He is not willing that any should perish, but earnestly desires that all shall be saved. If we are not saved, it will be because we reject the light and love darkness and death better. With this benediction resting over us, shall we not hasten now under its bright wings? It will be a blessed shelter for us. A traveler plodded on, weary and hungry, not knowing where to turn to find food and rest. A storm broke upon him, and he fled under a wide-spreading tree for shelter. Here he found not only

refuge from the storm, but food also, for the tree gave him of its fruits to eat; and rest, too, for his weariness. So the weary sons of men who will flee under this benediction shall find shelter, rest and bread.