

F.B. Hole

**Comments on  
the Gospel of Luke**

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# Comments on the Gospel of Luke

By F.B. Hole

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## Chapter 1

IN THE OPENING verses Luke avows the object before him in writing his Gospel; he wished to bring certainty to the mind of a certain Gentile convert. God had given him a perfect understanding of all things from the outset, so now he wrote them "in order," or "with method;" and we shall see as we proceed that he sometimes ignores historical order to present things in a method that is moral and spiritual. The understanding of that moral and spiritual order, together with having the facts clearly in writing, would bring certainty to Theophilus, as also it will to us. We see here how certainty is linked with the Holy Writings — the Word of God. If we had not the Holy Writings, we should have certainty of nothing.

The first and second chapters present us with facts concerning the birth of Christ, and with very interesting pictures of the godly remnant in Israel, out of whom, according to the flesh, He appeared. The first picture, verses 5-25, concerns the priest Zacharias and his wife. They were "righteous before God," from which we may deduce that they were a couple marked by faith, and consequently they were marked by obedience to the instructions of the law. Yet, when told by an angel that his eld-

erly and barren wife should bear a son, he asked for a sign of some kind to be given in support of the bare Word of God. In this he proved himself to be an "unbelieving believer," though very true to type, for "the Jews require a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22); and he suffered governmentally, inasmuch as the sign granted was the loss of his power of speech. The sign was quite appropriate however. The Psalmist said, "I believed, therefore have I spoken." Zacharias did not believe, and therefore he could not speak.

The angel's prediction concerning the son of Zacharias was that he should be great in the sight of the Lord, and be filled with the Holy Ghost, so that in the spirit and power of Elijah he might "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." In verses 6, 9, 11, 15, 16 and 17, "Lord" is the equivalent of the Old Testament "Jehovah," so the advent of the Messiah is to be the advent of Jehovah. There were to be people on earth who were prepared to receive Christ when He came. The Gospel starts then with a godly priest fulfilling the ritual of the law in the temple, and granted a promise that had to do with a people waiting for the Messiah to appear on earth. We ask special attention to this, for we think we shall see that this Gospel gives

us the transition from law to grace, and from earth to heaven, so that it ends with tidings of grace for all nations, and with Christ ascending into the heavens to take up high-priestly service there. In chapter 1 the earthly priest was dumb. In the closing verses of the Gospel the men who are to be priests in the new dispensation of the Holy Spirit, were in the temple and anything but dumb — they were praising and blessing God.

In verses 26-38, we have the angel's announcement to Mary concerning the conception and birth of her Son. She was the chosen vessel for this great event. A few details of much importance must be briefly noted. In the first place, verse 31 makes it abundantly plain that He was truly a Man; "made of a woman," as Galatians 4:4 says.

In the second place, verses 32 and 33 make it plain that He was far more than a mere Man. He was "great," in a way that no other man ever was, being Son of the Highest; and He is destined to be the looked-for King over the house of Jacob, and take up a kingdom that abides for ever. We observe that there is as yet no hint of anything outside those hopes as to the Messiah which could be based upon Old Testament prophecies. The Son

of the Highest was coming to reign, and that reign might be immediate as far as this message was concerned.

A difficulty occurred to Mary's mind which she expressed in verse 34. The coming Child was to have David as His ancestor and yet be the Son of the Highest! She did not ask for a sign, since she accepted the angel's words, but she did ask for an explanation. How could this thing be? Mary's question and the angel's answer in verses 35-37, make quite plain in the third place the reality of the virgin birth and the wholly super-natural character of the Manhood of Jesus.

There was to be an action of the Holy Ghost, producing "that Holy Thing," and then the over-shadowing of the Power of the Highest — a process we believe — protecting "that Holy Thing," while as yet unborn. In result there was to be a suitable vessel of flesh and blood for the incarnation of the Son of God. He is Son of David truly, as is indicated at the end of verse 32, but Romans 1:3 shows that it was the Son of God who became Son of David according to the flesh. In verse 35 of our chapter the article "the" is really absent — "called Son of God" — that is, it indicates character rather than the definite Person. When the Son of God became the Son of David through Mary, there

was such a putting forth of the power of God as ensured that the "Holy Thing" born of Mary should be "Son of God" in character, and therefore the fit vessel for His incarnation. It was a miracle of the first order; but then, as the angel said, "with God nothing shall be impossible."

The faith of Mary, and her submission to the pleasure of God concerning her, comes out beautifully in verse 38. Verses 39-45 show the piety and prophetic spirit that characterized Elisabeth, for seeing Mary she at once recognized in her the mother "of my Lord." She was filled with the Holy Ghost, and recognized Jesus as her Lord even before He was born, an instructive illustration, this, of 1 Corinthians 12:3.

This is followed by Mary's prophetic utterance in verses 46-55. It was called forth by her sense of the extraordinary mercy that had been shown to her in her humble circumstances. Though descended from David she was but the espoused wife of the humble carpenter of Nazareth. In the mercy shown to her she saw the pledge of the final exaltation of those who fear God and the scattering of the proud and mighty of this world. She saw moreover that the coming of her Child was to be the fulfilment of the promise that had been made to Abraham — God's

unconditional promise. She had no thought of Israel having deserved anything under the covenant of law. All depended upon the covenant of promise. The hungry were being filled and the rich dismissed empty. This is ever God's way.

We must not omit to notice that Mary spoke of "God my Saviour." Though the mother of our Saviour, she herself found her Saviour in God.

In due time the son was born to Zacharias and Elisabeth and at the time of his circumcision his father's mouth was opened. He wrote, "His name is John," showing that he now fully accepted the angel's word, and hence the name of his son was a settled question. At last he believed, though it was faith that follows sight, of the true Jewish type; consequently his mouth was opened. He praised God, and filled with the Holy Ghost he prophesied.

A striking thing about this prophecy is that, though it was provoked by the birth of his own son John, that child was only before his mind in a minor and secondary way. The great theme of his utterance was the yet unborn Christ of God. He held things in their right proportion. This was the fruit of his being

filled with the Spirit, who always magnifies Christ. Had he spoken merely in the enthusiasm engendered by the birth of the unexpected son, he would have talked mainly or altogether about him and the exalted prophetic office to which he was called.

He spoke of the coming of Christ as though it had already materialized, and he celebrated the effects of His coming as though they had already been accomplished. This is a common feature of prophecy: it speaks of things as accomplished which historically are still in the future. For the moment the prophet is carried in his spirit outside all time considerations. In the imminent appearance of Christ, Zacharias saw the Lord God of Israel visiting His people in order to redeem them. The salvation that He would bring would deliver them from all their enemies and enable them to serve Him in freedom, and in holiness and righteousness all the days of their life. And all this would be in fulfilment of His promise and oath to Abraham. Notice how the Holy Spirit inspired him to refer to the unconditional promise to Abraham, just as Mary had done. Israel's blessing will be on that basis and not on the basis of the covenant of law.

In all this we observe as yet no clear distinction between the first and second comings of Christ. Verses 68-75, contemplate things which will only be brought to pass in any full sense at His second coming. True, redemption was wrought by Christ at His first coming, but it was redemption by blood, and not by power; and it is true of course that the holiness and righteousness in which a restored and delivered Israel will serve their God through the bright millennial day will be based upon the work of the cross. Still in these verses the two comings are regarded as one whole.

Verses 76 and 77 refer directly to John, who had just been born. He was to go before the face of Jehovah preparing His ways. He was to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins. This he did as verse 3 of Luke 3 records, in connection with his baptism. Notice that here "His people" acquires a rather new sense — not Israel nationally, but those who were the believing remnant in the midst of that people. All is on the ground of mercy even with John and his Elijah-like ministry. It is, "the remission of their sins on account of the bowels of mercy of our God" (New Trans.).

In verses 78 and 79 Zacharias returns to the coming of Christ, and all of course is on the ground of that same mercy, for the word "whereby," connects what follows with the mercy just mentioned. The "Dayspring from on high" is a peculiarly lovely description of Christ. Alternative words for "Dayspring" would be "Daydawn" or "Sunrising." His advent was indeed the dawning of a new day. Every earthly sunrising has been, to human eyes, from beneath upwards. This one was "from on high" that is, from above downwards. The Spirit of God moved Zacharias to announce by inspiration the dawning of a day that would be new, though the full wonder of it was as yet hidden from his eyes.

He saw however that it meant the bringing in of both light and peace for men; and here he does begin to speak of things that were blessedly accomplished in the first coming of Christ. When He came forth in His public ministry the light began to shine, and the way of peace was well and truly laid in His death and resurrection, and the feet of His disciples led into it immediately after. The prophecy of Zacharias closes on this strikingly beautiful note. In the first glimpse we have of him he is a troubled and fearful man. His last word recorded in Scripture is

"peace." He had seen by faith the coming of the Saviour, like the dawning of a new day of blessing, and that made all the difference.

Verse 80 summarizes the whole of John's life up to the opening of his ministry. God dealt with him in secret in the deserts, educating him in view of his solemn preaching of repentance in the days to come.

## **Chapter 2**

THE OPENING VERSE of this chapter shows how God may use the great ones of the earth, all unconsciously to themselves, for the accomplishing of His designs. The case here is the more remarkable inasmuch as the decree of Augustus was not carried out immediately but delayed until Cyrenius was governor of Syria. Prophecy however had indicated Bethlehem as the birth-place of the Messiah, and the decree of the Emperor came just at the right time to send Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, though subsequently the proceedings were stayed for a time. It was owing to this disturbed state of affairs, no doubt, that the inn was full, and the fact that the infant Christ was born in a stable was a testimony to the poverty of Joseph and Mary for then as

now inconveniences can always be obviated by money. It was symbolic however of the outside place as regards the world and its glory which Christ was to have from the outset.

Verses 8-20, are occupied with the episode in connection with the shepherds. This has become so well known in connection with hymns and carols that we are in danger perhaps of missing its full significance. Shepherds as a class, were not held in much esteem in those days, and these were the men who took night duty, unskilled in comparison with the men who cared for the sheep by day. To these exceedingly humble and unknown men the angels appeared. Heaven's secret concerning the arrival of the Saviour was disclosed to such nobodies as these!

The thing becomes even more remarkable when we compare this chapter with Matthew 2. There the scene is cast amongst the great ones in Jerusalem — Herod the king, his courtiers, chief priests and scribes — and they are completely ignorant of this marvellous event for months afterwards, and then they only hear of it through the wise men of the east arriving, men who were complete outsiders as regards the nation of Israel. The explanation is given to us in the words of the Psalmist, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him" (25:14).

God respects no man's person, but He has respect to humility and integrity of heart before Himself; so He passed by the grandees in Jerusalem, and sent a deputation of angelic beings to wait on a small group of despised night watchmen that they might be initiated into the secret of Heaven's ways. These shepherds were a few of the godly remnant waiting for the Messiah, as their subsequent words and actions show us.

First came the message of the angel, and then the praise of the angels. The great joy of the message centred in the fact that it was as Saviour that He had come. They had had the Lawgiver and the prophets, but now had arrived the Saviour, and He was so great an One as Christ the Lord. This good news was for "all the people," — not "all people" as our A.V. has it. For the moment a wider circle than all Israel is not in view. The sign of this marvellous event was one that never could have been anticipated. Men might have expected to see a mighty warrior wrapped in garments of glory and seated on a throne. The sign was a Babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. But then the sign indicated the whole manner and spirit of His approach to men at this time.

The praise of the angels is compressed into fourteen words, recorded in verse 14 — though few in number, words of deep meaning. They put on record the ultimate results that were to flow from the advent of the Babe. God is to be glorified in the highest seats of His power, the very place where the slightest slur cast upon His name would be most keenly perceived and felt. On earth, where since the fall warfare and strife had been incessant, peace is to be established. God is to find His good pleasure in men. "Good pleasure in men," is the rendering of the New Translation. From the moment that sin came in there was no pleasure for God in Adam or in his race: but now had appeared One who is of another order of humanity than Adam, owing to the Virgin birth, which has been so plainly stated in the first chapter. In Him the good pleasure of God rests in supreme measure, as also it will rest in men who are in Him as the fruit of His work. Wonderful results indeed!

To all this the shepherds gave the response of faith. They did not say, "Let us go ... and see if this thing is come to pass," but "see this thing which is come to pass." They came with haste and saw the Babe with their own eyes; then they bore testimony to others. They could then say, "God has said it, and we

have seen it." — the Divine testimony backed by personal experience. Such testimony is bound to have effect. Many wondered, and Mary herself kept these things, pondering them in her heart; for evidently she did not herself yet understand the full significance of it all. As for the shepherds, they caught the spirit of the angels, glorifying and praising God. So there was praise on earth as well as praise in heaven on this great occasion; and we venture to think that the praise of these humble men below had in it a note that was absent from the praise of the angels of His might above.

We are permitted to see in verses 21-24, that all things that the law enjoined were carried out in the case of the holy Child, and when presented to the Lord in the temple two aged saints, walking in the fear of the Lord, were there to greet Him as guided by the Spirit of God. We have just noted how the great men of Jerusalem were totally out of touch with God and knew nothing about Him: there were those in touch with God and they soon knew, even though no angel appeared to them. The Holy Ghost was upon Simeon, and by the Spirit he not only knew that he should see Jehovah's Christ before he died but also he came into the temple at the exact moment that the child

Jesus was there. So too with old Anna. Her visit was timed perfectly, so that she saw Him.

Reading verses 28-35, we can feel how affecting the scene must have been. The old man addressed God and then addressed Mary. He was ready to depart in peace having seen Jehovah's salvation in the holy Child. He actually went one step further than the angel, for he recognized that God's salvation had been prepared before the face of "all peoples" — the word is in the plural this time. Not only was Jesus to be the glory of Israel but also a light to lighten the Gentiles. It was revealed to him that grace was going to flow beyond the narrow borders of Israel.

It was revealed to him also that the Christ had come to be spoken against. Dimly perhaps he saw it, but there it was — the shadow of the cross when the sword should pierce through Mary's soul. This we learn from his words to her.

We may wonder perhaps that Simeon, having been permitted to live until he actually held the Saviour in his arms, should have been so ready to "depart in peace." We might have anticipated that he would have felt it a tantalizing thing to see the begin-

ning of God's intervention in this way, and yet have to depart before the climax was reached. But evidently it was given to him as a prophet to foresee the rejection of Christ, and therefore he did not expect the immediate arrival of the glory, and was prepared to go.

He announced that the Child would put Israel to the test. Many who were high and lifted up would fall, and many who were low and despised would rise up; and as He would be spoken against and rejected, the thoughts of many hearts would come to light, as they came into contact with Him. In the presence of God all men are forced to come out in their true character, so this feature about Christ was an involuntary tribute to His deity. Moreover Mary herself should be pierced with sorrow as with a sword: a word that was fulfilled when she stood by the cross.

The very aged Anna completes this beautiful picture of the godly remnant in Israel. She served God continually, and when she had seen the Christ, she "spake of Him."

We may recapitulate at this point by summing up the features that marked these pious folk. The shepherds illustrate the faith that characterized them. They accepted at once the word that

reached them through the angel, then their own eyes verified it, then they glorified and praised God.

Mary exemplified the thoughtful and meditative spirit, that waits upon God for understanding — verse 19.

Simeon was the man who was waiting for the Christ under the instruction and power of the Spirit of God. He was satisfied with Christ when he found Him, and prophesied concerning Him.

Anna was one who served God continually, and witnessed of the Christ, when she had found Him.

Lastly, there was great care exercised that every detail concerning the Christ should be carried out as the law of the Lord had ordained. Five times over it is stated that the law was observed — verses 22, 23, 24, 27, 39. This excellent feature, we presume must be credited to Joseph, the husband of Mary — this careful obedience to the Word of God.

We are now waiting for His second advent. How good it would be if in our cases these excellent features were strongly marked.

Verse 40 covers the first twelve years of our Lord's life. It conveys to us the fact that the ordinary development of mind and body, which is proper to mankind, marked Him; a testimony to His true Manhood.

This is reinforced too by the further glimpse we are given of Him at the age of twelve years. He was not teaching the learned men, but He was hearing them and asking them questions in such a way as to astonish them as they questioned Him. Here again we see Him fulfilling perfectly that which is proper to a child of such an age, while displaying features that were supernatural. His reply to His mother also showed that He was conscious of His mission. Yet for many years to come He took the subject place in regard to Joseph and Mary, and thus displayed all human perfection proper to His years.

### **Chapter 3**

THE COMMENCEMENT of John's ministry is very fully dated in the opening two verses. They show that things were entirely out of course, government was vested in the Gentiles, and even in Israel things were in confusion, for there were two high priests instead of one. Hence repentance was the dominant

note in his preaching. Earlier prophets had reasoned with Israel and recalled them to the broken law. John no longer does this, but demands repentance. They were to acknowledge that they were hopelessly lost on the ground of the law, and take their place as dead men in the waters of his baptism. It was "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." If they listened to John and repented, they were morally prepared to receive the remission of sins through the One who was about to come. Thus the path before the Lord would be made straight.

Note how this quotation from Isaiah speaks of Jehovah coming, and how this coming of Jehovah is obviously fulfilled in Jesus. Verse 5 states the same truth as we had in verses 52 and 53 of Luke 1, and verse 34 of Luke 2, only putting it into language of a more figurative sort. Verse 6 shows that since He who was about to come was One no less than Jehovah, the salvation He would bring was not to be confined within the narrow boundaries of Israel, but go forth to "all flesh." Grace was about to come, and it would overflow in all directions. This grace is one of the special themes of the Gospel of Luke.

But John not only preached repentance in a general way, he also made it a very pointed and personal matter. Crowds

flocked to him, and his baptism threatened to become a popular service, almost a fashionable recreation. Things work in just the same way today: any religious ordinance, such as baptism, very easily degenerates into a kind of popular festival. Evidently John was not in the least afraid of offending his audience and spoiling his own popularity. Nothing could be more vigorous than his words recorded in verses 7-9. He told the people what they were very plainly; he warned them of wrath ahead; he called for the genuine repentance which would bring forth fruits; he showed that no place of religious privilege would avail them, for God was about to judge the very roots of things. The axe was now about to cut, not in the way of lopping off branches but of smiting at the root so as to bring down the whole tree. A very graphic figure, this; and fulfilled not in the execution of outward judgment, such as will mark the Second Advent, but in that moral judgment which was reached at the cross. The Second Advent will be characterized by the fire which will consume the dead tree: the First Advent led to the cross, where the judicial sentence of condemnation was promulgated against Adam and his race; or in other words, the tree was cut down.

John demanded deeds, not words, as the practical fruits of repentance, and this led to the people's question, recorded in verse 10. The publicans and the soldiers followed with similar questions. By his answers in each case John put his finger upon the particular sins that marked the different classes. Yet, though the answers varied, we can see that covetousness provoked all the wrongs that he dealt with. Of all the evil weeds that flourish in the human heart covetousness is about the most deep-seated and difficult to deal with: like the dandelion its roots penetrate to a great depth. True repentance leads to true conversion from the old way of sin, and John knew this.

Thus John prepared the way of the Lord, and not only so he also faithfully pointed to Him, and did not for one moment permit the people to think great things of himself. He proclaimed himself to be but the humblest servant of the great Person who was coming — so humble as to be unworthy to perform the very menial service of unlacing His sandal. The Coming One was so great that He would baptize men with the Holy Ghost and with fire: the former for blessing, and the latter for judgment, as the next verse makes abundantly plain. Here again we may notice that the two Advents are not as yet quite plainly dis-

tinguished. There was a baptism of the Spirit, recorded in Acts 2, as the result of the First Advent, but the baptism with fire, according to verse 17, awaits the Second Advent.

Luke records John's faithful ministry and then briefly dismisses him from the record in order to make way for Jesus. The imprisonment of John did not take place just at this juncture, but Luke deviates from the historical order to set the thing before us in a moral and spiritual way. The Elijah-like ministry of John disappears before the One who was to be the vessel of the grace of God; and who was baptized, and thus introduced to His ministry. We are not even told here that it was John who baptized Him, but we are told that He was praying when baptized, a thing not mentioned elsewhere. This Gospel evidently emphasizes the perfection of our Lord's humanity. Grace for man is vested in One who is the perfect Man, and the very first feature of perfection in man is that of dependence upon God. Prayer is an expression of that dependence, and we shall notice in this Gospel how many times it is put on record that Jesus prayed. This is the first instance.

On this praying and dependent Man the Holy Ghost descended in bodily shape like a dove, while the Father's voice declared

Him to be the beloved Son, the Object of all the Divine delight. Thus at last the truth of the Trinity became manifest. The Spirit became for a moment visible; the Father became audible; the Son was here in flesh and blood, and consequently not only visible and audible but tangible also. It is very wonderful that the heaven should be opened, and all its attention focused upon a praying Man on earth. But in that praying Man God was to be known, for it was pleasing that "in Him should all fulness dwell" (Col. 1:19).

The Father's voice having thus owned Him as the beloved Son, Luke now introduces His genealogy through Mary to show how really He is also Man. Matthew traces His descent down from Abraham, the depository of promise, and David, the depository of royalty. Luke traces Him up to Adam and to God, for it is simply His Manhood that is the point, and that was through Mary, for Joseph was only supposed to be His father. He is truly a Man though the Son of God. He is the Second Man, the Lord from heaven, the One overflowing with the grace of God.

## Chapter 4

OUR CHAPTER OPENS with Him returning from His baptism, full of the Holy Ghost. But before beginning His service He must for forty days be tempted of the devil. To this testing the Spirit led Him, and here we see the glorious contrast between the Second Man and the first.

When the first man was created God pronounced all to be very good, but Satan came promptly on the scene, tempted man and ruined him. The Second Man has appeared, and the Father's voice has pronounced His excellence, so again Satan comes on the scene with promptness, but this time he meets Man, full of the Holy Ghost, who is impervious to his wiles. When the first man fell, he knew no pangs of hunger, for he dwelt in the fertile garden planted by his Creator's hand. The Second Man victoriously stood, though the garden had been turned into a wilderness and He was an hungered.

Luke evidently gives us the temptations in the moral order and not the historical. Matthew gives us the historical order, and shows us that the end of the temptation was when the Lord bade Satan get behind Him, as recorded in verse 8 of our chapter. The order here agrees with John's analysis of the world

in 1 John 2. The first temptation was evidently designed to appeal to the lust of the flesh, the second to the lust of the eyes, and the third to the pride of life. But no such lust or pride had any place in our Lord, and the three testings only served to reveal His perfection in its details.

The Lord Jesus had become truly a Man, and in answer to the first temptation He took man's proper place of complete dependence upon God. Just as man's natural life hangs upon his assimilation of bread, so his spiritual life hangs upon his assimilation of, and obedience to, the Word of God. In answer to the second temptation was seen His whole-hearted devotedness to God. Power and glory and dominion in themselves were as nothing to Him; He was wholly set for the worship and service of God. He met the third temptation, in which He was urged to put God's faithfulness to the test, by His unswerving confidence in God. The great adversary found no point of attack in Him. He trusted God without testing Him.

The three features thus brought so prominently into display — dependence, devotedness, confidence — are those which mark the perfect Man. They are very distinctly seen in Psalm 16,

which by the Spirit of prophecy sets forth Christ in His perfections as a Man.

Having been tested by Satan, and triumphed over him in the power of the Holy Ghost, the Lord Jesus returned to Galilee to begin His public ministry in the power of the same Spirit, and His first recorded utterance is in the synagogue at Nazareth, where he had been brought up. He read the opening words of Isaiah 61, stopping at the point where the prophecy passes from the first Advent to the second. "The day of vengeance of our God" has not yet come, but by stopping at the point He did, where in our Version only a comma appears, He was able to begin His sermon by saying, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." It presented Him as the One anointed by the Spirit of God, in whom was to be made known to men the fulness of the grace of God.

This presentation of Himself appears to be characteristic of Luke's Gospel. Though He was God in the fulness of His Person, yet He comes before us as the dependent Man full of the Holy Ghost, speaking and acting in the power of the Spirit, and flowing over with grace for men. What struck the hearers at Nazareth was, "the gracious words which proceeded out of His

mouth." The law of Moses had often been rehearsed within the walls of the synagogue, but never before had grace been thus proclaimed there. But it was not enough to proclaim grace in the abstract: He proceeded to illustrate grace in order that the people might realize what it involved. He cited two instances from their own Scriptures where the kindness of God had been shown, and in both cases the recipients of the grace were sinners of the Gentiles. The Sidonian widow was in a hopeless plight — "without strength." The Syrian soldier was amongst the "enemies" of God and His people. Hence the two cases quite aptly illustrate Romans 5:6-10, for the woman was saved and sustained, and the man was cleansed and reconciled.

This beautiful presentation of grace in its practical working did not suit the people of Nazareth. Gracious words were all very nice in the abstract, but the moment they realized that grace presupposes nothing but demerit in those who receive it, they rose up in proud rebellion and great fury, and would have slain Jesus had He not passed from their midst. The good things that grace brings were acceptable enough, but they did not want them on the ground of grace, since it assumed they were no better than Gentile sinners. The modern mind would probably

approve of grace being offered in the slum, while regarding it as an affront if preached in the synagogue. The Jewish mind would not even hear of it being exercised in the slum!

Thus in a very definite way there was a rejection of grace the very first time it was proclaimed, and this not in Jerusalem among scribes and Pharisees but in the humbler parts of Galilee in the very place where He had been brought up. Their familiarity with Him acted as a veil upon their hearts.

In the light of all this the closing section of the chapter is very beautiful. When men offer a kindness in the spirit of grace and it is spurned with contumely and violence they are offended, and turn away with disgust. It was not so with Jesus. If it had been so, where should we have been? He withdrew Himself from Nazareth but passed to Capernaum and there He preached. His teaching astonished them, doubtless because of the new note of grace that characterized it, and then also because of the Divine authority with which it was clothed.

In the synagogue He came into conflict with the powers of darkness. The synagogue was a dead affair, hence men possessed by demons could be present undetected. But instantly

the Lord appeared the demon revealed himself, and also showed that he knew who He was, even if the people themselves were in ignorance. Jesus was indeed the Holy One of God, but instead of accepting the demon's testimony He rebuked him and cast him out of his victim. Thus He proved the power of His word.

In verse 36 we have both authority and power, the latter word meaning dynamic force. In verse 32 the word is really authority. So we have the grace of His word in verse 22, followed by the authority of His word, and the power of His word. No wonder that folk were saying, "What a word is this!" And we, who have in this day received the Gospel of the grace of God, have equal cause for such an ejaculation. What wonders of spiritual regeneration are being wrought by the Gospel today!

From the synagogue He passed to the home of Simon in which disease was holding sway. It vanished at His word. And then at eventide came that marvellous display of the power of God in the fulness of grace. All kinds of diseases and miseries were brought into his presence, and there was deliverance for all. "He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them." Thus He exemplified the grace of God, for it is exactly the

character of grace to go out to all irrespective of merit or demerit. On God's side it is offered freely and for all. Verse 40 inspired the hymn,

"At even when the sun was set,"  
and surely we all rejoice to sing that,  
"Thy touch has still its ancient power,  
No word from Thee can fruitless fall."

But beautiful as that hymn is, the reality spoken of in verse 40 is far more lovely. Such is the grace of our God.

And the grace that was displayed on that memorable evening was not exhausted by the display. He went forth elsewhere to preach the kingdom of God — a kingdom to be established not on the basis of the works of the law but on the basis which would be laid by grace as the fruit of His own work.

## **Chapter 5**

IN THE PREVIOUS chapter we saw the Lord Jesus coming forth in the power of the Spirit to announce the grace of God, and being confronted at once with man's rejection. We saw that nevertheless He pursued His way of grace unmoved by it. This

chapter now presents us with a series of lovely pictures, illustrating what grace accomplishes in the case of those who receive it. Four men come before us — Peter, the leper, the paralytic, Levi — and a different feature marks each. They follow one another in an order which is moral, if not strictly chronological.

Both Matthew and Mark tell us how the Lord called the four fishermen to be His followers, but only Luke informs us as to the miraculous draught of fishes, which made so profound an impression upon Peter. The Lord had used his boat and would not be his debtor, but grace it was that poured so abundant a recompense back upon him. It was made the more striking by the fact that they had just been spending a laborious and wholly fruitless night. Now there was not merely abundance but superabundance. Where futile labour had abounded, there rich results did much more abound. The only breakdown was in connection with their ability to conserve what grace gave.

Peter's boat went out twice into the lake, once by night, when fish might be expected, once by day when they would not be. The place was the same on both occasions, so were the men, and so was their equipment. What made the difference? One

thing, and one thing only. Christ had stepped into the boat. Peter had his eyes opened to see this fact, and it evidently made the Saviour shine before him in a light that was Divine. Finding himself in the presence of God, even though it was God present in the fulness of grace, wrought in Peter's heart conviction of his own sinfulness.

Now this is the first thing that grace brings with it — conviction of sin. It produces it in deeper measure than ever did the law, and it attracts while producing it. Herein lies the wonderful contrast. The law of Moses, when given at Sinai, wrought conviction of unfitness on the part of the people, but it repelled them and sent them afar off from the burning mountain. Grace in the person of Jesus so convicted Peter that he confessed himself to be full of sin, and yet casting himself at Jesus' knees, he got as near to the Saviour as ever he could.

The next incident, fittingly enough, is about a man, not exactly full of sin, but full of leprosy, which is a type of sin. So full of leprosy was he that he felt himself to be too repulsive an object to count with confidence upon the kindness of Jesus. He was confident of His power but rather dubious as to His grace. So he approached with the words, "If Thou wilt ..." revealing him-

self to be wholly filled with leprosy and partly filled with doubt. The grace of the Lord instantly rose to its full height. All power was in His word, yet He put forth His hand and touched him, as if to wipe out of his mind for ever the last lingering doubt and set him perfectly at ease.

Now here we see that grace brings cleansing, a cleansing which the law did not bring though it made provision for the recognition by the priests of any cleansing which should be at any time effected by the power of God. Here was the power of God at work in the fulness of grace, and it was a lovely sight indeed! We do not wonder that great crowds came together to hear and be healed, as verse 15 records.

Do not miss verse 16. Jesus has taken the place of Man in dependence upon God, acting by the power of the Spirit. Grace has been freely flowing from Him, and He takes time for communion in prayer, withdrawn from the haunts of men, before further coming into contact with human need.

Next comes the case of the man smitten by paralysis and reduced to a state of utter helplessness. Nothing is said as to his faith, though striking and energetic faith was displayed by the

men who brought him, and the Lord abundantly answered it. The Pharisees and doctors of the law, who were present, fill in a kind of dark background to the picture. They had plenty of needs and the power of the Lord was present to heal them, since grace brings its ample supplies freely and for all. They were present however to give and not to receive. What they gave was criticism, and it proved to be wrong! They flung out their criticisms and missed the blessing.

The man got the blessing — power was conferred upon him. This was just what he needed. The man full of sin not only needs cleansing from his sin but also power over his sin, and he needs that power in connection with forgiveness. Evidently in the case of this man his paralysis was the result of his sin, and the Lord dealt with the root of the trouble before addressing Himself to the fruit. This is the way that grace ever takes, for there is never anything superficial about its methods. The criticising Pharisees could no more deliver the man's body from the grip of paralysis than they could deliver his soul from the guilt of his sins. Jesus could do both: and He proved His power to accomplish the wonder of forgiveness, which was outside hu-

man observation, by performing the wonder of healing right before their eyes.

The Pharisees were quite right in believing that no one save God can forgive. But when they heard Him give absolution they denounced Him as a blasphemer. We deduce from it that He is God. We each have to face this crisp and clear-cut alternative, and happy for us it is if we have made the right decision. The healing the man received was given in God-like fashion. He rose up a strong man, able to shoulder his couch at once and march off to his house. He did so glorifying God, and the beholders were moved in the same way. Grace, when displayed, does lead to the glory of God.

In the fourth place Levi comes upon the scene, and he illustrates the fact that grace supplies an Object for the heart. When Jesus called him he was occupied in the pleasant task of receiving money. His mind and heart was instantly diverted from his money and he began to follow the Lord, with the result that we next see him reversing the process, and dispersing by giving to the poor according to Psalm 112:9. Levi invited a great company of publicans and others to his feast, showing how at once his thoughts had been brought into concert with his newly

found Lord, and that he had caught the spirit of grace. Yet Christ was the real Object of the feast, for it says "Levi made Him a great feast in his own house." The Pharisees were entirely out of sympathy with this spirit of grace, but their objections only served to bring forth the great saying, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

All that we have been saying might be summarized in this: — Grace produces conviction of sin, and then works cleansing from sin. Then it confers power, and also conforms the recipient to the likeness of the One in whom it is expressed. Christ becoming Levi's Object, we can see how he began to catch the spirit of his Master.

From verse 33, and onwards into chapter 6, another thing begins to emerge pretty clearly; and that is that grace conducts out of bondage and into liberty. The Pharisees disliked grace and were very strong as to the fastings and prayers and other ceremonies prescribed by the law. The law generates bondage and grace brings liberty: this is taught very fully in the Epistle to the Galatians. The full truth expounded there could not be made known until the death and resurrection of Christ were accomplished and the Spirit had been given, still here we find the

Lord beginning to speak of the things so soon to shine forth clearly. He uses parabolic or illustrative language, but His meaning is clear. Being the true Messiah, He was the "Bridegroom," and His presence with His disciples forbade their being under these restrictions.

Then, further, He was introducing that which was new. In Him the grace of God was beginning to shine out, and like a piece of new cloth it could not be treated as a patch to be put on the old garment of the law. The new will impose such a strain upon the old fabric that it will tear, and also there will be no suitability between the new and the old. They will prove to be wholly incongruous.

Again, changing the figure, grace with its expansiveness may be likened to the action of new wine; whereas the forms and ordinances of the law are marked by the rigidity of old bottles. If the attempt is made to confine the one within the other, disaster is certain. New vessels must be found capable of containing the new power.

In this striking way did the Lord indicate that the grace of God, which had arrived in Himself, would create its own new condi-

tions, and that the "carnal ordinances" instituted in Israel under the law were only "imposed on them until the time of reformation" (Heb. 9:10). But at the same time He indicated that men naturally prefer law to grace — the old wine suits them better than the new. One great reason for this is that by the very fact of giving the law to men it is supposed that they may be capable of keeping it; whereas grace is proffered upon the assured basis that man is a hopelessly lost creature.

## Chapter 6

AS WE OPEN this chapter, we see the Pharisees and scribes attempting to confine the actions of the disciples, and then also the gracious power of the Lord, within the limits of the Jewish sabbath, as they were accustomed to enforce it. This illustrates His teaching at the close of chapter 5, and in result the "bottle" of the Jewish sabbath burst, and grace flows forth in spite of them.

The words, "The second sabbath after the first," refer we believe to Leviticus 23:9-14, and are intended to show us that the "wave-sheaf" had already been offered, and hence there was no objection to the action of the disciples except the Pharisees'

own strict enforcement of the sabbath. The Lord's answer to their objection was twofold: first, His position; second, His Person.

His position was analagous to that of David when he went into the house of God and took the shewbread. David was God's anointed king and yet rejected, and it was not the mind of God that His anointed with his followers should starve in order to uphold small technicalities of the law. The whole system of Israel was out of course by the refusal of the king, and it was no time for concentrating upon the smaller details of the law. So here, the Pharisees were concerned about trivialities whilst rejecting the Christ.

Verse 5 emphasizes His Person. Man, as originally created, was made lord over the earthly creation. The Son of Man is Lord over a far wider sphere. He was not bound by the sabbath, the sabbath was at His disposal. Who then is this Son of Man? That was what the Pharisees did not know, but the Lord indicated His greatness by this claim which He made.

The incident concerning the man with the withered hand follows in verses 6-11. Here again the sabbath question came up,

and the Pharisees would have pushed their technical objections to the length of forbidding the exercise of mercy on that day. Here we see, not the assertion of the Lord's position, nor of His Person, but of His power. He had power to heal in grace, and that power He exercised whether they liked it or not. He accepted their challenge, and making the man stand forth in the midst, He healed him in the most public way possible. The lords of the Philistines attempted to tie the hands of Samson with "seven green withs," but they tried in vain. The lords of Israel were trying to make cords from the law of the sabbath, wherewith to tie the gracious hands of Jesus, and they also tried in vain.

Failing to do it, they were filled with madness, and they began to plot His death. In the face of their rising hatred Jesus retired into the solitude of communion with God. In the last chapter we saw Him retiring for prayer when multitudes thronged Him and success seemed to be His. He does just the same when dark clouds of opposition seem to surround Him. In all circumstances prayer was the resource of the perfect Man.

It is significant further that what followed this night of prayer was the selection of the twelve men who were to be sent forth

as Apostles. Amongst the twelve was Judas Iscariot, and why he should have been included appears to us mysterious. The Lord chose him however, and thus his selection was right. No mistake was made after that night of prayer.

From verse 17 to the end of the chapter we get a record of the instruction which He gave to His disciples, and especially to these twelve men. We may give a general summary of His utterances by saying that He instructed them as to the character that would be produced in them by the grace of God that He was making known. The discourse much resembles the Sermon on the Mount of Matthew 5-7, but the occasion appears to have been different. No doubt the Lord again and again said very similar things to varying crowds of people.

On this occasion the Lord addressed His disciples personally. In Matthew He described a certain class, and says that theirs is the kingdom. Here He says, "yours is the kingdom," identifying that class with the disciples. His disciples were the poor, the hungry, the weepers, those hated and reproached. A description such as this shows that already He was treating His own rejection as a certainty, and the succeeding verses (24-26) show that He was dividing the people into two classes. There were those

identified with Himself, sharing His sorrows, and those who were of the world and sharing its transient joys. Upon the head of the one class He called down a blessing; upon the head of the other a woe. This of course involved a tremendous paradox. The sad and rejected are the blessed: the glad and the popular are under judgment. But the one follow in the footsteps of the Son of Man and suffer for His sake: the other follow in the way of the false prophets.

Having thus pronounced a blessing upon His disciples, He gives them instructions which, if carried out, would mean that they reflected His own spirit of grace. He does not actually send them for the moment, but He instructs them in view of their going out to represent Him and to serve His interests. The spirit of grace is specially marked in verses 27-38. The love that can go forth and even embrace an enemy is not human but Divine; whereas any sinner can love the one who loves him. The disciple of Jesus is to be a lover, a blesser, a giver; and on the other hand he is not to be one who judges and condemns. This does not mean that a disciple is to have no powers of sound judgment and discrimination, but it does mean that he is

not to be characterized by the censorious spirit that is quick to impute wrong motives and thus judge other people.

These instructions were exactly fitted to those who were called to follow Christ during His sojourn upon earth. The spirit of them equally applies to those called to follow Him during His absence in heaven. This is the day of grace, in which the Gospel of grace is being preached, and it is therefore of the utmost importance that we should be marked by the spirit of grace. How often, alas, has our conduct belied the cause with which we are identified. A great deal of gracious preaching can be totally nullified by a little ungracious practising on the part of the preacher or his friends. By the manifestation of love we prove ourselves to be the true children of God — the God who is "kind to the unthankful and to the evil."

It is not so easy to discern the sequence of the teaching contained in verses 39-49, but a sequence there undoubtedly is. These disciples were to be sent forth as apostles before long, so they must be seeing persons themselves. If they were to be seeing they must be taught; and for that they must take the humble place at the feet of their Master. They were not above Him: He was above them, and the goal set before them was to be like

Him. He was perfection, and when their "college course" was completed they would be as He is.

That this might be so, a spirit of self-judgment is to be cultivated. Our natural tendency is to judge others and perceive their smallest faults. If we judge ourselves we may discover some very substantial faults. And faith fully judging ourselves we may be able eventually to help others.

From verse 43 the outward profession of discipleship is contemplated. The Lord may have had such an one as Judas specially in view, in speaking thus. Amongst those who took the place of being His disciples there might be found "an evil man," as well as "a good man." They are to be discerned by their fruits, seen in both speech and action. Nature is revealed in fruit. We cannot penetrate the secrets of nature either in a tree or in a man, but we can easily and correctly deduce the nature from the fruit.

This leads to the consideration that mere profession counts for nothing. Men may repeatedly call Jesus their Lord, but if there is no obedience to His word, there is no discipleship that He acknowledges. The kind of foundation that cannot be shaken

under the testings is only laid by obedience. The mere hearing of His word apart from obedience may erect an edifice which looks like the real thing; but it means disaster in the day of testing.

Let us all bring ourselves under the searching power of this word. The truest believer needs to face it, and not one of us can escape it. It applies to the whole circle of truth. Nothing is really and solidly ours until we yield to it the obedience of faith — not only the assent of faith, but the OBEDIENCE of faith. Then, and only then, we become established in it, in such a way that we are "founded upon a rock."

These words of our Lord uncover for us, without a doubt, the secret of many a tragic collapse as regards their testimony, on the part of true believers; as also collapse and abandonment of the profession of discipleship on the part of those who have taken it up without any reality.

Reality is that, which above all things, the Lord must have.

## Chapter 7

LUKE HAS JUST recorded the choice by the Lord of the twelve Apostles and also the instructions He gave them, particularly as to the gracious spirit that was to characterize them, and the reality that was to mark them. We find that He did not immediately dispatch them on their mission but retained them in His company, that they might further learn of Himself both by His words and His actions. The sending out to serve does not come till the beginning of the ninth chapter.

We have already noticed how this Gospel is characterized by the unfolding of grace. This chapter, we see, carries on this theme by showing very strikingly the extent to which grace reaches. The blessing goes out to the Gentile, to the dead, to the degraded. Moreover the way in which grace is received comes very clearly to light — by repentance and faith.

The first case recorded is that of the Gentile. The centurion showed that he accepted his place among the "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:12), by sending the Jewish elders to intercede for him. The elders, true to their upbringing under the law, would have utterly spoiled grace by representing the centurion

as worthy. His worthiness, according to them, consisted in his kindly attitude and acts towards themselves! This was quite typical of the Jewish mind. Instead of seeing how their own law condemned them, they treated it as a distinction conferred upon them, they became self-centred; they made themselves, and the treatment accorded to themselves, the criterion of others. Judged by their standards this Gentile was a worthy man.

The centurion himself, however, was under no illusion on the point. He confessed himself to be unworthy, and thus manifested the spirit of repentance. At the same time he manifested remarkable faith in the grace and power of the Lord. He held a minor position of authority in the military organization of Rome, yet his power was absolute in his own small circle. He discerned in the Lord One who wielded authority in a vastly greater domain, and he was confident that a word from Him would effect all that was needed. Our language should be similar to his. It is enough that He should "say in a word," and we need nothing beside. The faith that simply takes Him at His word, without reasonings, feelings or experiences, is "great faith" according to our Lord. We see moreover how intimately faith and repentance are connected. They go hand in hand.

From this case we pass to that of the dead man, being carried out of Nain to the grave. Here faith is not visible at all: His compassions and His action fill the scene. Grace and authority are equally and harmoniously displayed. Divine compassion shone forth in the words, "Weep not," uttered to the sorrowing mother. His authority was displayed, in that the moment He touched the bier the whole funeral procession came to a standstill. Then His word of power brought the young man back to life.

Here is One who speaks, and the dead obey Him. "I say to thee, Arise." Who is this "I"? We may well ask this question. The people evidently asked it, and they decided that God had raised up a great prophet in their midst, and tidings of these things reached as far as to John the Baptist in his prison. Now a question, as to who He was after all, was at that time uppermost in John's mind, so this incident as to John's messengers comes in very appropriately at this juncture.

Verses 19-35 seem to be a kind of parenthesis in which we are shown that the display of power exercised in grace, and not in outward pomp, is the proof of the presence of the Messiah. The messengers of John were permitted to see ample proofs of that

gracious power. They saw Him doing what Isaiah 61:1 had said He would do. That was ample proof of who He was.

Then, turning to the people when John's messengers were gone, He pointed out that John himself, His forerunner, had not been a mere nonentity, nor had he come in pomp and luxury. His whole mission had been strictly in keeping with the character of the One whom he announced, who was infinitely great and yet come in lowly grace. He designated John as a prophet so great that there was none greater than he. This of course at once showed that when the people spoke of Christ Himself as "a great prophet" they were falling far short of the truth concerning Him.

As far as John was concerned, though so great, the one that should be least in the coming kingdom of God would be greater than he — not morally, but in the position that would be his. Morally John was very great indeed, and his testimony of such importance that men's destiny was determined by their attitude towards it. The publicans and sinners accepted it, and, thus justifying God, were led ultimately to Christ. The Pharisees and lawyers rejected it, and in due course they rejected Christ. Verse 28 can only be understood as we distinguish

between that moral greatness, which depends upon a man's character, and the greatness which springs from the position into which God may be pleased to call us, which varies in different dispensations.

The Lord now gives in a striking little parable the character of the unbelieving generation that surrounded Him. They were like petulant children who were agreeable to nothing; neither the gay nor the grave would they accept. So the Jews would not bow to the searching testimony of John, nor would they rejoice in the gracious ministry of Jesus. They denounced the one as being possessed by a demon, and falsely criticised the Other. Still there were those who discerned the Divine wisdom in both testimonies, and these were the true children of wisdom.

In the incident which closes this chapter we have all this most strikingly exemplified. Simon, the Pharisee, was amongst the critics, whom nothing pleased, though he invited Jesus to a meal in his house. The poor woman of the city was one of those who justified Jesus, and thereby she proved herself to be a true child of wisdom, and also she herself was justified.

The sorrow and contrition of the woman was nothing to the proud Pharisee. Satisfied with himself he was critical of Jesus, imputing to Him the feelings which he would have entertained toward such a person. As a result he felt sure that Jesus was no prophet at all. Verse 16 has shown us that the common people at least thought that He was a prophet, and a great one; Simon had not got as far as that. They had a glimmer of light; he was totally blind, for false religion is the most blinding thing on earth. However, the Lord quickly gave Simon a sample of the mighty prophetic powers that He possessed.

Simon only "spake within himself." He thought that Jesus had no discernment as to the woman. The Lord at once showed him that He knew his hypocrisy, and read his secret thoughts, by propounding to him the parable of the two debtors. One debtor was involved in liabilities ten times "more than the other; yet, since neither had any assets, both were equally bankrupt. And the creditor treated them alike; there was forgiving mercy for both. This parable was intended to bring home to Simon that though his sins might be fewer than the woman's, he too was utterly insolvent and he needed forgiving mercy just as she did.

Now debtors do not usually love their creditors, yet a sense of the grace that forgives does provoke love, and even Simon could judge rightly as to this. But then, the application was easy. Simon had studiously refrained from offering the Lord the most ordinary courtesies according to the customs of those days. Neither the water for His feet, nor the kiss of welcome, nor the oil for the head had been forthcoming. He had received the Lord in a way that amounted to offering Him an insult; yet the poor woman had made up for it all in abundant measure. He had no sense of guilt, and no love for the One who came in the grace of forgiveness: she had a true and deep repentance, coupled with faith in Jesus, and a fervent love for Him.

So we see how grace flows out to the degraded, and again we see how repentance and faith go hand in hand: they are like the obverse and reverse of a single coin. The grace that flowed out to this woman is the more striking inasmuch as it reached her in a purely spiritual way. She did not come with bodily ills and distresses to be cured; her ills were spiritual; her burden was that of her sins. Grace bestowed upon her an abundant forgiveness, and Simon was plainly told that such was the case.

But the Lord did not only speak of her forgiveness to the Pharisee, He also dealt with her personally as to it. What balm for her weary spirit must have been those four words, "Thy sins are forgiven." The saints of earlier days brought the appropriate sacrifice for each trespass or sin, and then knew that the particular sin was forgiven; they hardly knew such a complete absolution as the words of Jesus gave to her. The onlookers might well ask, "Who is this that forgives sins also?" God was here in the fulness of grace in the humbled Saviour.

Not only did He forgive, He gave the woman the assurance of salvation, and also declared that her faith had been the means of it. Apart from this word, she might have imagined that it had been procured by her sorrow or her tears. But no: faith it is that establishes the all-essential contact with the Saviour which brings salvation. She could indeed "Go in peace," for she not only had forgiveness, which covered all her past, but salvation, which meant a deliverance from the evil that had enslaved her. This is what grace accomplishes.

## Chapter 8

THE OPENING VERSES show the thorough and systematic way in which the Lord Jesus evangelized the cities and villages. He announced the kingdom of God, which involves God's authority being established and man's salvation secured through judgment. It was too early as yet for the Gospel of 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 to be preached, though, now that we have that Gospel, we can still preach the kingdom of God in its present form. The twelve were with Him, and being trained under His eye. The other Gospels show us this, but only Luke tells us how certain women, who had experienced His delivering power, followed Him and ministered to Him of their goods. This comes in very fittingly after the story of the salvation of the sinful woman of the city.

In verses 4-15, we have the parable of the sower and its interpretation. This reveals to us the agency which Divine grace uses to accomplish its benign results — the Word of God. The fruit of which the parable speaks is not something which is natural to man: it is only produced by the Word, as that Word is received into prepared hearts. In our natural condition our hearts are marked by insensibility, like the hardened wayside, or they

are shallow without conviction, or preoccupied with cares or pleasures. The heart prepared like the good ground is one that has been awakened and exercised by the Holy Spirit of God. When the heart is thus made "honest," the Word is retained and treasured, and ultimately fruit is produced.

Verse 16 adds the fact that light as well as fruit is produced by the true reception of the Word. Every real conversion means the lighting of a fresh candle in this dark world. Now just as cares and riches and pleasures choke the word, so may some "vessel," speaking of work and daily toil, or "bed," speaking of ease, hide the candle which has been lit. Every candle lit by the reception of the Word is to be conspicuously displayed for the benefit of others. Let us all take this home to ourselves, for the fact is that if the light be really there it cannot be altogether hid, as verse 17 indicates. If year after year nothing is manifested, only one conclusion can be drawn — there is nothing to be manifested.

All these considerations lead us to conclude how imperative it is that we hear the Word rightly. Hence, how we hear is of all importance. What we hear is of equal importance, and this is emphasized in Mark 4:24. If we do not hear aright we lose that

which we seem to have possessed. This is stated in verse 18, and it is illustrated above, in the case of the wayside, the stony ground and the thorny ground hearers.

Verses 19-21 add a further striking fact: if the word be rightly received it brings the recipient into relationship with Christ Himself. The Lord plainly shows here that the relationship He was going to acknowledge was not based upon flesh and blood, but upon spiritual realities — upon the hearing and the doing of the Word. This thought is amplified in the epistles: Paul speaking of "the hearing of faith," (Galatians 3:2; Romans 10:8-17); James of the works of faith, for "faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). If we consult Matthew and Mark we shall probably conclude that this incident, as to the Lord's mother and brethren, did not take place exactly at this point, but Luke here again observes an order which is moral rather than historical. The Word received in faith produces fruit for God, light for men, and introduces into true relationship with Christ himself. There is a moral sequence in these things.

Now we come, verses 22-25, to the storm on the lake which was so miraculously calmed. Here again we believe we see a moral sequence. He had just pointed out that the relationship

that He acknowledged had a spiritual basis, and the disciples were those who had entered into it. Now they have to discover that relationship with Him means opposition and trouble in the world. The water of the lake was lashed into rough waves by the power of the wind, just as Satan, who is "the prince of the power of the air," lashes men and nations into furious opposition against Christ and all that are connected with Him. The disciples came into that particular storm because of their identification with Him.

It was for the moment a terrifying experience, but one which afterwards must have yielded them much encouragement. It served as an opportunity for Him to display His complete mastery of wind and sea, and of the power that lay behind them. At the moment the faith of the disciples was small. They were thinking of their own safety, and had as yet but little understanding of who He was. When later the Spirit was given, and they saw all things clearly, they must have marvelled at their own obtuseness, that they had so little grasped the majesty of His action. If only they had grasped it, their hearts would have been calmed, equally with the waters of the lake.

On the lake the Lord triumphed over the power of Satan working upon the elements of nature: arrived in the country of the Gadarenes He was confronted by the same power, but much more directly exercised over man by means of demons. Opposition must be expected, but the power of His word was supreme. This man presented a very extreme case of demon possession. It had existed "long time;" it endowed him with super-human strength, so that no ordinary restraints held him; it drove him into deserts and the place of death — the tombs. Moreover he was enslaved not by one demon but by many. For some reason he had become like a fortress, strongly held for Satan by a whole legion of demons; so when Jesus met him there was a trial of strength indeed.

The cry of the demon-possessed man, in which he acknowledged Jesus as "Son of God most high," is strikingly in contrast with the exclamation of the disciples, "What manner of man is this!" The demons had no doubt as to who He was, and they knew that they had met their supreme Master, who could have banished them into "the deep," or "the abyss," with a single word. Instead He permitted them to enter into the swine. This meant deliverance for the man but disaster for the swine.

Incidentally too, it must have meant degradation for the demons to change their residence from a man to a herd of pigs; and this new residence was lost to them in a few minutes as the pigs choked themselves in the lake. Satan would have drowned the great Master and His disciples in the lake but an hour or so before; actually it was the swine, of which he had taken possession by his agents, that were drowned.

Just as the wind and water had obeyed His word, so the demons had to obey. The man was completely delivered and his whole character changed. In the words, "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind," we may see a beautiful picture of what grace accomplishes for men, who today have been held captive by Satan's power. We may also see in this delivered man another feature which stands good for us today. We too are not permitted as yet to be with our Deliverer: we have to go back to our friends and show what has been wrought in us. The more complete the change wrought, as in the case of this man, the more effective is such testimony.

The testimony was lost however on the Gadarene people, who had lost their swine. Pigs they did appreciate and grace they did not appreciate, so they refused the Deliverer. Jesus accepted

their refusal and returned to the other side of the lake to continue the display of His grace there.

The disciples had witnessed the triumph of their Lord over opposition both on the lake and in the Gadarene country, they were now to see further triumphs on the Capernaum side of the sea. The underworld of demons had owned His power as well as the elements of nature: now disease and death are to yield in His presence. It is worthy of note that the one who approached the Lord first was not the first to receive the blessing.

Jairus was a representative son of Israel; death was invading his house, and he appealed to the Lord, meeting with an immediate response. On the way Jesus was intercepted by this unnamed woman suffering from an incurable disease. Her touch of faith brought her instant healing. Though later in coming and irregular in her proceedings she was the first to experience the delivering grace of the Lord. We may trace here an analogy with the present ways of God. While still He is on the way to raise up to life and blessing the "daughter of Israel" others, and those mainly Gentiles, are giving the touch of faith and getting the blessing.

It was only a touch, and it was only the hem of His garment, yet the blessing was hers in full measure — thus illustrating the fact that the measure of our faith does not determine the measure of the blessing that grace bestows — for she was perfectly healed. We also see that a touch in itself brought nothing, for Peter's word of remonstrance showed that many had for various reasons been brought into contact with Him. Only the touch of faith counted. In other words, faith was the all-essential thing, and that we may exercise today, though the touch of faith can now only be given spiritually and not physically.

By His questions Jesus brought the woman to the point of confession. In accord with the spirit of the Gospel the faith of her heart had to be followed by the confession of her lips, and that brought her an accession of blessing, for she got the words, "Thy faith has made thee whole; go in peace." Apart from that word her mind might have been overshadowed by the dread of the recurrence of her plague. Her faith, expressed in the touch, brought the healing; but her confession brought forth the word of assurance that set her mind at ease. How many there may be today who lack the full assurance of salvation because they have lacked courage to confess fully His Name.

At that moment came the news of the death of the damsel, and this furnished a fresh opportunity for the importance of faith to be emphasized. To men death is the dispeller of every hope; yet the word of Jesus was, "Fear not: believe only." To her parents and friends it was death, but it was only sleep to Him: yet the very unbelief of those who bewailed her enables us to see that she really was dead, as we speak. The mocking unbelievers were all put out and only a few who believed saw His work of power. At His word her spirit came again and she was restored to life.

The charge "that they should tell no man what was done" was entirely contrary to all human ideas. Men love notoriety, but not so the Lord. He wrought to make God known, and only faith understood His works, and was confirmed thereby.

## **Chapter 9**

THE DISCIPLES HAD now had full opportunity of learning their Master's spirit and methods and power; so they were sent forth, and verses 1-6 tell us how they were commissioned. "Then He called ... and gave ... He sent ... He said . ..." The order of the four verbs is very instructive. His is the choice and

not ours. But then He not only calls but also gives the authority and power adequate for the service to which He calls. Not until that power is given does He send. And then in sending He gives the specific instructions that are to control and guide them in their service. The instructions He gave them were exactly suited to men who were sent to support the testimony rendered by the Messiah, the Son of Man, present personally on the earth.

The testimony we are called upon to render today is not that, but rather to the Christ who is risen and glorified on high; still any service we can render is subject to just the same conditions. He must call and send. If He calls any of us He will give the power and grace that is needed for the work; and when sent we too must be careful to observe the instructions that He has left us.

The disciples went forth with the power of their Lord behind them, and the testimony thus being multiplied the attention of even an ungodly monarch like Herod was drawn to the Lord. The great question was, "Who is this?" The people asked it and indulged in speculations. Herod asked it with an uneasy mind, for he had already beheaded John. His wish to see Jesus was

fulfilled, but hardly in the way he had anticipated — see Luke 23:8-11.

All details of the disciples' mission are passed over in silence. In verse 10 it is recorded that they returned and told their Master all that they had done, and He took them aside in private. Thus it will be for all of us when we reach Him at His coming. That will mean being manifested before His judgment seat; and it will be in the privacy and rest of His presence.

On this occasion there was very little rest for Him. Desert place though it was, the people flocked after Him, and He turned no one away. He received, He spoke of the kingdom of God, He healed and, when the evening drew on and they were hungry, He fed them.

The disciples were like ourselves: they had much to learn. In spite of having been sent forth as His messengers they had no adequate sense of His power and sufficiency, and hence they judged as to the difficult situation in the light of their own powers and resources instead of judging everything by Him. When He said to them, "Give ye them to eat," they thought of their loaves and fishes — pitifully few and small. They might

have said, "Lord, it is to Thee we look: we will gladly give them all that Thou dost give to us."

How easily we can see what they might have said, and yet fail in just the same way as they did! We have to learn that if He commands, He enables. He did enable on this occasion, and the disciples were employed in dispensing His bounty. Thus they were instructed as to the fulness of supply that was in Him.

Before multiplying the loaves and fishes Jesus looked up to heaven, thus publicly connecting His action with God. In verse 18 we again find Him in private prayer, thus expressing the dependent place which He had taken in Manhood. The grace was the grace of God, though flowing to men in Him.

Having given His disciples this glimpse of His fulness, He warned them of His approaching rejection, and of its results as far as they were concerned. The people were still completely in the dark as to who He was, but Peter — and doubtless the other disciples too — knew that He was God's Christ, or Messiah. This confession of Peter's was met by the Lord's command to tell no man that thing. This injunction must have been a great surprise to them, as up to this point the joyful tidings that they

had found the Messiah must have been the chief item of their testimony. Now however the moment had arrived for them to know that what lay before Him was not the earthly glory of the Messiah but death and resurrection. In breaking the news of this the Lord spoke of Himself as the Son of Man — a title with wider implications. The Messiah is to rule over Israel and the nations, according to Psalm 2: the Son of Man is to have all things under His feet, according to Psalm 8.

In speaking of Himself in this way, the Lord was beginning to lead their thoughts toward the new developments that were impending, though not as yet unfolding what the developments were. Still He did intimate very plainly to them that if death lay before Him, it would also lie before them. This surely is the significance of the words, "deny himself, and take up his cross daily." To deny oneself is to accept death inwardly — death lying upon the motions of one's own will. To take up one's cross daily is to accept death outwardly, for if the world saw a man carrying his cross it knew him to be under its sentence of death.

Verses 24-26 amplify this thought. There is life according to the reckoning of this world, made up of all the things that appeal to man's natural tastes. If we seek to save that life we only

lose it. The path for the disciple is to lose that life for Christ's sake, and then we save life in the proper sense, that which is life indeed. The man of the world grasps at the life of this world and ends by losing himself; and that is loss of an irreparable and eternal kind. The disciple who loses the life of this world is no loser in the end. Verse 26 only speaks of the one who is ashamed. The converse however is true: the one who is not ashamed will be acknowledged by the Son of Man in the day of His glory.

The Lord knew that these words of His would fall as a blow upon the minds of the disciples, and therefore He at once ministered to them great encouragement, not by words so much as by giving them a sight of His glory. This was granted not to all but to the chosen three, and they could communicate it to the rest. In the transfiguration they saw the kingdom of God, since for that brief moment they were "eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). The expression the Lord used — "taste of death" — is worthy of note. It would cover not only actual dying but also the spiritual experience which He had indicated in verse 23. The same thing stands true for us in principle. It is only as

we see the kingdom by faith that we are prepared to taste of death in that experimental way.

Once more we find Him praying, and it is only Luke who puts on record that the transfiguration took place as He prayed. It is a striking fact that it was the praying, dependent Man who shone forth in glory as the King. Long before this David had said, "He that rules over men must be just, ruling in fear of God" (2 Sam. 23:3). Here we see the One who will take up the kingdom and hold it for God, ruling as the dependent Man. All the elements of the coming kingdom were there in sample form. The King Himself was manifested as the central Object. Moses and Elijah appeared from the unseen, heavenly world, representing heavenly saints who will appear with the King when He is manifested: Moses representing saints who have been raised from the dead, and Elijah those raptured to heaven without dying. Then Peter, James and John represented the saints who will be on earth, blessed in the light of His glory.

While the disciples were heavy with sleep the heavenly saints were conversing with their Lord concerning His approaching death, which is to provide the basis on which the glory must rest. Luke speaks of it as His "departure" or "exodus," for it

meant His going out from the earthly order into which He had entered, and His entrance into their world by resurrection from among the dead. When the disciples did awake Peter's only thought was to perpetuate the earthly order, and keep his Master in it. He would have detained Moses and Elijah in it also, had he been permitted to make his three tabernacles. As yet he did not grasp the reality of the heavenly order of things just displayed before his eyes, and he had as yet no proper apprehension of the supreme glory of Jesus.

Hence at that moment there came the cloud — evidently the well-known cloud of the Divine presence — which overshadowed them with its brightness, and silenced them with fear. Then the Father's voice proclaimed the supreme glory of Jesus and marked Him out as the one and only Speaker to whom all are to listen. No Moses, no Elijah is for one moment to be coupled with Him. Jesus is indeed to be "found alone." Though Peter did not at that moment understand the full significance of all this, and therefore "told no man in those days," he did afterwards, as his allusion to it in his second Epistle so plainly shows. It confirmed for him, and for us, the prophetic word, giving the assurance that in anticipating "the everlasting king-

dom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" we are not following "cunningly devised fables" but resting in solid truth.

How great the contrast when the next day they came down from the hill! Above, all had been glory, the power and glory of Christ, with its accompanying order and peace. Below, all was under the power of Satan, with disorder and distraction. The nine disciples left at the foot of the hill had been tested by the child possessed by a particularly virulent demon, and had failed. The distracted father appealed to the Lord, though evidently with but little expectation that He could do anything. Jesus instantly acted for the child's deliverance, and "they were all amazed at the mighty power [majesty] of God." The majestic power He displayed amid the disorders at the foot of the hill was equal to the glory that had been displayed on its crest the day before.

Then once more, just when He had thus manifested His power, He spoke of His death. Said He, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears." What sayings? we may ask, for Luke has not recorded any particular sayings in connection with the casting out of the unclean spirit. The words refer perhaps to the saying on the holy mount, where His decease had been the theme. But

that was the trouble with the disciples at that moment: they could not tear away their minds from expectations of an immediate kingdom on earth, so as to realize that He was about to die. The sad consequence of this is seen in verse 46.

By nature we are self-important creatures, loving prominence and greatness above all else; and the flesh in a disciple is no different from that in an unbeliever. Jesus countered the thought of their heart by the object lesson of the little child, and by words that indicated that true greatness is found where the littleness of a child is manifested, and where that "least" disciple is truly a representative of his Master. To receive an insignificant child is to receive the Divine Master, if the child comes "in My Name." The significance is in the Name, not in the child.

This episode evidently stirred John's conscience so that he mentioned a case that had occurred some time before. They had forbidden some zealous worker because "he follows not with us." They had attached far too much importance to the "us" which, after all, is but a group of individuals each of which is of no importance in himself. All the importance, as the Lord has just shown them, lay in the Name. Now the one who had

cast out the demons — the very thing they had just failed to do — had done so "in Thy Name." So he had the power of the Name and they had the imagined importance of the "us." The Lord dealt gently with John yet firmly. The man was not to be forbidden. He was for the Lord and not against Him.

Luke now groups together four further incidents in the close of the chapter. It seems that the Lord having displayed to the disciples the power of His grace and of God's kingdom, is now instructing them as to the spirit that befits them as those brought under both; and He also warns them of things which would be hindrances thereto.

The first hindrance is obviously selfishness. This may take an intensely personal form, as in verse 46. Or it may be collective, as in verse 49. Yet once more it may be under cover of zeal for the Master's reputation, and this is the most subtle form of all. The Samaritans were wholly wrong in their attitude. But He was going up to Jerusalem to die, while James and John wished to vindicate His importance — and incidentally their own — by bringing death upon others. Elijah had indeed acted thus when confronted by the violence of an apostate king, but the Son of Man is of another spirit. That was the trouble with the

disciples; they did not as yet enter into the spirit of grace — the grace that characterized their Master.

The three incidents which briefly close the chapter show us that if we would be disciples indeed, and fit for the kingdom, we must beware of mere natural energy. An energy which is more than natural is needed if we would follow a rejected Christ. Also there must be no half-heartedness and no indecision. The claims of the kingdom must take precedence over all else.

## **Chapter 10**

THE DISCIPLES HAVING been instructed in this way, the Lord still further extended the scope of the witness that had to be rendered in connection with His presence on earth, by appointing and sending forth seventy other disciples, two and two before His face. This saying as to the greatness of the harvest and the fewness of the labourers, seems, according to Matthew 9:37-38, to have been uttered on another occasion. There, the prayer is answered by the sending forth of the twelve: here, by the sending forth of the seventy.

The instructions which the Lord gave to the seventy are similar to those given to the twelve. There was to be the same simplicity and absence of self-seeking, the same dependence upon Himself for the supply of their needs. They had however additional warnings which indicated increasing opposition from the people. They were told they were to be as lambs amongst wolves, a very striking simile. Yet, in spite of refusal, they were to make it very plain that the kingdom had come nigh to the people.

These seventy had not the distinguished place of the twelve, but nevertheless they fully represented the Lord, as verse 16 makes manifest. This verse establishes the same principle as Luke 9:48, only here the Lord carries the matter back to "Him that sent Me." Humble folk the seventy might be, yet much depended on the attitude of men towards their message. Capernaum and other cities of that day, having this testimony, would have greater responsibilities; and refusing it, would merit severer judgment than cities that had never had such testimony rendered to them.

No details are given as to what transpired during the service of the seventy, and one verse (9:6) sufficed to sum up the earlier

labours of the twelve. We note this because Luke was chosen of God to record the doings of the disciples in the Acts; but that was after the Holy Ghost was given. Before the Spirit was given their work had much less significance, and any light there was in it was eclipsed in the shining of the perfect light in their Master. In verse 17 we pass on to their return at the end of their mission.

They came back with joy, rejoicing mainly in what was more spectacular, the subjection of even demons through the Name of their Master: Now this was indeed a great thing, and a pledge of Satan's ultimate casting out of the heavens. The allusion in verse 18 is not, we believe, to the original fall of Satan but to his final dispossession, as predicted in Revelation 12:7-9. The past tense is often used in prophetic utterances to describe future events. It is used in those verses in Revelation, as also in Isaiah 53:3-9. So the Lord confirmed the authority which at that moment He had given them, exerted over all the power of the enemy, but at the same time He indicated something that went beyond all power exerted upon earth.

He said to them, "Your names are written in heaven." It is more than likely that at that moment they did not appreciate the won-

der of that statement. Later on they must have done so, and we should appreciate it; since it applies also to us. The figure is a simple one. Our names are enrolled in the city or district, where we are domiciled. The Lord said to these men in effect, a heavenly citizenship is to be yours, and that is a greater cause of rejoicing than any power conferred on earth. Luke's Gospel specially gives us the transition from law to grace and from earth to heaven, and this verse is a distinct landmark on the way. It was the first intimation of the truth which comes fully to light in Philippians 3:20, "Our conversation [commonwealth] is in heaven."

In that same hour — the hour of the rejoicing of the seventy — Jesus Himself rejoiced. He saw not only the coming fall of Satan, with the consequent overthrow of all his evil designs, but the Father's action towards the establishment of all His designs. At the basis of those bright designs lay this, that He Himself is to be perfectly revealed and known, and that "babes" rather than the wise and prudent of this world are to receive the revelation.

The Son had entered into Manhood that thus He might reveal the Father to men. And not only this, He is Himself the Heir of

all things. The dependent Man on earth knew that all things had been delivered to Him of the Father. Moreover, the very fact that He had become Man adds an element in His case which defies all human grasp. He became Man that the Father might be known: as Man He is the Heir of all things: yet let no man pretend to fathom the mystery that must surround so infinite a stoop. If we esteem ourselves to be wise and prudent we may attempt it to our own undoing. If we indeed are babes we shall accept the mystery with humble and subject minds, and rejoice rather in all that He has revealed to us of the Father and of the Father's designs.

Having thus rejoiced in His own mission, and in the grace that took up the insignificant "babes," the Lord turned to the disciples to show them the greatness of their present privilege. They were seeing things which had been the desire of the godly of past ages. They saw and heard things which had to do with the manifestation of the Father upon earth, and the doing of a work which would result in the calling of a people for heaven. All this was for the moment private to the disciples.

Publicly there was nothing but conflict. The question of the lawyer, recorded in verse 25, apparently so sincere, was really

asked with an evil ulterior motive. He asked what he should do, and the Lord who knew the man's motive, took him up on the ground of his doing. It was the law that demanded doing from man: hence the Lord's question. In saying that the supreme demand of the law was for love; firstly towards God, and then towards one's neighbour, the man answered rightly. Jesus had simply to say, "This do, and thou shalt live;" — not, "have eternal life," but just, "live." There is no life for earth except the law be kept.

The lawyer set out to entrap the Lord, and now found himself entrapped by his own answer. Desirous of justifying himself, he enquired who was his neighbour; as though he would infer that, granted he had sufficiently attractive neighbours, he would find no difficulty in loving them. This enquiry was met by the parable concerning the Samaritan, and the lawyer was left to judge who was the neighbour. Again the man answered rightly in spite of the antipathy felt by the Jew for the Samaritan. Thus judging, he answered his own question, and was left under the obligation of acting as the Samaritan on the one hand, and loving the Samaritan as himself on the other.

The teaching of this parable however goes beyond the mere answering of the man's question. In the action of the Samaritan we can see a picture of the grace that marked the coming of the Lord Himself. Priest and Levite, representatives of the law system, passed by on the other side. The law was not instituted to help sinners, much less to save them, and had the half-dead man died on their hands, both priest and Levite would have been defiled, and for a time disqualified from the exercise of their office. Like the Samaritan, Jesus was the rejected One, and yet He was the Minister of grace and salvation. If in verse 20 we see the transition from earth to heaven intimated, in this parable we see intimated the transition from law to grace.

In the light of this it is also plain that the Lord Jesus was the best and truest Neighbour that man ever had — the perfect Neighbour, in fact. He was also God, perfectly revealed and known. In Him God and the Neighbour were united, and in hating and rejecting Him, men broke at once and hopelessly both counts of the law.

But not all rejected Him: some received Him. And so there follows, in the end of this chapter and the early part of Luke 11, very happy intimations of the ways in which such are put into

touch with Him. There is the virtue of His word, there is prayer, and the coming gift of the Holy Spirit.

Mary had discovered the power of His word. It opened to her a door of entrance into the thoughts of God, so she sat at His feet and listened. It would seem that, in serving, Martha was only doing the duty that rightly belonged to her. Her trouble was in aiming at much serving: she wished to do the thing in very special style, and this "cumbered" or "distracted" her. Her distraction was such that she spoke in a way that was an aspersion not only on her sister but on the Lord. Mary, she thought, was neglecting her duty, and the Lord was indifferent to her neglect. Martha represents distraction and Mary, communion.

Martha's distraction was the result of having too much service on hand, a thing which itself is quite good. She became careful and troubled about many things, and missed the one thing that is needful. Mary had discovered that all she could do for the Lord was nothing compared with what He had to convey to her. To receive His word is the one thing needful, for out of that will flow all service that is acceptable to Him. It is the good part, that shall not be taken away.

We believe that much of the weakness which characterizes present-day Christians may be explained by this one word — distraction. So many things from all quarters, and often enough harmless in themselves, are presented to us that we are distracted from the one thing of importance. We may not always be careful and troubled about them; we may be merely fascinated and occupied with them. But the result is the same: the one thing is missed. Then we are losers indeed.

## **Chapter 11**

ONCE AGAIN WE find the Lord in prayer, and this awakened in His disciples a desire to be taught to pray. As yet they did not possess the Spirit as we do today, and hence "praying in the Holy Ghost" (Jude 20), and the help and intercession of the Spirit, of which Romans 8:26-27, speaks, could not be known by them as we may know it. At this period the Lord was their "Comforter" and Guide from without: we have "another Comforter," who is within. In response, the Lord gave them the pattern prayer, and added to it an illustration to enforce the need for importunity. If a man will rise at the midnight hour at the earnest solicitation of a friend, we may well come with confidence to God.

The Lord had instructed His disciples to address God as Father and the assurances He gave in verse 10 fit in with this, as also the statements of verses 11-13. The Father in heaven is not to be conceived of as less interested and considerate than an earthly father. He will not give that which is useless or harmful in answer to requests for necessary food. Nor, we may add, will He give what is useless or harmful if we foolishly desire it and ask for it. Many an unanswered prayer is, no doubt, accounted for by this.

Man in his evil condition knows how to give good gifts to his children; the heavenly Father will give to those who ask Him the greatest of all gifts - the Holy Spirit. Here we see the Lord in His teaching leading on to the developments that were soon to come. The Holy Spirit was not given until Jesus was glorified, as we know from John 7:39; but when He was given, He came upon a band of men and women who were continuing in prayer and supplication, as Acts 1:14 records. We live in the day when the Spirit has been given; and so we may rejoice in the fruit of His presence, as well as in the power of the Word of God and of prayer.

In the next paragraph (14-28) we get the definite rejection of the grace displayed, and of the Lord Himself who displayed it; which leads the Lord to unfold the fearful result of this rejection and also to further emphasize the importance of obedience to the Word.

The dumb demon being cast out, the change in the man who had been his victim was impressive and undeniable. Many of the people however adopted the plan of vilifying what they could not deny. The remark about Beelzebub is not attributed to the Pharisees, as it is in Matthew. Doubtless they instigated it, but the common people supported them in it, as Luke records here. Others, shutting their eyes to the many signs already given, had the effrontery to demand a sign from heaven. In His reply, Jesus firstly showed that their accusation was wholly unreasonable: it involved the absurdity of Satan acting against himself. Secondly, He showed that, if true, their accusation would recoil on the head of their sons, if not on their own.

But thirdly, and this most important of all, He gave the true explanation of what He was doing. He had arrived on the scene stronger than Satan. Before His coming Satan had held his captives in an undisturbed peace. Now the stronger One was re-

leasing these captives. His coming presented a test to all of them: they were either with Him or against Him. Not to be with Him was tantamount to being against Him, for there could be no neutrality. Men might appear to be gathering together, but if not with Him it would prove to be but scattering. This is a point we do well to note. There is a great urge today for gathering men together in all kinds of associations and groups; but if not with Christ, central and dominant, it is a process of scattering, and will ultimately be manifested as such.

Verses 24-26 are evidently prophetic. At that moment the unclean spirit of their ancient idolatry had gone out of Israel, but though they were "swept and garnished" in an outward way, they were engaged in refusing the One sent of God to occupy the house. As a result the old unclean spirit would return with others worse than himself, and so their state be worse than at the beginning. This word of Jesus will be fulfilled when unbelieving Israel receives Antichrist in the last days.

Not all were refusing Him however. A woman of the company perceived something of His excellence, and pronounced His mother to be blessed. This He accepted, for the first word of His reply was, "Yea." Yet He indicated something more blessed

still. The truest blessedness for us lies in the receiving and keeping of the Word of God. The spiritual link formed by the Word is more intimate and enduring than any link formed in the flesh. The Lord was leading the thoughts of His disciples to these spiritual verities, and the hearing of the Word is that good part, as we have just seen in the case of Mary.

The Lord now proceeded to speak of the insensibility that characterized the people of His day. They were asking for a sign as though no signs had been given to them. Only one sign remained for them, which He speaks of as "the sign of the prophet Jonas." Jonah preached to the Ninevites but he was also a sign to them, inasmuch as he appeared among them as one who had come up out of what looked like certain death. The Son of Man was about to go into actual death and come forth in resurrection, and that was the greatest of all signs: moreover He was displaying among them wisdom far greater than Solomon's and His preaching went far beyond that of Jonah. Why was it that the people were not moved?

It was not because there was no light shining. Men do not light a candle in order to hide it, as verse 33 says. The Lord had come into the world as the great Light and His beams were

shining upon men. What was wrong was wrong, not with the light but with the eyes of men. This is emphasized in verses 34-36. The sun is the light of our bodies objectively: but our eyes are light to us subjectively. If the sun went out, there would be universal darkness, but if my eye went out, there would be absolute darkness for me. If my spiritual seeing faculty be evil, my mind is full of darkness: if single, all is light. In other words, the state of the one upon whom the light shines is of great importance. The state of the people was wrong, hence their insensibility to the light that shone in Christ.

But, if the people did not receive the light to their blessing, the Lord at least would turn the searchlight of truth on their state. He began with the Pharisees, and the rest of the chapter gives us His indictment of them. The Pharisee who invited Him was true to type; a critic, and obsessed with ceremonial details. The hour had struck for the critic to be criticized and exposed. Nothing could be more trenchant than the Lord's words. As we read them we may form some conception of how men will be searched in the day of judgment.

Their hypocrisy is the point of verses 39-41. Ostentatious cleanliness where the eyes of men reach, filthiness where they

do not. And further, rabid self-seeking lay under their apparent piety. They were full of "ravening" or "plunder." The word, "give," in verse 41, is in contrast with this. If only they became givers, rather than plundering other people, all things would be clean to them, inside as well as outside. Such a radical change as that would imply true conversion.

Verse 42 points out their perverted judgment. They specialized on things that were neither important nor costly and ignored things of utmost weight. Verse 43 shows that love of notoriety and the adulation of men consumed them. Hence they became unsuspected centres of defilement for others, as verse 44 indicates. They damaged others as well as themselves. A terrible indictment indeed, but one that sadly applies in varying measures at all times to those who are exponents of a merely outward and ceremonial religion.

At this point one of the doctors of the law protested that these words were also an insult to such as himself. This only led to the indictment being more closely pressed home against himself. These teachers of the law busied themselves with laying burdens on others. They legislated for others, and coolly ignored the law for themselves. Moreover they were marked by

the rejection of God's word and of the prophets who brought it, though after the prophets had been killed they honoured them in building their tombs, thus hoping to gain the prestige of their names now that they were no longer tested by their words. A cunning device, that! But one not unknown even in our day. It is easy to laud to the skies a century after his death a man that would be fiercely opposed during his life of testimony. The Lord's words imply that what their fathers had done would be done again by the sons. The generation to whom He spoke were guilty not only of the blood of the former prophets, but of the Son of God Himself.

Finally, in verse 52 we find that just as the Pharisees defiled other people (verse 44) so the lawyers took away the key of knowledge, and so did Satan's work in hindering others from entering into the true knowledge of God. They slew the prophets, and blocked the way of life.

The Lord evidently uttered these tremendous denunciations with calmness of spirit. The best of men would have spoken differently. Hence to us comes the injunction, "Be ye angry, and sin not" (Eph. 4:26). We easily sin in being angry against sin. He needed no such command. His opponents thought they

had but to provoke Him further and He would easily succumb. He did no such thing as they anticipated, as the next chapter shows.

## **Chapter 12**

INSTEAD OF BEING provoked by the vehement opposition of the scribes and Pharisees, the Lord improved the occasion by calmly instructing His disciples in the presence of the enormous crowd, that the controversy had drawn together. He had just been turning the searchlight of truth on the religious leaders: He now turned the same light on the disciples and their path.

In the first place He warned them against the hypocrisy, which He had just been unmasking in the Pharisees. It is indeed a "leaven;" that is, a type of evil which, if unjudged, ferments and grows. The hypocrite aims at having things "covered" from God in the first place, and then from the eyes of his fellows. Everything however is coming into the light, so that in the long run hypocrisy is futile. Still, while it exists, it is absolutely fatal to the soul having to do with God in any way. Hence from a moral point of view the warning against it must come in the

first place. For the disciple of Christ there must be no covering of anything from the eyes of the Lord.

In the second place He warned them against the fear of man — verses 4-11. He did not hide from them the fact that they were going to encounter rejection and persecution. If they were to be free of hypocrisy in a world which is so largely dominated by it, they could not expect to be popular. But, on the other hand, if they were to have nothing covered from the eyes of God, they would be able to stand forth with no cowardice in the presence of persecuting men. They who fear God much, fear men little.

The Lord did not merely exhort His disciples to have no fear of men, He also made known to them things which would prove great encouragements to that end. In verse 4 He addressed them as, "My friends." They knew that they were His disciples, His servants, but this must have set matters in a new and very cheering light. In the strength of His friendship they, and we, can face the world's enmity. Then, in verses 6 and 7, He set before them in a very touching way the care of God on their behalf. So intimate is it, that the very hairs of our head are not merely counted but numbered.

In verse 12 He assures them that in their moments of emergency they could count upon the special teaching of the Holy Ghost. They would have no need to prepare an elaborate defence when arraigned before the authorities. The hatred and opposition of men was to lie as a liability upon them: but what marvellous assets are these — the friendship of Christ, the care of God, the teaching of the Holy Ghost. And in addition to this, their confession of Christ before hostile men would be rewarded by His confession of them before holy angels.

At this point in His discourse the Lord was interrupted by a man who wished Him to interfere on his behalf in a matter of money. Had He been the social reformer or socialist, that some imagine Him to have been, here was the opportunity for Him to have laid down correct rules for the division of property. He did nothing of the kind: instead, He unmasked the covetousness which had led to man's request, and spoke the well-known parable concerning the rich fool. To reconstruct his barns, so as to conserve all the fruits given to him by the bounty of God, was just ordinary prudence. To lay all up for himself, and to neglect all the Divine riches for the soul, was the substance of his folly.

The rich fool was filled with covetousness, since he regarded all his goods as guaranteeing the fulfilment of his programme — "take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." This is precisely the programme of the average man of the world today — plenty of leisure, plenty to eat and drink, plenty of fun and amusement.

Now the believer is "rich toward God," as verse 32 makes very plain. So, when the Lord resumed His discourse to His disciples, in verse 22, He began to relieve their minds of all those cares which are so natural to us. Since we are enriched with the kingdom, no covetousness is to characterize us; and we are to be burdened with no care, since God's care on our behalf is all-sufficient. His words were, "Your Father knows." Thus He taught His disciples to know God as One who took a fatherly interest in them, and in all their needs as relating to this life.

But this He did, in order that they might be set free in spirit to pursue things that at the present moment lie outside this life. There is no contradiction between verses 31 and 32. The kingdom is given to us and yet we are to seek it. We must seek it because it is not yet in manifestation; consequently it is not found in the things of this life, but lies in the spiritual and

moral realities connected with the souls of those who are brought under the Divine authority. Nevertheless the kingdom is to be a manifested reality in this world, and the title-deeds of it are already sure to the people of God. As our thoughts and our lives today are filled with the things of God and the service of God, we seek the kingdom of God.

Hence the lives of the disciples were to run on lines diametrically opposed to those of the votaries of this world. Instead of laying up goods for an easy time of pleasure, the disciple is to be one who is a giver, one who lays up treasure in heaven, one whose loins are girded for activity and service, and whose light of testimony is shining. He is, in fact, to be like a man waiting for the return of his master. We have already noticed the things which are not to characterize us: here we have the things which are to characterize us.

As servants we are to be waiting for our Lord, and not only waiting but "watching" (verse 37), "ready" (verse 40), and "doing" (verse 43) — doing that which is our allotted task. The time of reward will be when our Lord returns. Then the Lord will Himself undertake to minister to the full blessing of those who have watched for Him. This, which we find in verse 37,

indicates a reward of a general sort. Verse 44 speaks of a reward of a more special sort to be given to those marked by faithful and diligent service in their Master's interests.

The Lord's discourse to His disciples extends to the end of verse 53. A few salient points are these:

1. Heaven is again set before the disciples. In Luke 10, as we noticed, they are instructed that their citizenship is to be in the heavens. Now they are taught so to act that their treasure may be in heaven, and consequently their heart there too. They are to live on principles altogether opposed to those governing the rich fool.
2. The Lord assumes His rejection all through, and speaks of it yet more plainly towards the end — verses 49-53. "Fire" is symbolic of that which searches and judges, and it had been already kindled by His rejection. By His "baptism" He indicated His death, and until that was accomplished He was "straitened," that is, narrowed up, or restrained. Only when expiation had been accomplished could love and righteousness flow forth in full power. But then, the fire being kindled and the baptism accomplished, all would be brought to an issue, and the

line of demarcation clearly drawn. He would become the test, and division take place even in the most intimate circles. In the anticipation of all this, the Lord assumes His absence, and consequently speaks freely of His second coming.

3. To Peter's question (verse 41) the Lord did not give a direct answer. He did not definitely limit His remarks to the small circle of His disciples, nor enlarge the circle to embrace the thousands of Israel who were standing round. Instead He rested the whole weight of His words upon the responsibility of His hearers. If men were in the place of His servants — no matter how they got there — they would be recompensed according to their works, whether they proved to be faithful or evil. The evil servant does not desire the presence of the Lord, and consequently in his mind he defers His coming. Being thus wrong in relation to the Master, he becomes wrong in his relations with his fellow-servants, and wrong in his personal life. When the Lord comes his portion will be with the unbelievers, inasmuch as he has proved himself to be only an unbeliever. Verses 47 and 48 clearly show that penalty as well as reward will be

graduated with equity in keeping with the degree of responsibility.

4. The marks of the true servant are that he devotes himself to his Master's interests while He is absent, and he waits for his reward until He returns. Three times in this discourse does the Lord refer to eating and drinking, as a figure of having a good time. The worldling has his good time of merriment (verse 19), which ends in death. The false servant has his good time when he begins "to eat and drink, and to be drunken" (verse 45), which ends in disaster at the coming of his Master. The worldling was not only merry; he was drunk, which is worse. As a matter of fact, when unconverted men take the place of being servants of God, they seem to fall more easily under the intoxicating influence of seductive religious and philosophic notions than anyone else. The true servant waits for his Master, who will make him to sit down to eat and drink and be the Servant of his joy (verse 37). His good time will be then.

In verse 54 the Lord turned from His disciples to the people with words of warning. They were in a most critical position

and did not know it. They were well able to read the signs of the weather, but unable to read the signs of the time. By their rejection of the Lord they were forcing Him into the part of their "adversary," that is, the opposing party in a law-suit. If they persisted in their attitude, and the case came before the Judge of all, they would find themselves altogether in the wrong and the penalty to the uttermost would come upon them. They would have to pay "the very last mite."

## **Chapter 13**

JUST AT THAT moment some of those present mentioned the case of certain unhappy men of Galilee, who had paid the extreme penalty under Pilate. They had the impression that they were sinners of the deepest dye. The Lord charged home upon His hearers that their own guilt was just as great, and that they too would perish, and He cited the further case of the eighteen slain by the fall of the tower at Siloam. In the popular view these were exceptional happenings indicating exceptional wickedness. The people listening to Him were committed to worse wickedness by failing to understand their opportunity; and, rejecting Him, they would not escape. Thus He warned them of the retribution coming upon them.

In the parable of the fig tree we have the ground of the retribution stated (verses 6-10). God had every right to expect fruit from the people; He sought it but found none. Then for one year there was to be ministry to the tree instead of demand from the tree. Jesus was amongst them, ministering to them the grace of God instead of pressing home the demands of the law. If there was no response to that, then the blow must fall. In all this His teaching flows on from the end of chapter 12: there is no real break between the chapters.

Now comes the beautiful incident, verses 10-17, in which is set forth figuratively what the grace will accomplish, where it is received. The poor woman, though bowed together and helpless, was one who waited upon the service of God in the synagogue. Her physical condition was an apt figure of the spiritual plight of many. They were full of spiritual infirmity, and the law they found to be an oppressive yoke, so much so that under its weight they were bowed together, unable to straighten themselves and look up.

This woman was a "daughter of Abraham," that is, a true child of faith - see Galatians 3:7. Yet Satan had a hand in her sad state, taking advantage of her infirmity. Moreover the ruler of

the synagogue would have used the ceremonial law to hinder her being healed. But the Lord brushed all this aside. By His Word, and by His personal touch, He wrought her immediate deliverance. Many there are who would say, "With me it was law, and infirmity, and hopeless bondage, and the power of Satan, until Christ intervened in the might of His grace: then what a change!" Deliverances such as these shame the adversaries and fill many with rejoicing. They are indeed, "glorious things that were done by Him."

At this point the Lord showed that even the introduction of the grace and power of the kingdom was not going to result in an absolutely perfect state of things. The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven, brought in here, indicate that, while there would be much growth and expansion in the outward form of the kingdom, it would be accompanied by undesirable elements, and even by corruption.

With verse 22 of our chapter a distinct break comes from an historical point of view. The Lord is now seen journeying up to Jerusalem, teaching in the cities and villages as He went. But though this is so, there does not seem to be any marked break in His teaching recorded. The question in verse 23, seems to

have been prompted by curiosity, and in reply the Lord gave a word of instruction and warning which was much in keeping with what has gone just before. If the incoming of the grace of the kingdom was going to result in the mixed condition of things, pictured in the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven, then the narrow way of life must be sought with much sincerity and earnestness.

The word "Strive," in verse 24, does not signify work of any kind but earnestness of such intensity as to be almost an agony. It is as though He said, "Agonize to enter in at the narrow gate while the opportunity lasts." Many seek a wider entrance through things of a ceremonial sort, as indicated in verse 26. But only that which is personal and spiritual will avail. There is no real entrance save through the narrow way of repentance. So again here the Lord shows the futility of a merely outward religion. There must be inward reality.

The parables of verses 18-21 show there will be mixture in the kingdom in its present form; but verse 28 shows that in its coming form there will be none. Then the patriarchs will be in it and the mere ceremonialists thrust out. Verse 29 gives an intimation of the calling of the Gentiles that was impending, for

grace was about to go out world-wide with mighty effects. Grace, as we saw much earlier in this Gospel, cannot be confined within Jewish limits or forms. Like new wine it will burst the bottles. The Jew was first historically, but in the presence of grace his ingrained legalism often hindered him, so that he came in last. The Gentile, not hindered thus, becomes the first when grace is in question.

The chapter closes on a very solemn note. Now it is not the Jew but Herod who comes up for judgment. Herod hid his animosity with the cunning of a fox, but Jesus knew him through and through. He knew also that His own life, characterized by mercy for man, was to be perfected by death and resurrection. The hatred of Herod was however a small thing. The great thing was the rejection of Christ, and of all the grace that was in Him, by Jerusalem. They were the people that God had appealed to by the prophets, and that now He would gather together by His Son. The figure used is a very beautiful one. The prophets had recalled them to their duties under the broken law, while predicting Messiah's coming. Now He was come in the fulness of grace, and the shelter of His protecting wings might have been theirs. All however was in vain.

Jerusalem boasted of the beautiful house which was in the midst of her. Jesus had spoken of it earlier as "My Father's house," now He disowns it as "your house," and He leaves it to them desolate and empty. Jerusalem had missed her opportunity, and soon would not see her Messiah until the cry of Psalm 118:26 is heard, which proceeds, "out of the house of the Lord." That cry will not be heard on the lips of Jerusalem until the day of His second advent.

## **Chapter 14**

IN THE CLOSING verses of the previous chapter the Lord accepted His rejection and foretold its results for Jerusalem; yet He did not cease His activities in grace nor His teachings of grace, as the opening part of this chapter shows. The Pharisees wished to use their law of the sabbath as a cord wherewith to tie up His hands of mercy and restrain them from action. He broke their rope and showed that He would at least have as much mercy on the afflicted man as they were accustomed to show to their domestic animals. His grace abounded above all their legal prejudice.

From verse 7 Luke resumes the account of His teachings, and we do not find any further record of His works until we come to Luke 17:11. In the first place, the Lord emphasized the behaviour which should characterize those who are the recipients of grace. Fallen human nature is pushful and self-assertive, but grace can only be received as humility is manifested. The guest invited to a wedding enters the feast as a matter of bounty and not as of right or of merit, and should behave accordingly. It may be remarked that in worldly society today bold self-assertiveness would not be considered good form. We admit that, and it is a witness to the way in which Christian ideals still prevail. In pagan circles such pushfulness would be applauded, and we shall see it increasingly manifested as pagan ideals prevail.

The abasement of the self-exalted and the exaltation of the humbled is sometimes seen in this life, but it will be fully seen when the One, who in supreme measure humbled Himself, even to the death of the cross, is highly exalted in public, and every knee bows before Him. In verse 11 we can discern the two Adams. The first attempted to exalt himself and fell: the Last humbled Himself, and sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

In the three verses which follow we find the Lord instructing not the guest but the host. He too is to act in the spirit which befits grace. Human nature is selfish even in its benefactions, and will issue its invitations with a view to future profit. If, under the influence of grace, we think of those who have nothing to offer us, we aim at no earthly recompense. There is recompense however even for the actions of grace, but that is found in the resurrection world which lies ahead of us.

Teachings such as these moved someone to ejaculate, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." This was said very probably under the impression that entrance into the kingdom was a matter of great difficulty, and the one to eat bread there must be a particularly fortunate person. This remark led the Lord to give the parable of the "great supper," in which He showed that the door into the kingdom is to be opened to all, and that if any do not enter it is their own fault. In this parable there is a prophetic element; that is, the Lord looked forward and spoke of things which have their fulfilment in the day in which we live. It is pre-eminently the parable of the Gospel.

"A certain man made a great supper and bade many." The cost and labour was his; the benefit was to be conferred upon many.

Those first invited were people who were already possessed of something — a piece of ground, oxen, a wife. These represent the Jews with their religious leaders in the land, who first heard the message. Taken as a whole they refused the invitation, and it was the religious privileges they already possessed that blinded them to the value of the Gospel offer.

When their refusal was reported by the servant, the master is represented as "being angry." In Hebrews 10:28-29, the doing of "despite to the Spirit of grace" is said to be worthy of "sorer punishment" than the despising of Moses' law. What we have here is in keeping with that. The anger of the master did indeed mean that none of those who thus despised his invitation should taste of his supper, as verse 24 states, yet it did not shut up his bowels of kindness. The servant was rather bidden to go out quickly and gather in the poor and needy — those most disqualified from a human standpoint.

But these were to be gathered from "the streets and lanes of the city;" so they represent, we judge, the poor and afflicted and undeserving of Israel — the publicans and sinners, as contrasted with the scribes and Pharisees. The Lord Himself was now turning to these, and amongst such the work continued into the

days recorded in the earlier chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. Then the moment arrived when the invitation had been fully declared amongst them, and though many responded, the happy announcement was made by the servant, "Yet there is room."

This led to an extension of the kindly invitation. Still the word is "Go out," and now the poor derelicts of the highways and hedges, outside the bounds of the city, are to be brought in, to fill the house. This pictures the going forth of the Gospel to the Gentiles. It carries us to the end of Acts, where we have Paul saying, "The salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles, and ... they will hear it."

The parable definitely sets forth the matter from God's side rather than man's. He makes the supper, He sends the Servant, He has His own way, and fills His house in spite of man's perversity. The Servant He sends is the Holy Spirit, for no one less than He can wield a power which is absolutely compelling. The under-servants, even so great an one as the Apostle Paul, cannot go beyond the persuading of men (see 2 Cor. 5:11); only the Spirit of the living God can so effectually work in the

hearts of men as to "compel them to come in." But this, blessed be God, is what He does, and has done for each of us.

Hearing things such as these, great multitudes went with Him. Many there are who like to hear of something which is to be had for nothing. The Lord turned, and set before these the conditions of discipleship. The grace of God imposes no conditions, but the Gospel which announces that grace does conduct our feet into the path of discipleship, which can only be trodden rightly as we submit to very stringent conditions. Four are mentioned here.

1. The Master must be supreme in the affections of the disciple; so much so that all other loves must be as hatred compared with it.
2. There must be the bearing of the cross in our following of Him; that is, a readiness to accept a death sentence as from the world.
3. There must be a counting of the cost as regards our resources; a correct appraisal of all that is ours in the Christ whom we follow.
4. There must equally be a correct appraisal of the powers arrayed against us.

If we do not reckon rightly in either of these directions we shall very likely go beyond our measure, on the one hand, or be filled with fear, and compromise with the adversary, on the other. If, as verse 33 says, we do indeed forsake all that we have, we shall be wholly cast upon the resources of the great Master whom we follow, and then the path of discipleship becomes gloriously possible for us.

Now the true disciple is salt; and salt is good. In Matthew 5, we find Jesus saying, "Ye are the salt of the earth" (ver. 13), but He said that to "disciples" (ver. 1). If the disciple compromises he becomes like salt that has lost its savour, and he is fit for nothing. What a word for us! Grace has called us, and our feet have been placed in the path of discipleship. Are we complying with its solemn conditions, so that we become disciples indeed? May we indeed have ears to hear!

## **Chapter 15**

FROM THE TWO verses that open this chapter, it would seem that these words about grace and discipleship drew the publicans and sinners toward Him, while repelling the Pharisees and scribes. He did indeed receive sinners and eat with them: such

action is according to the very nature of grace. The Pharisees flung out the remark as a taunt. The Lord accepted it as a compliment, and proceeded by parables to show that He not only received sinners but positively sought them, and also to demonstrate what kind of reception sinners get when they are received.

First the parable of the lost sheep. Here we see in the shepherd a picture of the Lord Himself. The ninety and nine, who represent the Pharisee and scribe class, were left not in the fold but in the wilderness — a place of barrenness and death. The one sheep that was lost represents the publican and sinner class; those who are lost, and know it — the "sinner that repents." The Shepherd finds the sheep; the labour and toil is His. Having found it, He secures it and brings it home. His shoulders become its security. He brings it home, and then His joy begins. Never does He have to say, "Sorrow with Me, for I have lost My sheep which was found."

It is impossible to find on earth the "ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance," though sadly easy to find ninety and nine who imagine themselves to be such. Yet if they could be found there is more joy in heaven over one repentant

sinner than there could be over them. All the myriads of holy angels in heaven have never caused such joy as one repentant sinner. What astounding grace this is!

The parable of the lost piece of silver pursues the same general theme, but with a few special details. The woman with her operations in the house represents the subjective work of the Spirit in the souls of men, rather than the objective work of Christ. The Spirit lights a candle within the dark heart and creates the disturbance which ends in the finding of the silver. The joy is here said to be in the presence of the angels; that is, it is not the joy of the angels but of the Godhead, before whom they stand.

Then follows the parable of the "prodigal son." The opening words are very significant. The Lord had been saying, "What man of you ... doth not ... go after?" "What woman ... doth not ... seek diligently?" He could not now say, "What man of you," if he have a prodigal son and he returns, will not "run and fall on his neck and kiss him"? We doubt if any man would go to the lengths of the father of this parable: the great majority of men certainly would not. This parable sets forth the grace of God the Father. Once more it is a picture of the sinner who re-

pents, and we are now permitted to see in parabolic form the depths from which the sinner is raised, and the heights to which he is lifted according to the Father's heart, by the Gospel.

In the best robe we see the symbol of our acceptance in the Beloved: in the ring the symbol of an eternal relationship established: in the shoes the sign of sonship, for servants entered the houses of their masters with bare feet. The fatted calf and the merriment set forth the gladness of heaven and the Father's joy in particular. The son had been dead morally and spiritually but now he was as one risen into a new life.

If the younger son pictures the repentant sinner, the elder son accurately represents the spirit of the Pharisee. The one was hungry and went in: the other was angry and stayed out. The arrival of grace always divides men into these two classes — those who know they are worthy of nothing, and those who imagine themselves to be worthy of more than they have got. Said the elder son, "Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." So he too found his society and pleasure in a circle of friends outside his father's circle. The only difference was in the character of the friends — the younger son's were disreputable, while his presumably, were

respectable. The self-righteous religionist is no more in real communion with the heart of the Father than is the prodigal; and he ends up still outside while the prodigal is brought within.

## **Chapter 16**

THESE PARABLES WERE spoken to the Pharisees but the one that opens this chapter was spoken to the disciples. They were instructed by it as to the position in which men find themselves before God, and the behaviour that befits them in that position. We are stewards, and have been unfaithful in our stewardship. The steward was accused to his master that he had "wasted his goods." This phrase gives us a link with the previous parable, for the younger son had "wasted his substance with riotous living." All that we possess has reached us from the hand of God, so that if we squander upon ourselves that which we may have, we are really wasting our Master's goods.

The unfaithful steward found himself under notice to quit, whereupon he resolved he would use certain opportunities, still within his reach in the present, with a view to his advantage in the future. Verse 8 is the close of the parable. The steward was

unjust — the Lord plainly calls him so — yet his lord could not but commend the subtle wisdom with which he had acted, in spite of it being to his own detriment. In matters of worldly shrewdness the children of this age excel the children of God.

Verses 9-13 are the application of the parable to us all. Earthly possessions, money and the like, are "the mammon of unrighteousness," because they are the things in which man's unrighteousness is mostly displayed, though in themselves they are not intrinsically unrighteous. We are to use the mammon in such a way as to lay up "a good foundation against the time to come" (see 1 Tim. 6:17-19), or as our verse says, "when it fails ye may be received into the eternal tabernacles" (New Trans.).

Verse 9 therefore shows that we are to act upon the principle so wisely adopted by the steward; verse 10 shows that we are to wholly differ from him in this, that what he did in unfaithfulness we are to do in all good fidelity. The "unrighteous mammon," which men struggle to obtain so earnestly, and often so dishonestly, is after all "that which is least." It is not properly ours at all but "another man's," inasmuch as "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." But there is "the true" mammon, which the Lord speaks of as, "that which is your own." If

we truly realize that our own things are those which we have in Christ, we shall use all that we have in this life — money, time, opportunities, mental powers — with a view to our Master's interests. At all events, we cannot serve two masters. Either God or mammon will dominate us. Let us see to it that God dominates us.

Though all this was said to the disciples, there were Pharisees listening and they openly mocked Him. To their covetous minds such teaching was ridiculous. They were great sticklers for the law, and the law had never stipulated things like these. The Lord's answer to them was twofold. First, they were all for that which was outward before the eyes of men, merely concerning themselves with that which men esteemed. They ignored the God who is concerned with the state of men's hearts, and whose thoughts are wholly opposed to men's. Ultimately God's thoughts will be established and men's thoughts overthrown.

But second, the law in which they boasted was being superseded by the kingdom of God. The law had stipulated the things necessary for man's life on earth, and the prophets had predicted God's coming kingdom on earth. The time of the vis-

ible, world-wide kingdom was not yet, but nevertheless it was being introduced in another form by preaching, and already in this spiritual form men were beginning to press into it. The Pharisees were blind to all this, and were staying outside. But, though the law was being superseded in this way, not one tittle of it was going to fail. In its own domain it stands in all its majesty. It is "holy, just and good," and its moral enactments still remain. The particular enactment which the Lord emphasized in verse 18, was no doubt a tremendous thrust at the Pharisees, who were very slack in such matters, while busily occupied with their tithes of mint and anise and cummin.

This home-thrust was followed by the tremendous parable of verses 19-31, if indeed it is a parable. The Lord uses a few figurative expressions such as "Abraham's bosom," but He relates it all as fact. Verses 19-22 relate very ordinary facts of this life ending in death and burial, and there for us the curtain drops. As we begin verse 23 the Lord lifts the curtain and brings into our view the things which lie beyond.

The rich man acted on precisely the opposite principle to the steward at the beginning of the chapter. All that he had he used for selfish, present enjoyment and he left the future to care for

itself. The Lord is not inveighing against riches, but against man's selfish use of riches without God. The rich man was all for the present, all for this world; God's kingdom was nothing to him.

The word Jesus used for "hell" here is hades; not the lake of fire, but the unseen world of the departed. He therefore shows us that even that is for the unsaved a place of torment. Four times over does He state that hades is a place of torment.

He also shows that once the soul enters hades no change is possible. The "great gulf" is "fixed." No transference from torment to blessedness is possible. No "larger hope" is here.

The rich man became quite evangelistic in hell. He desired his brethren to have a supernatural visitation to stop them reaching that awful place. The Lord shows us that no such supernatural event, were it possible, would stop people, if they are not stopped by the Word of God.

Today God is appealing to men by the New Testament as well as by Moses and the prophets, and in the New Testament is the record of the One who rose from the dead. If men reject the

Bible, which is the full Word of God for today, nothing will persuade them, and they will reach the place of torment.

Oh, that a God-given conviction of this may possess us! Then, the "love of God our Saviour toward man" also possessing our hearts, we should be full of zeal for the souls of men. We should be more like Joseph Alleine, one of the devoted men ejected from their livings under the Act of Uniformity, who was said to be, "insatiably greedy of the conversion of precious souls!" And we should have the zeal for the souls of men while still it is the accepted time and the day of salvation.

## **Chapter 17**

THE LATTER PART of the previous chapter, verse 14 to the end, was spoken to the Pharisees: at the beginning of this chapter the Lord again addresses His disciples. The rich man had stumbled over his possessions into hell, and now the Lord tells His disciples that, the world being what it is, "offences," or occasions of stumbling are inevitable. The great thing is to avoid being an "offence" to anyone else, to even the least important. The consequences are so serious that anything is better than that.

Yet this does not mean that we should never speak to our brother for fear of stumbling him. The very opposite: if he should go astray into sin, we are to rebuke him, and immediately he repents forgive him; and this, even if it should repeatedly happen. We might imagine that we should run the risk of stumbling him by rebuking him, but we should really do so by not rebuking him. It is of course assumed that the rebuke is administered not in human anger but in the power of Divine love.

Teaching such as this made the disciples feel that they needed to have their faith increased. The Lord's reply seems to infer that it is not a question of the quantity of faith but of its vitality. A mustard seed is very small but it is alive! Live faith accomplishes results of a supernatural order. Many a time have heavy paving stones been forced up by tender sprouts, proceeding from live seeds embedded beneath them. Even vegetable life has powers which appear miraculous, and much more so faith which is living. Nevertheless no faith that we have and no service that we render gives us any kind of claim upon God. We can never accomplish more than it was our duty to do. This seems to be the truth inculcated in verses 7-10.

The Lord was now on His way to Jerusalem, and we come to the touching incident concerning the ten lepers. All of them had some measure of faith in Him, for they appealed to Him as Master and they obeyed His direction to go to the priests, in spite of the fact that there was at the moment no change in their condition. Yet when the cleansing reached them nine of them continued their journey to the priests, so as to complete their ceremonial cleansing at the earliest moment. Only one deferred the ceremonial part in order to give the first place to his Benefactor. The Jewish mind was more bound by what was ceremonial: the poor Samaritan was free to render praise and thanksgiving to the Saviour in the first place and receive his ceremonial cleansing afterwards. Sovereign mercy had been dispensed, and he got lifted above the customs of the law by a glimpse of the Person who dispensed the mercy. In result he got the assurance of being made whole from the Lord's own lips, with the acknowledgement that his faith had been the instrument of it. This was worth far more than any assurance he could get from the priests. Intelligent faith always puts Christ first.

In verses 20 and 21, Luke sets the obtuse unbelief of the Pharisees in contrast with the faith of the Samaritan. They only thought of the kingdom of God arriving with outward show, so as to be observed of all. The Lord told them that it was not at that time coming in that way, but that already it was amongst them, inasmuch as He — the King — was in their midst. The kingdom was amongst them for He was amongst them. The Pharisees were quite blind to this, but the Samaritan had evidently got a sight of it, hence his hurried return to give thanks at His feet.

In verse 22, Jesus again turns to His disciples, speaking of "the days of the Son of Man," and of course it is the Son of Man who is to take the kingdom, when the hour does arrive for its public establishment, as had long before been made known in Daniel 7:13-14. Now they, like the Samaritan, had faith and already saw the power and authority of God vested in the Lord Jesus. They would also in due season see the Son of Man revealed in His glory, and of this verse 30 speaks as well as verse 24. But meanwhile His rejection was going to supervene, and the sayings reported to the end of the chapter were evidently addressed to them as representing saints who should be here

until the time in which He is revealed in glory. Many there have been who have desired to see one of His days, and have not seen it.

As the time of His advent approaches two things will become prominent. First, there will be much activity on the part of the powers of evil. Imposters will present themselves in this place and in that, as verse 23 indicates. Second, there will be on the part of men generally absorption with the things of earth. In the days of Noah and of Lot men were absorbed in their pleasures, their business and their schemes; consequently judgment caught them unawares and they all perished. Thus it will be in the day of the revelation of the Son of Man.

The great thought embodied in verse 33 occurs no less than six times in the Gospels, and the Lord seems to have uttered it on four different occasions. The context here makes it very striking. Men immerse themselves in the things of earth seeking to save their lives. In result they only lose them. The believer is to let go these things in favour of the far greater things that are revealed to him. He preserves his life, as will be very manifest when the Lord comes. Lot's wife illustrated this principle. The angels pulled her body out of Sodom, but her heart was still

there. She lost everything, and her own life as well. We do well to remember her.

Those who are on earth when the Lord comes will do well to remember her also. If they do they will not think of attempting to retrieve their stuff from the house, or to return from their field. That day will come with the swiftness of an eagle's swoop. Just as the eagles congregate wherever their prey is found, so the judgment of God will reach all who are subject to it. The kingdom, when established, will be marked by discriminating judgment against evil. The sinner will be taken in judgment, and the righteous left to enjoy the blessing, no matter how closely they have been associated together. Had the Pharisees realized that the public establishment of the kingdom would involve this, they might not have wished to raise the question as to when it would come.

It is worthy of note that the three cases mentioned by the Lord in verses 34-36, suppose night-time, early morning and full day-time respectively. When He comes men will be instantaneously arrested in all parts of the earth, just as they are.

## Chapter 18

IN SPEAKING THE parable, with which this chapter opens, the Lord was continuing the same line of thought, as is shown by His application of the parable in verses 7 and 8. When the kingdom arrives it will mean judgment for the evil-doers, but the days just before its arrival will mean tribulation for saints. Their resource will be prayer. Even an unjust judge will be moved to right the wrongs of a widow, if she is sufficiently importunate; so the saint may continue waiting upon God with the assurance of being heard in due season.

There is not the smallest doubt about the coming of the Son of Man to answer the cries of His elect. The only doubt is as to faith being found in lively exercise amongst them. The Lord asked the question, "Shall He find faith on the earth?" but He did not answer it. The inference seems to be that faith will be at a low ebb, which agrees with His own plain statement elsewhere that, "the love of many shall wax cold." If we are right in believing that the end of the age draws very near, we shall do well to take this very much to heart, and stir ourselves up to faith and prayer. Only if we always pray shall we not faint.

The man who prays trusts in God. The trouble with so many is that they trust in themselves and in their own righteousness. To these the next parable is addressed. The Pharisee and the publican are typical men. The Lord takes for granted that God's grace, which brings justification for men, was available, but shows that all depends on the attitude of the one who needs it. The Pharisee exactly represents the elder son of chapter 15, the rich man of chapter 16, the unrepentant thief of chapter 23. The publican represents the younger son, Lazarus, and the repentant thief.

With the Pharisee it was himself, his character, his deeds. With the publican, the confession of sin, and of his need of propitiation — the word translated, "be merciful," is literally, "be propitious." How full of significance is verse 13! His position: "afar off," indicating he knew he had no right to draw near. His attitude: not lifting "his eyes to heaven," — heaven was no place for such a man as he. His action: "smote upon his breast," thus confessing that he was the man who deserved to be smitten. His words: "me, the sinner," for it is the rather than a here. The Pharisee had said, "I am not as other men," smiting other

men rather than himself. The publican hit the right man, and humbling himself was blessed.

How strikingly all this fits in with the special theme of this Gospel. Grace was there in abundance in the perfect Son of Man, but except there be on our side the humble and repentant spirit, we miss all that it offers.

The next incident, which Luke relates briefly in verses 15-17, enforces just the same thing. Mere babes do not count in the world's scheme of things, but of such the kingdom is composed. It is not, as we should have thought, that the babe must reach up to full-grown estate to enter, but that the full-grown man must reach down to the babe's estate to enter. The former might have suited the law of Moses, but grace is in question here.

Again the next incident, concerning the rich young ruler, lays its emphasis on the same point. The Lord had just spoken of receiving the kingdom as a little child, when the ruler asks, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" His mind swung back to the works of the law, not knowing what Paul tells us in Romans 4:4, "To him that works is the reward not reckoned of

grace, but of debt." Approaching on this basis, the Lord referred him to the Law, as regards his duty to his neighbour, and on his claiming to have complied from his youth up, He tested him further as to his relation to Himself. "Come, follow Me." Who is this Me? That was the supreme question, on which everything hinged, whether for the ruler or for ourselves.

The ruler had addressed Him as "Good Master," and this complimentary epithet the Lord had refused apart from the acknowledgment that He was God. In truth He was God, and He was good, and He presented Himself to the young man, bidding him relinquish what he possessed and follow Him — just as Levi had done some time before. Even the law demanded that God should be loved with all the heart. Did the ruler love God thus? Did he recognize God in the lowly Jesus? Alas, he did not. He might claim to have kept commandments relating to his neighbour; he utterly broke down when the first of all the commandments was in question. In his eyes his riches had in them greater value than Jesus.

With great difficulty does a rich man enter into the kingdom of God, since it is so difficult to have riches without the heart becoming absorbed by them to the exclusion of God. To those

who thought of riches as tokens of God's favour all this seemed very disturbing, but the truth is that salvation is impossible to man, yet possible to God. This brings us back to the point which is in question. The kingdom cannot be earned, much less eternal life. All must be received as gifts from God. And if, in receiving the gift, other things are surrendered, there is an abundant recompense both now and in the world to come.

This saying of our Lord, recorded in verses 29 and 30, is a very sweeping one. In the present time there is manifold more for everyone who has given up good things of earth for the sake of the kingdom. Any difficulty we may have in understanding this is based upon our failure to appraise rightly the spiritual favours which make up the "manifold more." Paul illustrates that saying for us. Read Philippians 3, and see how he reckoned up the spiritual wealth poured into his bosom after he had "suffered the loss of all things." Like a camel stripped of every rag it had carried, he had passed through the needle gate, only to find himself loaded with favours on the other side.

All this would sound very strange to the Jewish mind, but the fact, which explained it all, was that the Son of Man was not at this time going to take the kingdom, but rather to go up to Jeru-

salem to die. So again at this point Jesus spoke of the death which was just before Him. The prophets had indicated that this was the way in which He would enter into His glory, though the disciples failed to understand it. And even though He thus again instructed them, they failed to take it in. Such is the power that preconceived notions can attain over the mind.

The Lord was now on His final journey to Jerusalem, and He approached Jericho for the last time. The blind man intercepted Him in faith. The crowd told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, yet he at once addressed Him as the Son of David, and asked for mercy. The rich ruler had asked what he should do, when the Lord had just spoken of the kingdom being received. The blind beggar said that he would receive when the Lord enquired what He should do to him. No transaction came to pass in the case of the ruler: a transaction was completed on the spot in the case of the beggar. The contrast between the two cases is very decisive.

The beggar received his sight, and, said the Lord, "Thy faith has saved thee." This shows that the transaction went deeper than the opening of the eyes of his head. He became a follower of the Jesus, who was going up to Jerusalem and to the cross;

and there was glory to God, both on his part and on the part of all the beholders. An equally distinct case of spiritual blessing met the Lord when He entered and passed through Jericho.

If, at this point, Luke's Gospel be compared with Matthew 20:29-34, and Mark 10:46-52, a serious discrepancy becomes evident. Luke most definitely places the cure of the blind man as Jesus approached Jericho, and the other two Evangelists as definitely place it as He left Jericho. With our limited knowledge it seemed impossible on this point to reconcile the different accounts. But during the last few years the archaeologists have been digging in the Jericho area, and have laid bare the foundations of two Jerichos; one, the old original city, the other, the Roman Jericho, a short distance off. The blind man understood the begging business and planted himself between the two! Luke writing for Gentiles, naturally has the Roman Jericho in his mind. The other Evangelists very naturally are thinking of the original city. We mention this to show how very simply what looks like an insuperable objection vanishes, when we know all the facts.

## Chapter 19

ONLY LUKE TELLS us about the conversion of Zacchaeus, which fits in so strikingly with the theme of his Gospel. The publican, though so despised by the leaders of his people, was a fit subject for the grace of the Lord, and he was marked by the faith which is ready to receive it. Zacchaeus had no physical or material needs; his was a case of spiritual need only. The people flung the epithet, "sinner," at him. It was a true epithet, and Zacchaeus knew it, yet it provoked him into an attempt to accredit himself by recounting his benevolences and scrupulous honesty. Jesus however put his blessing on its proper basis by proclaiming him to be a son of Abraham — that is, a true child of faith — and Himself to be the One come to seek and save that which was lost. Zacchaeus was in himself a lost man, yet he was a believer, and so salvation reached him that day. On exactly the same basis has it reached every one of us since that day.

The Lord had shown the Pharisees that the kingdom was already in their midst in His own Person; He had also again told His disciples about His impending death and resurrection. Yet they still cherished expectations as to the immediate ap-

pearing of the kingdom in glory. So the Lord added the parable, of verses 11-27, as a further corrective to these thoughts of theirs. The time of the kingdom would come, when all His enemies would be destroyed; but first comes a period of His absence, when the faithfulness and diligence of His servants would be tested. To each servant the same sum is entrusted, so that the difference in the result sprang from their diligence and skill, or otherwise. According to their diligence they were rewarded in the day of the kingdom. The servant, who did nothing, only showed that he did not really know his Master. In result, he not only had no reward but he suffered loss.

This is another reminder that grace calls us into a place of responsibility and service, and that our place in the kingdom will depend upon the diligence with which we have used that with which we have been entrusted.

Having spoken the parable of the pounds, the Lord led His disciples on the ascent towards Jerusalem, and reaching Bethphage and Bethany He sent for the ass colt, on which He made His entry to the city, according to the prophecy of Zechariah. The colt was unbroken for no man had sat upon it, and consequently it was tied up under restraint. It was loosed from re-

straint, but only in order that He might sit upon it. Under His powerful hand it was perfectly restrained. A parable this, of how grace sets us free from the bondage of the law.

Though the kingdom was not at this time to be established in glory, He did in this way most definitely present Himself to Jerusalem as its rightful and God-sent King. His disciples assisted in this, and as they approached the city they began to praise God and rejoice. We are told quite plainly in John 12:16 that at that time they did not really understand what they were doing, yet it is evident that the Spirit of God took possession of their lips and guided them in their words. They acclaimed Him as the King, and they spoke of "peace in heaven, and glory in the highest."

At the incarnation the angels had celebrated "on earth peace," for the Man of God's good pleasure had appeared, and they celebrated the whole result of His work. But now it was clear that death lay before Him and that His rejection would entail a period of anything but peace on earth. Nevertheless the first effect of His work on the cross would be to establish peace in the highest Court of all — in heaven — and to display glory in the highest, Himself going up there in triumph. This note of praise

had to be struck at this juncture. God could have made the stones cry out, but instead He used the lips of the disciples, though they uttered the words without full intelligence of their meaning.

Now comes a striking contrast. As they approached the city the disciples rejoiced and shouted blessings on the King. The King Himself wept over the city! In John 11:35, the word used indicates silent tears; here the word used indicates breaking forth in lamentation, visible and audible. The lament of Jehovah over Israel, as recorded in Psalm 81:13, reappears here, only greatly accentuated as they approached the greatest of all their terrible sins. Jerusalem did not know the things that belonged to her peace, hence peace on earth was impossible at that time, and the Lord foresaw and predicted her violent destruction at the hands of the Romans, which came to pass forty years later. The Dayspring from on high had visited them, and they did not know the time of their visitation.

As a consequence, everything in Jerusalem was in disorder. Entering the city, the Lord went straight to its very centre, and in the temple found evil enthroned. The house of Jehovah, intended to be an house of prayer for all nations, was just a den of

thieves, so that any stranger, coming up there as a seeker after God, was swindled in the obtaining of the necessary sacrifices. Thereby he would be repelled from the true God instead of being attracted to Him. Thus in the hands of men the house of God had been wholly perverted from its proper use. Moreover the men who held authority in the house were potentially murderers, as verse 47 shows: so it had become a stronghold of murderers as well as a den of thieves. Could anything be much worse than this? No wonder God swept it away by the Romans forty years later!

## **Chapter 20**

YET IN THE precincts of the temple the Lord taught daily during this last week of His life, so it is not surprising that He came into conflict with them. The whole of this chapter is occupied with details of the conflict. The chief priest and scribes began the conflict, and at the end they were left silenced and unmasked.

They started by challenging His authority. They were the people in authority there, and to them He was but an upstart "Prophet" from Nazareth. Their question assumed that they had

the ability to judge of the Lord's credentials, if He produced them; so He called upon them to settle the preliminary question as to the credentials of His forerunner, John. This at once put them in a quandary, for the answer they wished to give would have been resented by the people. They were time-servers, courting popularity, so they pleaded ignorance. To such men as these the Lord did not produce His authority. Instead He proceeded to speak with all the authority which omniscience gives, and they were very soon made to feel its power. There could be no doubt about His authority by the time the verbal conflict ceased.

In the parable, which occupies verses 9-16, He set forth with great clearness the exact position of things at that moment. It reads like a continuation of the historical statements made in 2 Chronicles 36:15-16. There it was God appealing by His "messengers, rising up betimes and sending;" but all were mocked and misused until "there was no remedy," and "He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees." Here the story is carried a step further and the "Beloved Son" is sent, only to be cast out and killed. Hence a worse chastisement than the Chaldeans was to come upon them. The Psalmist had prophesied that the rejec-

ted "Stone" should become the Head of the corner, and Jesus added that all, who fall upon that Stone, or upon whom it shall fall, would be destroyed. They were at that moment stumbling on the Stone, as Romans 9:32 declares. The falling of the Stone upon them, and upon the Gentile powers, will take place at the Second Advent, as Daniel 2:34 shows.

The chief priests and scribes felt the point and authority of His words, as we see in verse 19, but they were only thereby stirred up to more determined opposition; and they sent forth men of craft and deceit to entrap Him in His words, if possible. They came with the question as to paying tribute to Caesar; and in this both Pharisees and Herodians united, sinking their animosities in common hatred of the Lord.

The Lord's question, "Why tempt ye Me?" showed that He was thoroughly aware of their craft. His request for the penny reveals His own poverty. The superscription on the penny was a witness to their subjection to Caesar. His reply thus was that they must render to Caesar his rights, and yield to God the rights that were His. It was because they had not rendered to God the things that were His that Caesar had acquired the

rights of conquest over them. All this was so indubitable, when pointed out, that these crafty questioners were silenced.

The question with which the Sadducees thought to entrap the Lord was founded upon ignorance. No doubt they had often perplexed the Pharisees with it, but then they had no more light than the Sadducees on the essential point which the Lord made so plain. He contrasted "this world" and "that world," using really the word which means "age." Now it will be the portion of some to "obtain that age" as living men on earth, without passing through death and resurrection; but those who "obtain that age and the resurrection" will enter upon altogether new conditions of life. They will be deathless as the angels, and marriage will have no application to them. The Lord was here beginning to bring "to light life and incorruptibility" (2 Tim. 1:10. N.Tr.); and in result the Sadducees' question, which to their ignorance seemed so unanswerable, became merely ridiculous.

The Lord proceeded to prove the resurrection from Exodus 3:6. If the patriarchs were alive to God, centuries after they were dead to this world, their ultimate resurrection was a certainty. Thus He answered not only the foolish question of the Sad-

ducees, but the unbelief that lay behind their question. And He answered it with such authority that even a scribe was moved to admiration and approval, and they all feared to ask Him any more questions.

The Lord then asked them His great question, based upon Psalm 110. Matthew records that no man was able to answer Him a word. No answer was possible save to the faith that perceived the Divine glory of the Christ, and they had no faith. They were silent in stubborn unbelief. Answer His question they could not: ask Him any further question they dared not.

It only remained for the Lord to unmask these evil men, and this He did in few words, as recorded in the two verses which close the chapter. They were hypocrites of the most desperate type, using religion as a cloak to cover their self-seeking and rapacity. He unmasked them, and pronounced their doom. He did not speak of a longer damnation, as though judgment were bounded by time and not eternal. But He did speak of greater damnation, showing that judgment will differ as to its severity. They suffer "more abundant judgment" (N.Tr.).

## Chapter 21

THEN HE LOOKED up, and here were some of these rich men ostentatiously casting their money into the temple treasury, and amongst them came a poor widow casting in her two mites. We must not allow the break of the chapters to divorce in our minds these opening verses from the closing two of Luke 20. The widow was presumably one of those whose "house" had been devoured, yet instead of repining, she cast her last two mites into the temple treasury. Under these circumstances her gift was truly a great one, and the Lord pronounced it to be so. She went to the utmost limit; casting in her all.

Nor must we divorce this touching incident from the verses that follow, particularly verse 6. The widow expressed her devotion to God by casting her two mites into the collection for the upkeep of the temple fabric; yet the Lord proceeds to foretell its total destruction. Already it was displaced by the presence of the Lord. God was in Christ, not in Herod's temple. In her understanding the widow was, as we should say, behind the times; yet this did not mar the Lord's approval of her gift. Whole-hearted devotion He does appreciate, even if the expression of

it is not marked by complete intelligence. This should be a great comfort to us.

Luke now gives us the Lord's prophetic discourse, putting on record that part of it which specially answered the disciples' question, as recorded in verse 7. As Matthew's account shows, both their question and the Lord's answer contained in them a good deal more than Luke puts on record. Here the question is as to the time of the overthrow of the temple, and the sign of it. The answer divides itself into two parts: verses 8-24, events that led up to the destruction and treading down of Jerusalem by the Romans, verses 25-33, the appearing of the Son of Man at the end of the age.

It is very noticeable how the Lord presents the whole matter not as a mass of details, appealing to our curiosity, but as predictions which sound a note of warning, and convey instructions of the utmost importance to His disciples. Everything is stated in a way to appeal to our consciences and not our curiosity.

The first part of the discourse, verses 8-19, is occupied with very personal instructions to the disciples. The Lord does indeed make predictions. He foretells

1. the rising up of false Christs,
2. wars and commotions, together with abnormal happenings in the physical world around,
3. the coming of bitter opposition and persecution, even to death.

But in each case His disciples are to be forearmed by His warnings. They are not for one moment to be deceived by false Christs, or follow them. They are not to be afraid of the violent movements of men, nor imagine that these convulsions mean that the end is coming immediately — for that is what "by and by" means here. They are to accept the persecution as an occasion for testimony, and in testifying are not to rely on a prepared defence but on supernatural wisdom to be granted to them when the moment arrives.

Verse 18 is evidently intended to convey the personal and intimate way in which God would care for them. The closing words of verse 16 show it does not mean that all of them would escape; but even if death claimed them, all would be made

good in resurrection. By patient endurance they would win through, whether in life or in death. This seems to be the meaning of verse 19. We can see in the Acts how these things were fulfilled in the Apostles.

Then, verses 20-24, He predicts the desolation of Jerusalem. No word appears here as to the setting up of "the abomination of desolation," for that is only to happen at the end of the times of the Gentiles: all the things the Lord specifies were fulfilled when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. Then the city was compassed with armies. Then those who believed the words of Jesus did flee to the mountains, and so escaped the horrors of the siege. Then there commenced "days of vengeance" for the Jew, which will not cease for them until all that is predicted is fulfilled. Then started the long captivity which has persisted, and will persist, with Jerusalem under the feet of the nations, until the times of the Gentiles are ended. Those times began when God raised up Nebuchadnezzar, who dispossessed the last king of David's line, and they will be ended by the crushing of Gentile dominion at the appearing of Christ.

Consequently verse 25 carries us right on to the time of the end, and speaks of things which will just precede His advent.

There will be signs in the heavenly regions, and on earth distress and perplexity; "sea and waves" being expressions figurative of the masses of mankind in a state of violent unrest and agitation. In result men will be "ready to die through fear and expectation of what is coming" (N.Tr.). In view of the state of things that prevails on earth as we write, it is not difficult for us to conceive the condition of things which the Lord thus predicts.

This is the moment when God is going to shake the heavens as well as the earth, as Haggai predicted; and when only things which cannot be shaken will remain. All will lead up to the public appearing of the Son of Man in power and great glory. The day of His poverty will be over, as well as the day of His patience; and the day of His power, of which Psalm 110 speaks, will have fully arrived. Previous to His coming, the hearts of unconverted men will be filled with fear: when He has come, their worst fears will be realized, and "all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him" (Rev. 1:7).

But to His saints His coming will wear another aspect, as verse 28 makes happily manifest. For them it means a final redemption, when all creation will be delivered from the bondage of

corruption. That being so, the first signs of His advent are to fill us with glad anticipation. We are to "look up," for the next movement that really counts is to come from the right hand of God, where He sits. We are to "lift up our heads," the opposite of hanging them down in depression or fear. The very things that frighten the world are to fill the believer with the optimism of holy expectation.

Next comes the short parable of the fig tree. It is said to be "a parable," you notice, not a mere illustration. The fig tree stands for the Jew nationally. For centuries he has been dead nationally, and when at last there are signs of national reviving with them, and signs of reviving too with other "trees," of ancient nationalities, we may know that the millennial "summer" is near. Until that time comes there shall be no passing away of "this generation" — by this term the Lord indicated, we believe, that "froward generation ... in whom is no faith," of which Moses spoke in Deuteronomy 32:5, 20. When the kingdom is established, that generation will be gone.

Luke's short account of the Lord's prophecy ends with the solemn words in which He asserted the truth and reliability of His words. Every word of His lips has something in it, something

to be fulfilled, and is more stable than the heavens and the earth. Thus verse 33 furnishes the striking thought that the words of His lips are more enduring than the works of His fingers.

He closed with another appeal to the consciences of His disciples, and our consciences as well. No doubt those three verses, 34, 35, 36, have special application to saints who will be on earth just before His appearing, but they have a great voice for the believer today. A multiplicity of pleasures surrounds us, and we may easily become over-charged with a surfeit of them. On the other hand, there were never more and greater dangers on the horizon, and our hearts may be laden with forebodings, so that we lose sight of the day that is coming. It is very possible to be occupied so much with the doings of dictators and the progress of world movements that the coming of the Lord is obscured in our minds. The word for us is, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always." Then shall we be thoroughly awake, and ready to greet the Lord when He comes.

In the closing verses of the chapter, Luke reminds us that He, who thus foretold His coming again, was still the rejected One. By day during that last week, He diligently uttered the word of

God: at night, having no home, He abode on the Mount of Olives.

## **Chapter 22**

AS WE COMMENCE to read this chapter, we reach the closing scenes of our Lord's life. The Passover was not only a standing witness to Israel's deliverance from Egypt but also a type of the great Sacrifice which was yet to come. Now at last the climax approached, and "Christ our Passover" was to be sacrificed for us precisely at the Passover season. The religious leaders were scheming how they might kill Him in spite of the fact that many of the people viewed Him with favour. Satan inspired their hatred, and Satan it was who presented them with a tool wherewith to carry out their wishes.

John, in his Gospel, unmask's Judas for us before the end is reached. In his twelfth chapter he tells us that, consumed with covetousness, he had become a thief. He also tells us in his thirteenth chapter the exact moment at which Satan entered into him. Luke relates that dreadful fact in a more general way; and it shows that the prince of the powers of darkness considered that to encompass the death of Christ was a task of such

importance that it should be delegated to no lesser power: he would take charge of the business himself. Yet he undertook the work to his own overthrow. The compact between Judas and the religious leaders was easily settled. They were consumed with envy, and Judas with the love of money.

For many centuries the Passover had been observed with more or less faithfulness, it was now, in its full significance, to be observed for the last time. Within twenty-four hours its light grew pale in the shining of its Antitype, when the true Lamb of God died on the cross. It is a remarkable fact that the last time it was celebrated in its full significance, there was present to partake of it the One who instituted it — the perfect, holy Man, who was Jehovah's Fellow. He ordered the Passover to be prepared, and He decided the very place where they should eat it. The time, the manner, the place, were all His appointment. The choice lay not with the disciples but with Him, as verse 9 shows.

The Lord's foreknowledge is strikingly displayed in verse 10. Carrying the water was the task of the women; a man bearing a pitcher of water was a very uncommon sight. Yet He knew that there would be a man performing this unusual act, and that

Peter and John would meet him as they entered the city. He knew also that the "goodman of the house" would respond to the message delivered by the disciples in the name of "the Master." Doubtless he recognized the Master as being his Master; in other words, he was one of the godly in Jerusalem who acknowledged His claims, and the Lord knew how to lay His hand upon him. This man had the privilege of furnishing a guest-chamber for the use of the One who had no chamber of His own, and when the hour was come He sat down with His disciples.

In the account which Luke gives, the distinction between the Passover Supper and the Supper which He instituted is very clear: verses 15-18 give the one, and verses 19, 20 the other. The Lord's words as to the Passover indicate the closing up of that old order of things. His sufferings would mean its fulfillment, and when a spared remnant of Israel enters at last into the blessedness of the millennium, it will be as sheltered by the blood of Christ. As to the cup (verse 17), this does not appear to have been any part of the Passover as instituted through Moses, and the Lord apparently did not drink of it. Instead, He

indicated that His day of joy, which the fruit of the vine symbolized, would only be reached in the coming kingdom.

Then He instituted His own Supper in remembrance of His death; the bread symbolizing His body, the cup, His shed blood. The account is very brief, and, for the full significance of it all, we have to go to 1 Corinthians 10 and 11. Remembrance, was what the Lord emphasized at the moment, and in view of His long absence we can see the importance of this. Through the centuries the memorial of His death has been with us, and the abiding witness of His love.

The verses which follow (21-27) witness to the folly and the feebleness which was found amongst the disciples. The hand of the betrayer was on the table, and He knew it, though the rest of the disciples were quite unaware of it. There was also strife amongst them, each wishing for the foremost place, and this just as their great Master was about to take the lowest place. Such, alas! is the heart of man, even of saints. It served however to bring out very clearly the fundamental difference between the disciple and the world. Worldly greatness is expressed and maintained by taking a lordly place: Christian greatness is found in taking a servant's place. In that greatness

Jesus Himself was pre-eminent. Few words are more touching than this — "I am among you as he that serves." Such had been His life of perfect grace; and such, in supreme measure, His death was about to be.

It is also most touching to observe how He spoke to the disciples in verses 28-30. They were indeed foolish, and their spirit far astray from His, yet with what graciousness He brought into the light the good feature that had characterized them. They were firmly attached to Him. In spite of His temptations, culminating in His rejection, they had continued with Him. This He would never forget, and there would be an abundant recompense in the kingdom. In the coming day He will take up the kingdom for His Father, and take it up by His saints, and these disciples of His will have a very special place of prominence. In the light of this gracious pronouncement they must surely have felt how mean and sordid had been their previous strife for a great place. And, may we feel the same.

Next, verses 31-34, comes the Lord's special warning to Peter. At this moment he was thinking and acting in the flesh, so Jesus used his name according to the flesh, and His repetition of it conveyed the urgency of His warning. Self-confidence

marked him as well as desire for pre-eminence, and this laid him open to Satan: yet the Lord's intercession would prevail, and there was wheat there and not chaff only. This wheat would remain when the winnowing was passed.

The four verses which follow, 35-38, were addressed to all the disciples. They had to bear witness that they had possessed an absolute sufficiency as the fruit of His power, though sent without any human resources; and He intimated that with His death and departure another order of things would supervene. Men would reckon Him among the transgressors in this world, but the things concerning Him had an end in another world. He would be exalted to glory, and His disciples left as His witnesses, having to resume the ordinary circumstances of this world. Their response to these words showed that they were likely to miss the spirit of what He said, by seizing upon one literal detail; so for the moment He left it.

Thus far it has been the dealings of His love with His own; now we see the perfection of His Manhood displayed in Gethsemane. He faced, as before the Father, the full bitterness of that cup of judgment which He had to drink; and His full perfection is seen in that, while shrinking from it, He devoted

Himself to the accomplishing of the Father's will, whatever it might cost Him. Luke, alone of the Evangelists, tells us of the appearance of the angel to strengthen Him. This emphasizes the reality of His Manhood, in keeping with the special character of this Gospel. So also His sweat being as great drops of blood is only mentioned in this Gospel. The horror of that which was before Him was entered into in communion with the Father.

With verse 47 the last scenes begin; and now all is calmness and grace with the Lord: all is confusion and agitation with His friends, His adversaries, and even with His judges. The communion in the garden led to the calmness in the great hour of trial. Judas reached the heights of hypocrisy in betraying his Master with a kiss. Peter used one of those two swords they had just alluded to, in ill-conceived and ill-directed violence. What he did in his violence the Lord promptly undid in His grace. The violence was to be left to the multitude with the swords and staves. It was their hour, and the hour in which the power of darkness was to be displayed. Against that dark background the Lord displayed His grace.

The account of Peter's fall follows. The way for it had been prepared by his previous desire for the first place, his self-confidence, and his violent action. Now he followed afar off, and soon got amongst the enemies of his Master. Satan set the trap with consummate skill. First the maid and then the other two servants pressed home their identification of him, leading him to denials increasing in emphasis; though Luke does not tell us how he broke into curses and swearing. That after all was incidental; the essential thing was that he denied his Lord.

Precisely at that moment, just as Jesus had predicted, the cock crew; and then the Lord turned and looked upon him. Just what that look conveyed we may not know, but it spoke such volumes to the fallen disciple that he went out from the enemies of his Master with bitter tears. Judas was filled with remorse, but we do not read that he wept. Peter's bitter weeping was a witness that after all he did love his Lord, and that his faith was not going to fail. The prayer and the look were beginning to prove their efficacy.

This Gospel makes it clear that the trial of Jesus was divided into four parts. First, there was the examination before the chief priests and scribes, as they sought for some plausible pretext

for condemning Him to death. The account of this fills the closing verses of the chapter, and it is given with brevity. It is made very plain however that they condemned Him on His own plain confession of who He was. They challenged Him as to being the Christ, and the Lord's answer showed that He knew they were fixed in their unbelief and in their determination to condemn Him. Still, He claimed to be the Son of Man, who should presently wield the very power of God, and this they interpreted as meaning that He must also claim to be the Son of God. This indeed He was, and His reply, "Ye say that I am," was an emphatic, "Yes." As claiming to be the Christ, the Son of Man, the Son of God, they condemned Him to death,

## **Chapter 23**

THEN SECOND, they led Him to Pilate to get the Roman sanction for the execution of this sentence. Here they changed their ground completely, and charged Him as being an insurrectionary and a rival to Caesar. Jesus confessed Himself to be the King of the Jews, yet Pilate declared Him to be faultless. This might seem a surprising declaration, but Mark gives us a peep behind the scenes when he tells us that Pilate knew that the fierce hatred of the religious leaders was inspired by envy.

Hence he began by refusing to be the tool of their grudge, and availed himself of the Lord's connection with Galilee to send Him to Herod. The accusation, "He stirs up the people," was indeed true; but He stirred them up towards God, and not against Caesar.

So, third, there was the brief appearance of the Lord before Herod, who was eager to see Him, hoping to witness something sensational. Here again the chief priests and scribes vehemently accused Him, but in the presence of that wicked man, whom He had previously characterized as, "that fox," Jesus answered nothing. His dignified silence only moved Herod and his soldiers to abandon all pretence of administering justice, and descend to mockery and ridicule. In His humiliation His judgment was taken away.

Hence Herod returned Him to Pilate, and here the fourth and last stage of His trial began. But before we are told of Pilate's further efforts to placate the accusers and release Jesus, Luke puts on record how both he and Herod buried their enmity that day in condemning Him. The same tragedy has been often repeated since. Men of wholly different character and view have found a point of unity in their rejection of Christ. Herod was

given up to his pleasures and utterly indifferent: Pilate, though possessed of some sense of what was right, was a time-server and hence ready to do wrong for popularity's sake; but they came to an agreement here.

The story of the final scenes of the trial are given with brevity in verses 13-26. Not one word spoken by our Lord is put on record: all is presented as a matter lying between Pilate and the people instigated by the chief priests; yet certain things stand out very clearly. In the first place, abundant witness is given that Jesus was faultless. Pilate had stated this during the earlier examination (verse 4), and now he repeats it twice (verses 14, 22), and states it for a fourth time as being Herod's verdict (verse 15). God took care that there should be abundant and official witness to this.

Then the blind unreasoning fury of His accusers is made abundantly manifest. They merely shouted for his death. Again, the choice they made as an alternative to His release stands out with crystal clearness. Twice in these verses Barabbas is identified with sedition and murder; that is, he was the living embodiment of the two forms in which evil is so frequently presented in Scripture — corruption, and violence; or, to put it in another

way, we see the power of Satan working, both as a serpent, and as a roaring lion. Lastly we see that the condemnation of Jesus was the result of the weakness of the judge, who "delivered Jesus to their will." He represented the autocratic power of Rome, but he abdicated it in favour of the will of the people.

The crucifixion scenes occupy verses 27-49. We are struck by the fact that right through nothing happened in an ordinary way. Everything was unusual — supernatural, or bordering upon the supernatural. It was quite usual for professional wailing women to appear on these occasions, but wholly unusual for them to be told to weep for themselves, or to hear a prophecy of coming doom. Jesus Himself was the "green tree," according to Psalm 1, and perhaps He was alluding to the parable of Ezekiel 20:45-49. In that scripture God predicts a flame upon every green tree and every dry tree. Judgment fell upon the "green tree" when Christ suffered for our sakes. When the fire breaks out in the dry tree of apostate Jews, it will not be quenched.

Then the prayer of Jesus as they crucified Him was wholly unexpected and unusual. He desired the Father, in effect, that the sin of the people might be counted not as murder, for which

there was no forgiveness, but as manslaughter, so that there might yet be available a city of refuge, even for His murderers. An answer to that prayer was seen some fifty days later, when Peter in Jerusalem preached salvation through the risen Christ, and 3,000 souls fled for refuge. The prayer was unusual because it was the fruit of such Divine compassions as had never come to light before.

The actions of the various people involved in His crucifixion were unusual. Men do not ordinarily taunt and revile even the worst criminals undergoing capital punishment. Here all classes did so, even rulers, soldiers, and one of the malefactors who suffered at His side. The power of the devil and of darkness had seized their minds.

Pilate's superscription was unexpected. Having condemned Him as a false claimant of kingship amongst the Jews, he wrote a title proclaiming Him to be the King of the Jews, and, as another Gospel shows, he refused to alter it. This was the overruling of God.

The sudden conversion of the second thief was wholly supernatural. He condemned himself, and justified Jesus. Having

justified Him, he owned Him as Lord and proclaimed — virtually, though not in so many words — his belief that God would raise him from the dead, so as to establish him in His kingdom. He fulfilled the two conditions of Romans 10:9, only he believed that God would raise Him from the dead, instead of believing, as we do, that God has raised Him from the dead. The faith of the dying thief was a gem of the first order, beside which our faith today loses its sparkle. It is much more remarkable to believe that a thing shall be done, when as yet it is not done, than to believe that a thing is done, when it is done. And further, it was most unusual that a malefactor should wish to be remembered by the King, when His kingdom was established. Malefactors usually slink into the dark and wish to be forgotten by the authorities. His wish to be remembered shows his faith in the grace of the suffering Lord equalled his faith in His coming glory.

The response of Jesus to the thief's prayer was wonderful and unexpected indeed! Not merely in the coming kingdom but that very day he was to experience grace reaching beyond death, and landing his ransomed spirit into companionship with Christ in Paradise. Now Paradise and the third Heaven are identified

in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. These words of the Lord were the first definite revelation of the fact that immediately death supervenes the spirits of the saints are to be in conscious blessedness with Christ.

If everything was unusual, on the human side, when Jesus died, there were also supernatural manifestations from the hand of God; and of these verses 44 and 45 speak. The three brightest hours of the day were darkened, by the sun being veiled. There was something very fitting in this, for the true "Sun of Righteousness" was bearing our sin at that time. Also the veil of the temple was rent by a Divine hand, signifying that the day of the visible temple system was now over, and the way into the holiest about to be made manifest — see, Hebrews 9:8. Our true "Sun" was veiled for a moment, enduring our judgment, that there might be no veil between us and God.

Luke does not record the Saviour's cry as to the Divine forsaking, uttered about the time that the darkness passed away, nor the triumphant shout, "It is finished," though he does put on record that He "cried with a loud voice," and that then His closing words were, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." In these closing words on the cross we see the One, who all

along had been marked by prayerful submission to the will of God, closing His path as the perfect, dependent Man. Having said this, He yielded up His spirit; yet we see He is more than Man, for at one moment there was the loud voice, His vigour unimpaired, and the next moment He was dead. In every sense His was a supernatural death.

Testimony to this was borne by the centurion who witnessed the scene by reason of his official duty. Even the crowds drawn together by morbid curiosity were moved to uneasy fear and foreboding, and those who were His friends retreated into the distance. The centurion became a fourth witness to the perfection of Jesus, joining Pilate, Herod and the dying thief.

The prophetic writings had said, "Lover and friend hast Thou put far from Me" (Psalm 88:18), but they had also said, "He made His grave ... with the rich in His death" (Isaiah 53:9). If verse 49 gives us the fulfilment of the one, verses 50-53 give us the fulfilment of the other. In every emergency God has in reserve an instrument to effect His purpose and fulfil His word. Joseph is mentioned in all four Gospels, and John informs us that up to this point he had been a secret disciple for fear of the Jews. Now he acts with boldness when all others were cowed,

and the new, untainted tomb is available for the sacred body of the Lord. Not even by the faintest contact did He "see corruption." Men had intended otherwise, but God serenely fulfilled His word.

## **Chapter 24**

THE CLOSING VERSES of Luke 23, and the opening part of this chapter makes it very plain that none of His disciples in any way anticipated His resurrection. This makes the testimony to it all the more pronounced and satisfying. They were not enthusiastic and visionary, inclined to believe anything, but rather of materialistic mind and despondent, inclined to doubt everything.

The women are brought before us in the first place. They had no thoughts but those suitable to an ordinary funeral. Their minds were occupied with the sepulchre, His body and the spices and ointments that were customary. The Jewish sabbath intervened however, and put a stop to their activities — this was of God, for their activities were wholly unnecessary, and by the time they could have resumed them, the sacred body was not to be found. Instead of the dead body they found two

men in shining garments, and heard from their lips that the Lord was now "the living One" and not among the dead. So the first testimony to His resurrection came from the lips of angels. A second testimony was found in the words He Himself had spoken during His life. He had predicted His death and His resurrection. When reminded of His words, they remembered them.

The women returned and told all these things to the eleven; that is, they presented to them the evidence of the angels, and of the Lord's own words, and of their own eyes, as to the body not being in the sepulchre; yet they did not believe. The modern sceptic might call these things "idle tales;" well, that was just how they appeared to the disciples. Peter however, with his usual impulsiveness, went a step further. He ran to the sepulchre to see for himself, and what he saw so far verified their words. Yet in his mind wonder rather than faith was excited.

Next we are carried on to the afternoon of the resurrection day, and Luke gives us in full what happened with the two going into the country, to which Mark just alludes in verses 12 and 13 of his last chapter. The incident gives us a very striking insight

into the state of mind that characterized them — and doubtless they were typical of the rest.

Cleopas and his companions were evidently just drifting away from Jerusalem to the old home, utterly disappointed and dejected. They had entertained very fervent expectations which centred in the Messiah, and in Jesus they believed that they had found Him. To them Jesus of Nazareth was "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people;" and at that point evidently their faith stopped. They did not as yet perceive in Him the Son of God who could not be holden of death, and so to them His death was the mournful end of His story. They did think that "it had been He which should have redeemed Israel," but then that to them meant redeeming them by power from all their national foes, rather than redeeming them to God by His blood. His death had shattered their hopes of this redemption by power and by glory. This disappointment was the fruit of their having cherished expectations which were not warranted by the Word of God. They expected the glory without the sufferings.

Not a few believers may be found today who have drifted off into the world in rather similar fashion. They too have drifted

because disappointed, and they are disappointed because of entertaining unwarranted expectations. The expectations may have been centred in Christian work, and the conquests of the Gospel, or in some particular group or body of believers with whom they were linked, or perhaps in themselves and their own personal sanctity and power. However, things have not happened as they expected, and they are in the depths of dejection.

This case of Cleopas will help in the diagnosis of their trouble. In the first place, like him they have some little "Israel," which engrosses their thoughts. Had Israel been redeemed, just as Cleopas had expected, he would have been in the seventh heaven of delight: as it was not so, he had lost his enthusiasm and interest. He had to learn that though Israel was right in the centre of the bright little picture that his fancy had painted, it was not in the centre of God's picture. God's picture is the real one, and its centre is Christ risen from the dead. When Jesus had joined Himself to them, drawn out their thoughts and gained their confidence, He opened up to them, not things concerning Israel, but "things concerning HIMSELF." A certain cure for disappointment is to have Christ filling every picture

that our minds entertain: — not work, even Christian work, not brethren, nor even the church, not self in any of its many forms, but Christ.

But there was a second thing. True, these unwarranted hopes of Cleopas, which led to his disappointment, had sprung from this thinking too much of Israel and too little of Christ; yet this wrong emphasis was the result of his partial reading of the Old Testament Scriptures. Verse 25 shows that their foolishness and the slowness of their hearts had led them to overlook some parts of the Scriptures. They believed some things that the prophets had spoken — those nice, plain, easy-to-be-understood things as to the glory of the Messiah — whilst they set on one side and passed over the predictions of His sufferings, which doubtless seemed to them to be mysterious, peculiar, and difficult to understand. The very things they had skipped were just what would have saved them from the painful experience through which they were passing.

In speaking to them, three times did the Lord emphasize the importance of all Scripture — see verses 25 and 27. He so dealt with them as to make them see that His death and resurrection were the appointed basis of all the glory which is yet to come.

"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things ... ?" Yes, indeed He ought! And as He ought, so had He done!

What a walk that must have been! At the close of it they could not bear the thought of a separation from this unexpected "Stranger," and they besought Him to abide. Going in to tarry with them, He of necessity took the place which is ever intrinsically His. He must be Host and Leader and also the Blessor; and then their eyes were opened and they knew Him. What joy for their hearts when suddenly they discerned their risen Lord!

But why did He withdraw from their sight just as they had recognized Him? For the same reason doubtless as He had told Mary not to touch Him earlier in that same day (see, John 20:17). He wished to show them from the outset that He had entered into new conditions by resurrection, and that consequently their relations with Him must be upon a new basis. The brief glimpse they had of Him however, coupled with His unfolding of all the prophetic Scriptures, had done its work. They were completely revolutionized. A new light had dawned upon them: new hopes had arisen in their hearts: their disconsolate drifting was over. Though night had fallen, they retraced their steps to Jerusalem, to seek the company of their fellow-

disciples. Sick at heart they had sought solitude: faith and hope being revived, the company of saints was their delight. It is ever thus with all of us.

Back they came to tell their great news to the eleven, but they arrived to find themselves forestalled. The eleven knew the Lord was risen, for He had also appeared to Peter. The proofs of His resurrection were rapidly accumulating. They now had not only the testimony of the angels, and the remembrance of His own words, and the account given by the women, but also the witness of Simon, almost instantly corroborated by the witness of the two returned from Emmaus. And, best of all, even as the two were telling their story, in their very midst, with words of peace on His lips, stood Jesus Himself.

Yet, even so, they were not at the outset wholly convinced. There was about Him in His new risen condition something unusual and past their comprehension. They were fearful, thinking they saw a spirit. The truth was they saw their Saviour in a spiritual body, such as 1 Corinthians 15:44 speaks of. This fact He proceeded to demonstrate to them in very convincing fashion. His was a body of "flesh and bones," yet though conditions were new, it was to be identified with the body of "flesh and

blood," in which He had suffered, for the marks of the suffering were there in both hands and feet. And while the truth was slowly dawning in their minds, He made it yet more manifest by eating before them, that they might see that He was not merely "a spirit." Thus the reality of His resurrection was fully certified, and the true character of His risen body made manifest.

Then He began to instruct them, and first of all He emphasized to them what He had already stressed with threefold emphasis to the two at Emmaus, that ALL things written concerning Him in the Scriptures had to be fulfilled, as indeed He had told them before His death. They were to understand that all that had happened had transpired according to the Scriptures, and was in no way a contradiction of what had been written. Then, in the second place, He opened their understandings so that they might really take in all that had been opened up in the Scriptures. This, we think, is to be identified with that in-breathing of His risen life, which is recorded in John 20:22. This new life in the power of the Spirit carried with it a new understanding.

Then, thirdly, He indicated that, having this new understanding, and being "witnesses of these things," a new commission was

to be entrusted to them. They were no longer to speak of law but of "repentance and remission of sins ... in His Name." Grace was to be their theme — forgiveness of sins through the Name and virtue of Another — and the only necessity on the side of men is repentance — that honesty of heart which leads a man to take his true place as a sinner before God. This preaching of grace is to be "among all nations," and not confined to the Jews only, as was the giving of the law. Yet it was to begin at Jerusalem, for in that city man's iniquity had risen to its climax in the crucifixion of the Saviour; and where sin had abounded, there the over-abounding of grace was to be manifested.

The basis, on which rests this commission of grace, is seen in verse 46 — the death and resurrection of Christ. All that had just happened, which had seemed so strange and a stumbling-block to the disciples, had been the laying of the necessary foundation, on which the superstructure of grace was to be reared. And all was according to the Scriptures, as He again emphasized by saying, "Thus it is written." The Word of God imparted a Divine authority to all that had transpired and to the message of grace which they were to proclaim.

So, in verses 46 and 47, we have the Lord inaugurating the present Gospel of grace, and giving us its authority, its basis, its terms, the scope it embraces, and the depths of sin and need to which it descends.

Verse 49 gives us a fourth thing, and by no means the least — the coming gift of the Holy Spirit, as the power of all that is contemplated. The Scriptures had been opened up, their understandings had been opened too, the new commission of grace had been clearly given; but all must wait until they possessed the power in which alone they could act, or rightly use what now they knew. Luke draws his Gospel to an end, leaving everything, if we may so put it, like a well-laid fire waiting for the match to be struck which will produce a cheerful blaze. He opens his sequel the Acts by showing us how the coming of the Spirit struck the match, and lit the fire with wonderful results.

We have just seen how this Gospel ends with the launching of the Gospel of grace, which is in striking contrast with the way in which, in its opening verses, it brings before us the temple service in working order, according to the law of Moses. The four verses which close this Gospel also present us with a striking contrast, for the first chapter gives us a picture of godly

people with earthly hopes, waiting for the Messiah who would visit and redeem His people. It shows us a God-fearing priest, engaged in his temple duties, but possessed of only a little faith, so that he was struck dumb. Not believing, he could not speak: he knew nothing worth speaking about, at all events for the moment. Verses 50-53 show us the risen Saviour ascending to engage in His service as High Priest in the heavens, and leaving behind Him a company of people whose hearts have been carried from earth to heaven and whose mouths are opened in praise.

Bethany was the spot from which He ascended, the place where, more than any other, He had been appreciated. He went up in the very act of blessing His disciples. When we remember what they had proved themselves to be, this is indeed touching. Six weeks before all had forsaken Him and fled. One had denied Him with oaths and curses, and to all of them He might have said what He did say to two "O fools, and slow of heart to believe." Yet upon these foolish, faithless, cowardly disciples He lifted up His hands in blessing. And upon us too, though very like to these men in spite of our living in the day when the Spirit is given, His blessing still descends.

He blessed them, and they worshipped Him. They returned to the spot that He appointed for them until the Spirit came, and in the temple they were continually occupied in the praise of God. Zacharias had been dumb: no blessing could escape his lips, either Godward or manward. Jesus went up on high to assume His priestly office in the fulness of blessing for His people; and He left behind those who proved to be the nucleus of the new priestly race, and already they were blessing God and worshipping Him.

This Gospel has indeed carried us from law to grace and from earth to heaven.

