

James Smith-Handfuls of Purpose-Gospel of Luke

GOSPEL OF LUKE

Handfuls on Purpose

by James Smith, 1943

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A FAITH CONFIRMING PROLOGUE. Luke 1:1-4.

The voice of Jesus in His Gospel is a very "small voice" compared with the clamorous speech of political partyism and the strife of modern ungodly tongues, but like a spring silently making its way through the rocks it comes to the surface and refreshes many a thirsty soul. What Luke says about the things of the Gospel in this brief introduction is worthy of our closest attention. We learn that these things—

1. Were the chief topic in the days of Luke. This we infer from the fact that "Many had taken in hand to set them forth in order" (v. 1). The words and deeds of Christ were in everybody's mouth. These things were not done in a corner, many were anxious to have them in a connected form, and many had attempted so to put them. But any spiritual man, such as Luke, could easily detect distorted representations of the life and character of Jesus Christ.

2. Were delivered by eye-witnesses. "They delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses" (v. 2). John could say, "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes" etc. (1 John 1:1, 2). "He was seen by five hundred brethren at once." Men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and so the men of the new dispensation spoke as they were moved by the living personal Christ among them. The great salvation which at first began to be spoken by the Lord was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him (Hebrews 2:3).

3. Were most surely believed in Luke's days (v. 1).

If they were accepted without doubt by multitudes in the time of Christ and in the days immediately following, where is the ground for questioning them now? They did not follow cunningly devised fables in making known the Gospel of Christ (2 Peter 1:16). These things were tested in the seven times hotter furnace of the days in which they were spoken and wrought. The power and truth of them is being yet proven in the experience of them that believe and do the will of God (John 7:17).

4. Have been recorded by one who had a perfect knowledge of them (v. 3). Although Luke's name does not occur among the twelve apostles, yet he was familiar with all that had been done, being intimate with the chosen twelve and a close companion of Paul the great apostle of the Gentiles. The Gospel according to Luke is confessedly the fullest record of all that Jesus began to do.

5. Are here written in order (v. 3). Luke professes to give us the order in which the events of Christ's life took place. This, to the simple Bible student, is a great blessing, as the very connection between the recorded deeds of our Lord is full of deep significance. If not in their mutual relationship, yet in point of contrast.

6. Were written that we might have certainty (v. 4). Luke evidently wrote that the honorable Theophilus might be confirmed in his faith. "These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God" (John 20:31). In the written Gospel we have

a sure Word, wherein we do well to take heed as unto a light that shines in a dark place. The Gospel offers both Salvation and the certainty of it. Yet how many Gospel hearers there are who have not yet known the certainty of those things wherein they have been instructed. Make your calling and election sure.

ZACHARIAS MADE DUMB THROUGH UNBELIEF. Luke 1:5-22.

"O Father, God, to You I come! Rather in mercy hold me dumb Than that, unto You drawing near, I think of mortal men that hear. O may I reverence more and more, And in every deed adore."

Nothing fetters the hand of God from working like unbelief; nothing grieves the Spirit more readily. But although he was smitten dumb he did not flee from the presence of the holy Smiter. He did not give up his work for the Lord although this sore affliction came upon him. Zacharias would teach us not to be so engrossed with our trials even if they should be most sudden and severe as to neglect our work for Christ. After reflecting on this incident we desire to point out that—

1. Visions may come while doing our ordinary work. "While he executed the priest's office, there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord" (vs. 8, 11). Moses kept the flock of Jethro when the call came through the burning bush (Exod. 3:1). Gideon was threshing wheat (Judges 6:11). Elisha was ploughing when the prophetic mantle fell upon him (1 Kings 19:19). David was in the sheepfolds (Psalm 78:70). Matthew in his toll-booth. Your God is sufficient for you, wait on Him and look up.

2. Our prayers may be answered very unexpectedly (v. 13). When the angel said to him, "Fear not, for your prayer is heard," it was to him staggering news, although he had been praying many long years that a son might be given them. They were both now "well stricken in years" (v. 7), suggesting that he had continued this prayer long after the expectation had died away. If the Lord lays it on the heart to continue in prayer for any definite thing, is this not in itself an evidence that He desires so to bless us? Believe, and you shall see the glory of God. "You shall reap if you faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

3. The Lord is able to do far above what we ask.

He not only would have a son born to him, but that son "would be great in the sight of the Lord, and filled with the Holy Spirit" (vs. 14, 15). A son worthy of the God who gave him. The good old man and his humble, blameless wife were now abundantly rewarded for their many years of praying and waiting. God is not unfaithful. Wait on the Lord. Though the vision tarry, wait. You long for a revival, let not your faith fail (Psalm 126:6).

4. The promises of God test our faith. "Zacharias said, Whereby shall I know this?" (v. 18). It was a big order he received that day from the Lord (read carefully vs. 14-17). It was as if the fountains of the great deep of God's infinite grace had just opened up and poured their unspeakable riches at his feet. Is it not the very greatness of His grace that staggers our weak faith? If you wish to find out the measure of your faith, just try someone of His great and precious promises. "In My Name you shall cast out devils" (Mark 16:17). Try that one.

5. Unbelief fetters the tongue of testimony. "Behold, you shall be dumb, because you Believe not My words" (v. 20). What a God-dishonoring thing unbelief is! How many tongues among the children of God are under the condemnation of dumbness because of their unbelief? How many of us are dumb with regard to the Lord's coming, the filling of the Spirit, the consecration of the life, answered prayer, and the deeper experiences of the things of God, all because of unbelief? "Because you Believe not My words." According to Grosart he became a D. D. through unbelief—deaf and dumb.

6. Real contact with the Lord makes men to marvel.

"The people marveled that he tarried so long in the temple" (v. 21). As for Zacharias, he did not feel the time long. Who does when they are in real communion with God? A man is sure to get out of the old rut and to do unprecedented things when his ministry becomes a living and solemn reality before God. Zacharias, during the hours of public service, forgot all about the clock that day. He was late in getting through, but the people, when they did see him, were convinced that he had seen a vision (v. 22). Short services are not always the best. Where a preacher's soul is filled with the vision of God, both time and men have to stand back. There is more blessing through one day with God than twenty years without Him. Have faith in God.

JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. Luke 1:12-17.

There is a singular resemblance between the work of John and the work of the Holy Spirit. Both came to convince men of sin, to

bring them to repentance, and to point them to Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away sin. The points of likeness are not few—

1. The coming of both was foretold (v. 13; John 14:16). John's birth was predicted by the angel, and Christ promised to send another Comforter. Every event foretold by God is a link of connection between earth and Heaven; an evidence of the reality of unseen and eternal things.

2. At the coming of both many were made to rejoice.

It was said of John "that many shall rejoice at his birth" (v. 14). The advent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost filled many with joy. Three thousand souls gladly received the Word, and did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God (Acts 2:41-47). The fruit of the Spirit is joy.

3. Both were to be great in the sight of the Lord "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord" (v. 15) John's testimony was to glorify the Lord, even though in the sight of men and in his own estimation he was but a voice crying in the wilderness. Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, "He shall glorify Me" (John 16:14). The blessed Spirit is indeed great in the sight of the Lord, although men should ignore Him and close their ears to the crying of His voice. Have you heard this voice crying in the wilderness of your desolate heart and fruitless life?

4. Both were to prepare the way for the Lord. "He shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah" (v. 17). The Holy Spirit also prepares the way for Christ's salvation to come to us by "convincing of sin" (John 16:8). John prepared the way of the Lord by convincing men of their need of repentance; the Holy Spirit prepares the way of the Lord into our hearts by revealing to us our need of salvation.

5. Both were to turn many to the Lord. "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God" (v. 16). This also is the mission of the Holy Spirit. "He shall testify of Me," said Jesus. "When the Spirit of grace and supplication is poured out they shall look upon Me" (Zechariah 12:10). The turning of men to the Lord is His overcoming work. It is the Spirit that quickens. There can be no salvation or joy in the Lord without this turning, for all like sheep have gone astray. Turn you, turn you, for why will you die?

6. Both came to give knowledge of salvation.

"You shall go before the face of the Lord to give knowledge of salvation" (vs. 76, 77). John gave the knowledge of salvation by declaring that the Savior was at hand. The Holy Spirit gives the knowledge by revealing Christ in the heart. He who believes has the witness in himself (1 John 5:10).

7. Both came to make ready a people for the Lord.

This was the outstanding feature of John's mission (v. 17); this is pre-eminently the great mission of the Holy Spirit, calling out a people for His Name, and preparing them for the coming of the Lord (Acts 15:14). The Church is the Lamb's wife, called and comforted, and led by the Spirit, just as Eliezer made ready Rebekah by giving her the gifts of Isaac, and led her right into the presence of him whom she had not seen yet loved (Genesis 24).

8. Both came to honor the Lord and not themselves. John kept himself, as it were, out of sight, saying, I am a voice, one to be heard but not seen. So the Spirit, we are told, shall not speak of Himself. The mission of the Spirit, like that of John, is to point out Jesus as the Lamb of God. He shall take of Mine and show it unto you (John 16:13, 14). Those filled with the Spirit will in this respect become like the Spirit, seeking only to glorify Jesus. Their language is: "He must increase; I must decrease" (John 3:30).

A GREAT CHARACTER. Luke 1:15, 16.

"Among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist." He was a Nazarite unto God, drinking neither wine nor strong drink. Wherein did his greatness consist? He was great—

1. Before the Lord. "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord." This assures us that he must have been in a condition of—

1. Rightness with God. No one can be great in the favor of God who is not right with Him. Reconciliation is needed to acceptance.

2. Likeness to God. It is possible to be justified before Him and yet not be fully conformed to Him. He made the first man after His own likeness. The second Man is the Lord from Heaven, after whose likeness we are now to be created by the same Spirit.

3. Readiness for God. A man entirely separated for Him, with no interest to come between him and his service for God. He was in no way entangled, a free man to do His will. This is greatness.

2. In himself. "He was filled with the Holy Spirit." Not the greatness of his own will, of purpose, or goodness, but the greatness of God dwelling in him. This implies—

1. Self-abnegation. He died to himself that God might live and move in him. Not I, but Christ in me. Man's original greatness was lowered to the dust through sin, and eternally ruined. The way into greatness in the Divine eyes is not by self-reformation, but by self-abnegation. A going out of the ruined nature into the life of God. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live.

2. Divine possession. Filled with the Holy Spirit. Yielded up to the will of God as taught by His Spirit abiding within. Be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit. All true greatness comes from Him who alone is great. Great in wisdom, holiness, and power. "Your gentleness has made me great" (2 Samuel 22:36).

3. Heavenly wisdom. To be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with the knowledge of His will, so that every thought and act may be in perfect harmony with the mind of God. He works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. You are wise in Christ.

3. Among his fellow men. "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God." This greatness then lies in holiness and usefulness. It is not something given us for our own honor, ease, or aggrandizement, but whereby the power of God may come into contact with others. If you would have this greatness you must not seek it for yourself. He will not give His glory to another. Here we see—

1. Great faithfulness. His ministry gives abundant evidence of his fearlessness and devotion to the work of God. Like the apostle of the Gentiles he could say, "This one thing I do" (Philippians 3:13).

2. Great power. Like the greater One who was to come after him, he spoke with power. His word was sharp, and quick, and powerful, because it was a word that burned in his bones. He was in vital sympathy with his message. It was to him no task committed to memory, but the living truth, blazing in a living soul, and dropping from his glowing tongue like coals of fire.

3. Great success. "Many turned to the Lord." A Holy Spirit ministry is always a success. It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which is in you. The Spirit of your Father will never speak without telling effect. The secret of his success lay in his exalting the Lord and not himself. He must increase, and I must decrease. "Go you and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

JESUS AS SAVIOR AND KING. Luke 1:30-33.

"Great disaster of the world,
When Adam from his throne was hurled;
When the tempter seemed to win
Through unfathomable sin.
Ah! but it was only seeming;
Lo! the Christ has come redeeming."

Jesus the Lowly Child, yet the "Mighty God," stripped of His glory, and still glorious in His weakness. Great is the mystery of godliness.

1. His saving Name. "You shall call His Name Jesus." Jesus means Savior. God in measuring the depth of man's need could only meet that need by the gift of His only Son. As a Savior He saves from—

1. Sin (Matthew 1:21). From its defiling and condemning power, from the love of it, and from the wrath that is to come because of it (1 Thessalonians 1:10). He saves from sin by putting Himself between the sinner and his guilt (Isaiah 53).

2. Self (Galatians 2:20). The I is to be crucified with Christ that the body of sin might be destroyed (Romans 6:6). Self-wisdom, self-effort, and self-righteousness are all enemies from which we need to be delivered, and from which we are saved when Jesus reigns within.

3. This present evil world (Galatians 1:4). By being crucified with Christ we are crucified to the world and the world to us (Galatians 6:14). The Cross of Christ comes between us and our sins, between us and the flesh, and between us and the world. Did not our Lord pray that we should be kept from the evil? (John 17:15). He is mighty to save.

2. His wonderful character. "He shall be great" (v. 32).

1. Great in His origin. "Called the Son of the Highest." As a Child He was born, as a Son He was given (Isaiah 9:6). Being the Son of the Highest, He is higher than angels, or than any created one. Yet He who belonged to the Highest descended to the lowest for us,

becoming obedient unto death.

2. Great in His love. He so loved us that He gave Himself for us. Being the Son of the Highest His love was of the highest possible order. Behold what love! Herein is love (1 John 4:10). His love was consistent with the greatness of His character, and was stronger than death.

3. Great in His power. The power of Christ was the power of faith. He believed, and therefore spoke, and it was done. There is nothing impossible with Him (v. 37). All power, He says, is given unto Me. He is able to save to the uttermost. As many as touched Him were made perfectly whole.

3. His glorious prospect. "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame."

1. He shall have a throne. "The Lord God shall give Him the throne of His father David" (v. 32). He shall do it. He has not yet received this throne, for the house of Jacob (v. 33) still despise and reject Him as their Messiah King. Jesus Christ is God's appointed heir to David's throne (Jeremiah 23:5; compare Psalm 132:11 with Rev. 22:16; see also Isaiah 9:6, 7).

2. He shall reign over the house of Jacob (v. 33). Would Mary remember this while she stood by and saw Him crucified? Is His promise to come to naught? He as King has been rejected, and His reign over them as a people delayed, but the Word of God cannot be broken. The gifts and callings of God are without repentance. That foretold by Daniel must be fulfilled (chapter 7:13, 14). He was born King of the Jews. God has given Him the throne of David, and He shall reign over the house of Jacob. To spiritualize this at the sacrifice of its literal meaning is to wrest the Scriptures. Render to God the things that are God's.

3. His kingdom shall have no end (v. 33). The Kingdom of God that is within us shall certainly have no end. We shall never cease to be under the rule of Him who is our exalted Redeemer. But the kingdom of this world has not yet become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15). The time has not yet come when the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, shall reign over all blessed forever. These times cannot come "until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 6:14-16).

MARY'S PRAYER. Luke 1:30-38.

When the power of the Highest stooped to overshadow the lowly Mary, it was to her indeed a manifestation of mild mightiness. She could truly say, "Your gentleness has made me great" (2 Samuel 22:36).

1. The promise. "Fear not, you have found favor with God, and shall bring forth a Son, and call His Name Jesus" (vs. 30, 31). She found favor, not as one who deserved it or bought it. The grace of God, which is favor, is never found by those who seek it as wages. The gift of God is eternal life.

2. The question. "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (v. 34). To have Christ formed within us is to be blessed above all. But how can this be? Hear, O heavens, and give answer, O earth. How shall this be? It is not in man to reason, and in all mere human experience impossible. Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? You must be born again. How shall this be?

3. The answer. "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you" (v. 35). To Mary's question, How shall this be? God's answer is "The Holy Spirit." How is His Son to be revealed in me? (Galatians 1:16). The Holy Spirit shall come upon you. It is not of man, not of the flesh, not of works, not by might or by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord. He who brooded over the creation of old must overshadow you. It is the Spirit that quickens. Let us apply this great thought to—

1. God's way of salvation. How shall this be? Well, it must just come to you as this honor came to Mary. As the favor of God. You cannot purchase it, and you never shall deserve it. God's answer to your question as to how it is to come into your heart and life is, "The Holy Spirit" (John 3:5). Like Mary, believe God's Word and rest.

2. God's way of sanctification. This, like salvation, and the forming of the new nature within us, is all of Grace. It is the favor of God. It is God who works in us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure. How shall this be? The Divine answer again is the same: "The Holy Spirit shall come unto you." The storms and trials of life may blow off many withered leaves from an outward character, but there is nothing like the rising of the new life for putting off the old. Be filled with the Spirit.

3. God's way of service. To all our questions as to how we shall be made fruitful in the work of the Lord He has but one answer: "The Holy Spirit." From Me, says the Lord, is your fruit found. How shall I glorify God in my body and spirit? The power of the Highest shall overshadow you. As vessels, we are to be filled with the Spirit and the knowledge of His will. As instruments, we are to be polished, and entirely yielded to His will. As agents, we act in His Name and for His sake. "Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19, 20). "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

4. The prayer. Mary said, "Be it unto me according to Your word" (v. 38). This is very precious. Mary could not understand how the Son of God was to be formed in her, but she believed that it was His gracious will that it should be so. And she immediately yielded herself, spirit, soul, and body, that the will of God might be done in her and through her. "Be it unto me according to Your word." This brief, deep, self-surrendering, God-glorifying prayer breathes the secret of salvation, sanctification, and successful service. Not My will, but Your be done. Take this as an example of how His gracious words may be received and fulfilled in us. Be you holy, for I am holy. How shall this be? The Holy Spirit shall come upon you. Be it unto me according to Your word.

HOLY JOY. Luke 1:46-55.

"Bethlehem and Calvary—
A human child that God might die;
This the stupendous mystery.
Bethlehem and Calvary—
Sweet picture of humility,
And earth and Hell's hostility."

Bethlehem and Calvary are the two poles of Divine grace and human guilt. In the one we see the evidence of God's love to man, in the other the proof of man's hatred to God. In this chapter we have three holy songs:

1. The song of Elizabeth (vs. 41, 42).
2. The song of Mary (v. 46).
3. The song of Zacharias (v. 67).

It is with the song of Mary that we have now specially to do. It is pleasant to think of Mary as a singer. Did ever mortal voice sing a sweeter song than this? Her joy was holy, deep, Divine. It was—

1. Spiritual joy. "My spirit has rejoiced" (v. 47). The tidings of the grace of God, in the gift of His Son, filled her soul with joy and made her spirit sing. The Gospel of God is intended to reach the very spirit of man, to touch and revive the innermost spring of His being. The lip songs of the hypocrite and the sentimental songs of the world never penetrate to the needy spirit in man.

2. Joy in God. "My spirit has rejoiced in God" (v. 47). God revealed Himself, and He was known to Mary in the gift of His Son, and so known and believed that her spirit rejoiced in God. It cannot be said of us that we know God if in our spirits we do not rejoice in Him. We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:11). The joy that is in God is pure and blameless, and may be changeless and eternal.

3. Joy of salvation. "My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (v. 47). How near the heart of the virgin mother comes to her God in these words, "My Savior." Mary needed a Savior, and she found Him in the Son of the Highest, begotten in her by the power of the Holy Spirit. Where and how else can we find Him? My Lord and my God. Christ dwells in our hearts by faith.

4. Praiseful joy. "My soul does magnify the Lord" (v. 46). Even the joy of salvation may be a selfish joy, but the joy of adoration is God-glorifying. Hannah also knew this double joy. Joy in the salvation of the Lord, and joy in the Lord Himself (1 Samuel 2:1). O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His Name together (Psalm 34:3).

5. Grateful joy. "For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden" (v. 48). She is deeply conscious that she could never merit the exceptional honor conferred upon her. No more can you. Every one who knows God and lives in the light of His presence cannot but be conscious of his or her utter unworthiness of such love and favor. It is when, like Mary, we are in the low estate that the Lord will lift us up. Humble yourself and He will honor you (Psalm 138:6).

6. Hopeful joy. "Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (v. 48). She was blessed indeed, and blessed down through the generations, all because of her very close relationship to both her Lord and ours. May we not learn from this that it is our nearness to Christ that is to tell on our children and the generations yet to come? The memory of the wicked shall rot, rot like a rootless, lifeless tree, but those planted by the river shall never wither (Psalm 1:3).

7. Reasonable joy. "For He who is mighty has done to me great things" (v. 49). When we are so really conscious that the Lord has done great things for us and in us, by the mighty operation of His Holy Spirit, the joy becomes, as it were, natural. The fruit of the Spirit is joy. The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad (Psalm 126:3). Think on these things. He who is mighty is still able to do for us great things (Ephesians 3:20).

8. Joy that constrained to testimony. In the following verses (50-55) Mary testifies to—

1. The power of God. "He scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their seats, He has sent the rich empty away. The arm that is strong to save is also strong to smite down everything that exalts itself against God. Those who know the joy of the Lord know this also.

2. The grace of God. "His mercy is on them that fear Him." "He has exalted them of low degree." "He has filled the hungry with good things." "By grace are you saved, that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Luke 18:14). It is the hungry and thirsty that are filled (Matthew 5:6). Our testimony will be blessed if it is given as Mary gave hers.

DELIVERED TO SERVE. Luke 1:74, 75.

"Lord, keep alive my sense of wonder,
Cent'ring in the living Christ,
Oft placing me, His great throne under,
To hold with Him a gracious tryst;
The 'old, old story' every new.
And ever proving itself true."

It is a great and cruel fallacy toward God and man to believe that we are saved merely to be satisfied. Such a debased thought is not worthy of the grace of God. The man who eats only to be satisfied is a selfish glutton and a worshiper of his stomach. We eat to live, and love, and labor. The provision of God made for us in Christ is to enable us to live before God, to love our fellow men, and labor for Christ and His cause.

1. The great deliverance. "We being delivered out of the hand of our enemies." We are here reminded that this deliverance is—

1. All of grace. "That He would grant us." It is in reality a Divine grant. It is because of His mercy that we are not consumed. When any board or society allows a grant to any one, the idea of merit and desert is often present, but with God's grants there can be no plea of merit, else grace is not grace.

2. From the enemy, SIN. Sin is one of the enemies out of whose hand we need deliverance. In giving us His Son, God has also given us a grant of freedom from sin (Romans 6:18). "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14). Claim this grant.

3. From the enemy, SELF. If sin is not to be allowed to lord it over us, the self-seeking I must be put in the place of death. As long as the carnal I lives it will be the servant of sin. By the atoning Blood the victory is won.

4. From the enemy, SATAN. The great accuser is always ready to bring some railing accusation against the Lord, against His Gospel, or against ourselves. We are not ignorant of His devices." Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand" (Ephesians 6:11).

2. The purpose of it. "He has delivered us that we might serve Him." We are saved to serve. We have been freed from sin that we might become servants to God (Romans 6:18). It is good to be able to say "Thank God, I am saved," but it is better to be able to say "Thank God, I am the bondservant of Jesus Christ." That we might—

1. Serve Him. One is your Master, even Christ. Lord, what will You have me to do? Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears. Serve Him, God first, not the Church, not a cause, not the good principle, but the living Christ, our ever present gracious Lord, whose we are.

2. Serve Him without fear. If we love the Lord with all our heart this will be the character of our service, for there is no fear in love; perfect love casts out fear. Having received the Spirit of adoption we are saved from slavish fear and serve in the love of a son (Romans 8:15).

3. Serve Him in holiness. As saved ones we are "called with a holy calling" (2 Timothy 1:9). Called into the holy priesthood, having been washed and clothed with holy robes that we might minister in holy things as we eat the holy meat. They must be clean who bear the vessels of the Lord. He which has called you is holy, so be you holy (1 Peter 1:15).

4. Serve Him in righteousness. Our new man is created after God in righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:24). So the new man is expected to serve God in righteousness as well as in holiness. "In holiness" may refer to the nature of God within us; "in righteousness," to the Word of God before us. His holy nature imparted to us gives us fitness for service. His Holy Word gives us

righteous principles for guidance in service.

5. Serve before Him. Sweet is the service that is rendered in the consciousness of His presence and done as standing before Him. Elijah could speak of "the Lord God of Israel before whom I stand" (1 Kings 17:1). Abraham walked before God. Serving before Him is the remedy for the fear of man, and the secret of deliverance from dishonoring God by presenting eloquent prayers to great audiences.

6. Serve Him all the days of our life. There is no discharge in this holy war. The Levite might retire after a limited number of years' service, but those delivered from sin and wrath by the agony and blood of God's beloved Son are to serve Him all the days of their life. All the days of that life which is Divine and eternal. In the days of bodily infirmity and weakness, when we can do nothing but look, may that look be the look of blessed submission and holy trust. Yes, Lord, all the days of my life and of Your life.

THE NIGHT OF THE INCARNATION. Luke 2:1-20.

"O prodigious wonder!
To be sounded by the thunder—
Our God on earth a Child.
But as the light, not lightning,
Attracting and affright'ning,
Earth and Heaven reconciled."

This is in truth what one has called "The birth supreme 'midst things ajar." The Light of the World was born in the night. Naturally and spiritually the world at His coming was wrapped in sullen, helpless darkness. The cold, chilly mists of form and ceremony are now to melt away before the warmth and brightness of His rising. Thank God that He came as "light, not lightning." Notice the—

1. Preparation. "Joseph and Mary, because they belonged to the house of David, went up to Bethlehem to be taxed" (vs. 1-5). God had foretold, through the mouth of His prophet Micah, that Christ the King of Israel was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The decree of the Roman Emperor helped on the fulfillment of God's Word. Our circumstances are in the hand of God as well as our soul.

2. Arrival. "She laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (v. 7). No room in the inn for Him is strangely prophetic of the reception He was to have as the Savior of men. Other persons and things first. Is it not so still? We are told that there is a place for everything. What place has Jesus Christ in politics, in business, in society (so-called), in the home, or in the heart. Like that inn in Bethlehem they are already full. No room for Jesus with regard to the affairs of daily life. Is it not still true that "the Son of Man has not where to lay His head?" (Matthew 8:20).

3. Proclamation (vs. 8-12). It was divinely fitting that "Christ the Lord" should be heralded by the "angel of the Lord," and accompanied with the "glory of the Lord." We have here the gospel of the incarnation, declaring "good tidings of great joy." Good tidings of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, emptying Himself unto poverty that He might make many rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

4. Accompaniment. "Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host praising God" (vs. 13, 14). If there was indifference among men on earth at the coming of the Son of God there was no indifference in Heaven at His going. There is joy in Heaven still over one sinner repenting and believing in Him (Luke 15:7).

5. Inquiry. "Let us now go and see this which the Lord has made known unto us" (vs. 15, 16). The shepherds believed the Word, and acting on it, they found Him just as it was told them. Instead of reasoning and caviling, would that men had the wisdom of these shepherds, and just say, "Let us go and see." Put the Word of God to the test. Believe, and you shall see. Seek, and you shall find.

6. Testimony. "When they had seen they made known abroad the saying" (v. 17). They believed, and therefore they spoke. Those who have proved the power of God's revealed truth in their own experience are better able to speak of it to others. They cannot help speaking it, it is such good tidings of great joy. They make known the saying because it is a faithful one and worthy of the acceptance of all (1 Timothy 1:15),

7. Rejoicing. "They returned glorifying and praising God" (v. 20). We may well question whether we have ever found the Lord if we have no joy in speaking of Him, and not constrained out of a full heart to glorify and praise Him. If the Gospel is not tidings of great joy to us it is clear that we have never yet believed it. The shepherds: 1. Heard; 2. Believed; 3. Obeyed; 4. Received; 5. Testified; 6. Rejoiced; 7. Praised. "They returned praising God." Returned to their daily avocation, but with a new vision before their souls, and a new power in their lives. Finding Jesus the Savior is a very practical discovery.

GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY. Luke 2:8-14.

In those broad undulating fields lying around Bethlehem, where Ruth began her mission of gleaning, and where David tended the flock of his father Jesse, shepherds were still keeping watch over their flock by night. But that was a night never to be forgotten. That night a star appeared that was destined to supersede the brightness of the sun, and to fill the whole earth with the glory of the invisible God. Good tidings. Look at—

1. The Preacher. "The angel of the Lord." This is the first herald of the new dispensation. It was a great occasion, but it was not what the wisdom of men would call an eloquent sermon. It was brilliant in its simplicity, though in meaning fathomless as eternity. "Fear not, I bring you good tidings of great joy" (v. 8). It was what all sermons should be—plain, pointed, practical, powerful.

2. The hearers. "Shepherds in the fields." They were both intelligent and attentive. They were more. They were hungry and thirsting for the tidings which now fell so suddenly upon their startled ears. They were anxious souls, looking and longing for His appearing. Just as the highest hill top catches the first glory beams of the rising sun, so these shepherds, standing on the heights of believing expectation, are first bathed in the glory that was coming to bless a sleeping world. They that honor Me, I will honor.

3. The Gospel. "Behold I bring you good tidings." Let us examine the characteristics of this wonderful God-spell that was in the approaching ages to hold so many spellbound amidst all the fascinations of the world and pleasures of sin. It was—

1. Mysterious. "Unto you is born Christ the Lord." Who can by searching find out this? The Lord of glory born and lying in a manger, stripped of His ineffable majesty and wrapped in swaddling clothes. This is the sign (v. 12). The sign of infinite grace and compassion. Great is the mystery of godliness. God manifest in the flesh.

2. Good. "Good tidings." The voice on the mount at the giving of the law only brought fear and quaking. The law proclaimed was holy, just, and good, but that was no tidings of good to sinful men. The Gospel brings good tidings, because it declares a Savior born. Without the birth of God's Son, no son could be born of God. He who was to bring sons to glory must be "made perfect through sufferings" (Hebrews 2:10; Isaiah 52:7).

3. Joyful. "Good tidings of great joy." Its first note is "Fear not." Fear not the depth of your sinfulness, the number of your sins, your own weakness, or the foes of the soul without, for unto you is born a Savior. God has laid help on One that is mighty, Christ the Lord. We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:11).

4. Personal. "I bring you good tidings. For unto you is born this day." The voice of this heavenly wisdom is still crying out, "Unto you, O men, I call." The shepherds could not but believe that this blessed message from God was for all that heard it. Hear, and your soul shall live. This Gospel is unto you first (Acts 3:26).

5. Universal. "Which shall be to all people" (v. 10). When our Lord lay in His swaddling clothes, or when He stood before Pilate, He was in the eyes of men a very insignificant object compared with Pilate and the pagan Emperor of Rome, but where are they now? The world for which Christ died shall yet be blessed through His Name. "All nations shall call Him blessed" (Psalm 72:11). Are you blessing Him now?

6. Confirmed. "Suddenly a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest" (vs. 13, 14). This thing was not done in a corner. Those who believe the Gospel will have ample reasons for cleaving to it, both miraculous and otherwise, the Word will always be confirmed with signs following. The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God (Romans 8:16; 1 Corinthians 1:22).

SIMEON—A HIDDEN ONE. Luke 2:25-32.

"My mother's grave my Sinai was,
But light, not lightning, was the cause
That won me from my unbelief,
And staunch'd an ageing father's grief;
Softly my childhood's prayer returned,
And my old faith within me burned."

Simeon seems to have been one of the Lord's hidden ones, who, under the guidance of God, calmly and quietly served Him in waiting. But the hidden one is here brought into light. He has prayed in secret, he is now rewarded openly.

1. See his holy character.

1. He was just and devout (v. 25). Just in his dealings with men, and devout in his dealings with God. Righteous and holy. These are the two sides of a Christian life, they must be equally honest and true.

2. He waited for the consolation of Israel. He waited and prayed because he believed. This dear old man of God had no faith in any other means or efforts to comfort Israel than the coming of the King. This is still Israel's hope, for "the Lord shall comfort Zion" (Isaiah 51:3). His waiting was rewarded; his hope was fulfilled. "They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me" (Isaiah 49:23). Wait on the Lord.

3. He was endued with the Spirit. "The Holy Spirit was upon him." There is always a very vital connection between waiting on the Lord and being endued with power (Acts 2:1-4). The effect of the Holy Spirit resting upon Him was twofold: 1. He was taught. It was revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 2. He was led. "He came by the Spirit into the temple" (v. 27). Every Spirit-possessed one has the things of Christ revealed to him or her, and will be led by the Spirit. It may simplify the matter to reverse the order here: (1) Be filled with the Spirit, then you will (2) be willing to wait on and for the Lord; and then (3) you will be able to live a just and devout life before God and men, being taught of God and led by the Spirit.

2. Hear his joyful testimony. His is indeed a striking attitude as he stands with the infant Savior in those arms so long outstretched in prayer and patient waiting. Who can refrain from giving a glowing testimony when the arms of their faith have been filled with the personal Savior? He blesses God as one whose life had now been fully satisfied with his gift. Crowned with his honor, and ready to depart in peace. Such is always the satisfying power of Jesus Christ when received by faith. He testifies of—

1. Christ as the Salvation of God. "Mine eyes have seen Your salvation" (v. 30). Beautiful is the title thus given to Jesus. "Your Salvation." God's great love, mercy, and power united to redeem and bless us in the person of His Son. This was the making bare of the arm of the Lord for salvation (Isaiah 52:10). This naked arm reveals, if we might so put it, the strong and mighty saving muscle of Jehovah. "O arm of the Lord, awake, awake!" What else but the living Christ in our hearts will ever fit us for departing in peace?

2. Christ as the Light of the Gentiles (v. 32). "As a revelation to the nations" (Newberry). Christ is God's revealed Light to the nations of the earth. With regard to the character of God and the way of salvation there is no other light. All else is but the light of sin-blinded reason, which is only supposition or superstition. "I am the Light of the World." Salvation is a coming out of darkness into His marvelous light. The sparks of our own making will never turn night into day (Isaiah 9:2). No more can our own work save us. The presence of Christ with us and in us is as Heaven's own searchlight turned upon the Father that we may see Him, and turned upon ourselves, upon sin, death, and eternity that we might see these, as it were, with His eyes. "Walk in the light" (1 John 1:7).

3. Christ as the Glory of Israel (v. 32). This is the order revealed by the Holy Spirit to Simeon. Christ was to be first a light to the Gentiles, after that the glory of His people Israel. Was there another in Israel who believed that the Christ would first bless the Gentile nations before He would be glorified among His own ancient people? The Holy Spirit could make no mistake. The Messiah would be cut off, numbered with transgressors. But He will come again, not as a sin-offering, but as the King of Israel, with great power and glory. They shall mourn because of Him (having crucified Him), but the glory of the Lord will then have arisen upon them. Where the glorified One is there will be glory, for glory always dwells in Immanuel's land, whether in earth or in Heaven, in Time, or Eternity. Christ is our Salvation; Christ is our Light; Christ is our Glory. To Him be the praise.

CHRIST A SIGN SPOKEN AGAINST. Luke 2:34,35.

As soon as Simeon took the Lord in his arms he became a prophet, being taught of the Holy Spirit (v. 25), he spoke with all boldness. Each saying is full of deep and far-reaching significance. Receiving Christ is always a means of opening the eyes to behold the things which are unseen. Observe what he says about the—

1. Mission of Christ. "This Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel" (v. 34). This—

1. Was true locally. In the day of His suffering and shame His disciples forsook Him and fled, they fell from Him, but they rose again into faith and favor after His resurrection.

2. Is true universally. All who come to Him must fall before Him before they can be raised again in newness of life. Saul fell to the earth at His appearing to him on the way to Damascus, but he was raised again, a chosen vessel to bear His Name. Zacchaeus had to come down at His call before salvation came to his house (Luke 19:1-9). We must needs be planted in the likeness of His death before we can be raised in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:5).

3. Will be true dispensationally. Israel as a nation has already fallen (Romans 9:12), and the Gentiles are being presently enriched

thereby, but a rising again will yet take place, for all Israel shall be saved when the Deliverer shall come out of Zion and turn away ungodliness (Romans 9:26).

2. Character of Christ. "He shall be for a sign which shall be spoken against." "A sign may be offensive in two ways, either by its bewildering uncertainty or its alarming clearness. It was the unmistakable distinctness of Christ's life and teaching that made Him a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to many. In Him as a sign we see, as it were, the—

1. Red light of danger. Lifted up before the eyes of the doubting and the impenitent. If the green tree that stood in our place in the fires of God's judgment had to suffer so, what shall become of the dry?

2. Blue light of caution. To those who would rush past the Cross in their haste to be saved, going about to establish their own righteousness. O that men would consider. Take heed to yourself.

3. White light of safety. To the believing and the obedient. Christ the Sign declares that the way is clear to him that trusts. Press on to the mark. If your Master was spoken against, be you not offended if many speak against you (Acts 28:32).

3. Influence of Christ. "He shall be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (v. 35). These are solemn words. O my soul tread softly here. To come into contact with Jesus Christ is to have the thoughts of the heart revealed. He is the Living Word, who is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The thoughts of our hearts, with regard to Him, are being revealed every day by our words and actions. Are they for Him or against Him? As a man is in Christ's sight, so is he. Our attitude toward Him determines whether we shall stand or fall in the judgment, and determines now whether our life is pleasing in His sight. The Lord looks upon the heart. Has the sword of suffering that pierced through the soul of Mary, as she witnessed the agony and death of her Son and Savior, pierced through our souls, because of our deep and real sympathy with Him? And are the thoughts of many hearts being revealed through the suffering and rejected Savior in us? May the sword of His Word pierce through our souls, and may the thoughts of His heart be revealed to us.

A SORROWFUL SEARCH. Luke 2:41-51.

It is extremely melancholy at the end of an anxious, busy life only to find light enough to show that it has been a life of error and failure and transgression against God. It is possible for the saving light of the Gospel to become at last, through willful neglect, only the lurid glare that reveals but a ghastly future. Walk in the light while you have the light. Seek the Lord while He may be found.

It was the first eventful day in the life of Jesus when He went to His first Passover at Jerusalem at the age of twelve. Even then, as the Great Teacher came from God, He could not be hid. Let us reflect on the seeking and the finding of Him by His reputed parents.

1. The discovery. "They went a day's journey, and when they found Him not they turned back." It is always a sad discovery to those who know and love Jesus to find that He is not with them. Like Samson, they may shake themselves, but it avails nothing (Judges 16:20). How had this come about? We read that they—

1. Supposed Him to be in the company. Supposing Him to be with us is no evidence that He is with us. Many suppose Christ to be with them who are living Christless lives, supposing that all is right when all is wrong. Then again they—

2. Doubtless were taken up with other company. Not that they intended to go without Him, but between their suppositions and the pressure of their kinsfolk and acquaintances He was left behind. Is it not the old story, "While I was busy here and there, He was gone?" It is even possible to be busy with the Lord's work when the Lord Himself is not with us. A missionary going out to his work one morning very sad was caught at the door by his wife, who looked into his face and said, "O Willie, much work and little prayer makes a hard task." There was no visiting that morning, but a work was done in Willie's soul that proved a life-long blessing.

2. The search. One day's journey without Jesus incurred three days' sorrowful searching. But observe that they—

1. Sought Him at once. They did not attempt to go one step farther without Him. Their love forbade them. We will always make quicker progress by turning back to the place where we have parted company with Christ than by going on without His conscious presence with us. If His presence does not brighten your life, seek His face. Wait on the Lord. Turn back.

2. Sought Him sorrowing. At first they sought Him where they could not find Him, among their kinsfolk and acquaintances. Are we not all apt to run among our Christian friends, seeking the light and help that only Christ Himself can give? It is always a sorrowful search seeking the Lord. If we feel the need of His presence to satisfy our souls as much as His parents did, the terrible sense of loss will constrain us to seek Him in tears.

3. The finding. He who seeks finds (Jeremiah 29:13). They found Him—

1. Where? "In the temple." The temple was the "house of prayer." This fact may help to impress us with the thought that in the secret place of prayer we may surely expect to find Him whom our souls love, and whose presence with us we so much need in our journey homeward. Such blessed company makes the road short.

2. When? "After three days." We cannot resist the conviction that there is a profound truth here for every seeker after Jesus. The three days seem to remind us of the resurrection." Destroy this temple," He said, "and in three days I will raise it up again." It is not a dead Christ we seek, but the risen, living One, who sits in the midst, in the great temple above.

3. How? "Sitting in the midst of doctors about His Father's business." All who ever sought and found Christ have found Him doing His Father's business. It is the will of God both to save and sanctify. In our receiving Jesus Christ by faith, and abiding in Him, the great business of the Father with respect to our individual lives is being done. Your will be done in us as in Heaven.

4. The following. Note also that He—

1. Went down with them. He had just said to them, Knew you not that I must be about My Father's business? Yet He went down with them. Down into the home, down into all the joys and sorrows and details of their everyday life, and this was also to Him the Father's business. Is it otherwise now? Does He not still go down with those who have sought Him sorrowing into the sphere of their daily toil, into their every circumstance, that all may be brightened and cheered with His presence?

2. Was subject to them. He adapted Himself to all their needs and requirements. He placed Himself, as it were, at their disposal, and virtually said, "What will you that I should do unto you?" Reverently speaking, is it not so still? Has He not offered Himself to all who have sought Him? Does He not now adapt Himself as our Savior to our every condition and requirement? Is He not still, on the ground of His own promise, subject to them that believe? He cannot deny Himself.

THE CALL OF JOHN. Luke 3:1-6.

"Pleasure-seeking only,
Though others be Lonely;
Dressing, drinking, eating,
The soul madly cheating;
Scorning the love unpriced,
So we shall not be missed."

A life is poorly lived indeed that is not missed when gone. Those most anxious to obtrude themselves before their fellows seem to leave no gap behind them when they die. John the Baptist sought no place for himself, but God lifted him up as a trumpet, putting him, as it were, to His mouth, and, filling him with His own divine breath, made him the voice of God. Luke, as an historian, is very precise in giving us here, in a few words, the outward historical setting of John's life, but we tarry not to look at the framework, beautiful and wonderful as it is. We seek to point out—

I. When this Call Came. It came to John while "in the wilderness" (v. 2). Into this desert or sparsely peopled part of the valley of Jordan John had evidently gone, that there alone he might learn more fully what the mind of the Lord was concerning him. To improve our time we have often to cease working and get alone with God, especially when we realize that some definite purpose of God concerning us is breaking in upon our minds and hearts. Take time to be holy. Wait on the Lord. Enter your closet and shut to the door.

II. How this Call Came. "The Word of God came unto John" (v. 2). How the Word of God came to him we are not told. He being filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth, and as his early longings and convictions ripened into settled purposes, the revelation was made to him that this was God's work within him, and God's Word to be uttered through him. How often has the Word of God come to us in this way! When old familiar truths have suddenly flashed up with a new glory and urgency, bringing a fresh message from the Lord to the soul.

III. The Effect Produced. "And he came preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (v. 3). He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. When the Word of God burns within the bones the most unpopular methods may be adopted, but with sterling success. His mission was not to save, but to preach baptism as the outward sign of "a repentant heart, preparing the way of the Lord for their remission of sins. Those who had submitted to his baptism were afterwards pointed to the "Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

IV. The Character of his Testimony. There was—

1. A Fulfilling of Prophecy. "As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet" (v. 4). It is quite clear that John recognized and confessed that this Scripture was fulfilled in him before their eyes (John 1:23), just as his Master did with regard to Isaiah 61 (Luke 4:21). Every truly consecrated life is a fulfilling, or filling full, of the Word of God. It shall not return void or empty when our hearts and souls are in it.

2. An Abandonment of Self. "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness" (v. 4). John said, "I am the voice of one crying," etc. (John 1:23). John was the Word made voice. Christ was the Word made flesh. The message that came through Isaiah over 700 years ago is now voiced through John by the power of the Holy Spirit. He who would be a herald of Christ must be content to be a voice, and that voice not his own. The polluting breath of self-assertiveness must not be in it if its tones are to be pure and heavenly. "Not I, but Christ in me." John's was not a voice singing, but a voice crying in the wilderness, as one in an agony for the will of God. Those who so sigh and cry will have the divine mark set upon them (Ezekiel 9:4).

3. A Glorification of Christ. "Prepare you the way of the Lord," etc. (v. 4). John is not concerned about his own way, but is intensely interested in "the way of the Lord." John honors Christ. 1. As the pre-eminent One. The glory of Christ fills the broad horizon of his vision, and occupies both hemispheres of his soul. His way and His paths. 2. As the filling One. "Every valley shall be filled" (v. 5). He fills up the valleys by exalting them (Isaiah 40:4). He feeds the hungry by lifting them up into His own fullness. No matter how deep and wide the chasm of our need may be He can fill up out of His own "unsearchable riches." 3. As the humbling One. "Every mountain and hill shall be brought low" (v. 5). The lofty pride of Saul was suddenly brought low on the way to Damascus (Acts 9). He brings down that He might raise up. 4. As the upright One. "The crooked shall be made straight." Every son of God was once part of a crooked nation (Philippians 2:15). It takes an upright one to straighten out the crooks in others, and to the crooked this may be, and often is, a painful and shameful process. He suffered, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. 5. As the comforting One. "The rough ways shall be made smooth" (v. 2). Rough ways have caused many to faint and be discouraged. Rough ways are very common, and many even of God's children go on sad and wearily. Do we know Christ as the Smoother of our ways? "They looked unto Him, and were lightened." He is the "Breaker up" of our way, and can make the rough places smooth for us. The Israelites had light in their dwellings, while the Egyptians sat in darkness. He does make a difference. 6. As the universal One. "All flesh shall see the salvation of God" (v. 6). The good tidings of the Gospel was for all people (Luke 2:10). God is not a man that He should lie, and He has said, "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord" (Numbers 14:21). This curse-burdened earth is groaning on, waiting for the emancipating day, when the King Himself shall appear as the "blessed and only Potentate," and when all shall know Him, from the least unto the greatest.

THE PREACHING OF JOHN. Luke 3:7-18.

There is nothing like the glare of Heaven's light for blinding our eyes to the deceitful things of earth. The eyes of John were on the Son of Righteousness, and his tongue a flame of fire. The pure in heart shall see God, and they that see God shall not fear the face of man. The character of John's preaching has many lessons.

I. A Burning Question. "He said, O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (v. 7). There is wrath to come, but who has warned you that you have not fled from it through repentance. How can you flee from the wrath to come if you are not fleeing from your sins? The way of repentance is the way into the Father's bosom (Luke 15:20). From whom has your warning come?

II. An Urgent Demand. "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves," etc. (v. 8). It is easier to say within ourselves than to show the fruits of repentance towards God in our lives. Any tree may shake with the wind, but by their fruits are they known. Bringing forth fruit unto God is the evidence that we have fled from the wrath to come. This pressing claim of the desert preacher has much need to be emphasized today. Faith, humility, brotherly love, and zeal for the kingdom of God are fruits worthy of repentance.

III. A Testing Crisis. "And now also the axe is laid at the root of the tree," etc. (v. 9). The message of this forerunner of Christ was as an axe laid at the root of each tree, and by which each fruitless tree in due time would be hewn down. The words of John would judge them on the testing day. Every time we hear the Gospel of Christ in the power of God it is, as it were, an axe laid at the root of our life that will be used by the hand of the Judge in cutting down the fruitless impenitent. Has Jesus not declared that "the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him on the last day?" (John 12:48). "Take heed therefore how you hear" (Luke 8:18).

IV. A Practical Doctrine. "The people, the publicans, and the soldiers asked him, saying, What shall we do?" (vv. 10-14). The man whose eyes are on the coming Christ is the most practical man on earth. Here were three classes of anxious inquirers. To the first he preached brotherly love (v. 11), to the second honesty in business (v. 13), to the third forbearance and contentment (v. 14). John's preaching of righteousness led to repentance, but culminated, as all such preaching ever should, on pointing to the "Lamb of

God, which takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The repentance that does not lead to the Cross is a repentance that needs to be repented of.

V. A Self-Humbling Confession. "John answered, saying, One mightier than I comes, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose" (v. 16). John was mighty in righteousness, but Jesus was mightier in grace. The might of a servant of Christ lies in the mightiness of his Master. "One mightier than I comes." The knowledge of the nearness of the mighty coming One filled the heart of John with courage and comfort. The great Spirit and Fire-baptizer was at hand, and the herald is already lost in the brightness of His coming. Present-day preachers crying like a voice in the wilderness of this Christ-rejecting and pleasure-loving world have much need, like John, to know the sustaining power of this heart-bracing truth. "The Lord is at hand." The Almighty King will soon appear. Behold He comes.

VI. A Soul-Inspiring Proclamation. "He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (v. 16). The marginal rendering of the Revised Version is "in" instead of "with." John baptized with water as an outward evidence of repentance. Jesus Christ baptizes with the Holy Spirit as an inward assurance of forgiveness and acceptance (Romans 8:16). To be baptized with or in the Holy Spirit means the entering of the soul into a holy, heavenly, illuminating atmosphere, where the things of God and eternity are clearly seen. It is a passing from darkness into His marvelous light. To live in the Spirit is to live in the glowing fire of the divine presence. Here spiritual things become more real than the visible things of earth; here all believers are made to drink into one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). This baptism cannot come through the works of the flesh; it is the gift of the Mighty Ascended One. "He shall baptize you." Are you so baptized?

VII. A Solemn and Timely Warning. "Whose fan is in His hand. He will gather the wheat; He will burn the chaff" (v. 17). He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire carries the fan in His hand, He who unites and enriches with spiritual blessings also separates and judges. To come into contact with Christ is to come under the power of His fan. He carries it in His hand, and in a very real sense the purging process is going on now in the lives of those who have come into the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But the time will come when He will thoroughly purge the Church as "His floor," the sphere in which He has in grace been operating by the Holy Spirit, and where the lifeless chaff and the precious wheat meanwhile lie mingled in a confused heap. The fan is in His hand, so that He Himself must come before the final sifting can take place. He shall separate the precious from the vile (Malachi 3:3). The wheat and the tares are allowed to grow together until the harvest (Matthew 13:30). His wheat is gathered into "His garner," but the empty chaff He will not own, but appoints it to the "fire unquenchable" (Matthew 25:46).

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. Luke 4:1-13.

"We mourn, Lord, that our wav'ring will
So oft invites the tempter's skill;
We must confess that still we find
Some fleshy lusts war 'gainst the mind;
O break our chain, Lord, set us free.
You tempted once, us tempted see."

Jesus Christ was tempted on all points like as we are. How He met the tempter in the wilderness reveals to us some of those principles that lie at the root of every Christlike life, also teaching us something of what is meant by the "armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11). We shall look at these sayings of our Lord as a summary of the characteristics of a Christian life. It is—

I. A Life not of this World. "Man shall not live by bread alone" (v. 4). "Bread alone" may stand for all that goes to satisfy the natural cravings of man. It is possible to possess all that this world can furnish, and yet be destitute of life in this deep and divine sense. That which is "born from above" must also be supplied from above. We must ever distinguish between soul and spirit. Material things will satisfy the soulish life, but not the spiritual. You has He quickened, who were dead.

II. A Life of Faith. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." The words of God are spirit and life, and so become food for the inner man (John 6:63). "Your Word has quickened me" (Psalm 119:50). "Your words were found, and I did eat them, and Your Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (Jeremiah 15:16). The Word of God is always sweet to the taste of faith. While we feed on the Word of God faith itself will be fed, for faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

III. A Life of Adoration. "You shall worship the Lord your God" (v. 8). This was our Lord's answer to the devil when he offered Him the glory of "all the kingdoms of the world" on condition that He worshiped him. The glory of this Christ-rejecting world is only the mirage of the devil. Any one who worships him may easily have the promise of it. The glory of this world passes away. Whoever or whatever has the worship of our hearts is by us crowned as Lord of all we are. "You shall have no other God before Me."

IV. A Life of Service. "Him only shall you serve" (v. 8). "One is your Master, even Christ" (Matthew 23:8). The will of God ought to be supreme in the life of every Christian. "You call Me Master and Lord, and you say well: for so I am." He can take no other place than that of being "Head over all." In our daily work and calling are we conscious that we serve Him only? Doing all as for Him will lift the commonest drudgery into a work so holy that angels might covet. This is the cure for a grumbling spirit, and an unfailing remedy for the prevailing sin of discontent.

V. A Life of Humble Obedience. "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (v. 12). The Lord charged His people in the wilderness with tempting Him "ten times" by not hearkening unto His voice (Numbers 14:22). Our unbelief and disobedience sorely tempt the loving kindness of our God. What could try a true mother's heart like the doubting of her love? How would a faithful husband feel if treated by his wife like an untrustworthy stranger? Let us cease to tempt the Lord our God by hearkening unto other voices and walking in the light of our own eyes. Has He not declared, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?" "Hear you Him." You shall not tempt the Lord your God with your discontent, your doubtings, and your unbelief.

VI. An Overcoming Life. "The devil departed from Him" (v. 13). The victory was gained by the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, "It is written." The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit, not only because He uses it, but also because He is the Maker of it. "Holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Jesus fearlessly used the written Word against the archenemy of souls. We may as confidently use it against all his modern little angels. "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Romans 8:37). "Thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

A POWERFUL SERMON. Luke 4:14-30.

"Nazareth, O Nazareth!
The' a name of evil holding,
Here was brought 'The Undeified,'
Like a dove a serpent folding,
Here grew up 'The Holy Child.'
Nazareth! Cross—like we see
Your stained name from all stain free."

It was said, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" But ever since these words were uttered the name has become sacred because of its association with Jesus Christ. In fact, there is a heaven-born principle here, namely, everything with which Jesus Christ identifies Himself becomes holy, no matter how small and disreputable it may be in the sight of men. Palestine is called the Holy Land just because the feet of the Holy One trod upon it. A sinner out of whom no good thing could ever come may become holy in the self-same way by coming into contact with Jesus. If Nazareth lost its stain of sin through the Name of Jesus, so may we.

"Take the Name of Jesus with you,
Child of sorrow and of woe;
It will joy and comfort give you,
Take it then wherever you go."

Anywhere and everywhere His Name is a saving Name. Let it be then as the "new cruse" of salt to sweeten every bitter spring in our lives (2 Kings 2:20, 21). The picture before us is beautiful and impressive.

I. The Preacher. "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (v. 14). Jesus had gone out of Galilee, as others had gone, to the baptism of John, but the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Him and the assault of the devil in the wilderness had wrought a marvelous change upon His public character. "There went out a fame of Him through all the region." He was an obscure man until He was baptized with the Holy Spirit. So was Peter and the rest of the apostles. The man or woman who returns to his or her work in the power of the Spirit will not be without manifest tokens of the blessing of God.

II. The Place. "He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up" (v. 16). He began at home. "Go home to your friends, and tell them how great things the Lord has done for you" (Mark 5:19). The first example of piety is to be shown at home (1 Timothy 5:4). The home field is often the most barren. "Neither did His brethren believe in Him." Nevertheless His faithful testimony led many to say, "Whence has this Man this wisdom and these mighty works?" (Matthew 13:54). Wisdom and mighty works characterize all those who are filled with the Spirit.

III. The Text. "And when He had opened the book (roll) He found the place," the place where the lesson was for that day (v. 17). The

place was Isaiah 61:1. The text He found was the prophetic counterpart of His own experience. As preachers we may be assured of this, that it is not the will of God that we should preach from texts that have not had their fulfillment in our own experience. "We speak that we do know" was the testimony of Jesus (John 3:11). He had just received the anointing of the Spirit, now He declares it to them.

IV. The Sermon. He began with the application, saying, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (v. 21). The Scripture here referred to is a fountain of living waters (v. 18). Streams of blessing from the Anointed One to the poor, the broken-hearted, the captives, the blind, and the bruised. It was a sermon suited for the needs of all. This is the Gospel of Christ, but it was also heart-searching and convincing. His reference to the Sidonian widow and the Syrian leper (vv. 25-27) magnified the grace of God, while it cut at the roots of their pharisaical pride. He did not plead for their favor or forbearance, but boldly declared that "No prophet is accepted in his own country." The man who has a message from God does not preach to please the people. One of the best things that could happen many Gospel hearers is that they should be tremendously offended.

V. The Results. "That there will be definite results of some kind is a moral certainty when the preacher is anointed with the Holy Spirit." They—

1. Wondered. "They wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (v. 22). Men are still more inclined to wonder at gracious words than mere philosophical words. The tongue of the divinely learned knows how to speak a word in season to him that is weary (Isaiah 50:4). The wisdom that comes from above is always practical. Those filled with the Holy Spirit have grace poured into their lips (Psalm 45:2). Gracious words are seldom out of season.

2. Were Filled with Wrath (v. 28). Their wonder was turned into hate when the searchlight of truth was turned in upon their own hearts. These synagogue members, like many modern Gospel hearers, were quite pleased to hear beautiful words of grace as long as their own personal sins were allowed to remain hidden and untouched. Christ is the Truth as well as the Way.

3. Cast Him Out (v. 29). Those who have bad eyes are inclined to blame the sun. There is not much sometimes between man's admiration and disgust. Those who sacrifice the truth of God for the sake of their own proud and selfish ends show that they are animated by the grossest form of tyranny. Oh, the riches of His grace! He whom they cast out has said, "Them that comes unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."

4. Failed to Hinder Him. "But He passing through the midst of them went His way" (v. 30). Oh, the peerless dignity of Christ the Truth! He went His way, not hindered by the wrath of man any more than the clouds of the sky could impede the progress of the sun in the heavens. Sin-blinded man may thrust the Christ of God out of his life, but His eternal purpose will still go on its way. Be not deceived, God is not mocked.

A SCENE IN A SYNAGOGUE. Luke 4:33-37.

"O ignorant poor man! what do you bear
Lock'd up within the casket of your breast?
What jewels and what riches have you there?
What heavenly treasure in so weak a chest?
Think of her worth, and think that God did mean
This worthy mind should worthy things embrace;
Blot not her beauties with your thoughts unclean,
Nor her dishonor with your passion base."—Sir John Davies.

They were not all saints who attended the synagogue; unclean devils are regular hearers. But when Jesus Christ speaks with power (v. 32) the unclean spirits are sure to "cry out." There is never much real work done for God without the roaring of the adversary. The lion roars when robbed of its whelps. In examining this interesting scene we shall look at—

I. The Enemies of Jesus. There was, first, "the spirit of the unclean devil;" and, second, the man who was possessed of this spirit (v. 33). This "unclean spirit" uses the will and the mouth of the man for his devilish purposes, and speaks of the man as one with himself. "Let us alone. What have we to do with You?" Those at enmity with the work and purposes of Jesus Christ are in league with the devil, and unless there is a divorce of will and interest the doom of the devil will be theirs. Listen to their language. They—

1. Acknowledge His True Character. "I know You who You are, the Holy One of God" (v. 34). The confession of this fallen and unclean spirit might put to shame all Unitarian infidels who deny the divinity of Christ. This demon from the pit, in acknowledging Him as "Jesus of Nazareth" and the "Holy One of God," made confession both of His humanity and divinity. Christ as the Son of God was

given (John 3:16), but as the Son of humanity He was born (Isaiah 9:6).

2. Question His Mission. "Are You come to destroy us?" (v. 34). Does this unclean devil judge Jesus Christ to be like himself, "coming only to steal and to kill?" How far the purposes of God's grace are above the thoughts of the unclean and the sinful! Although He had come to destroy us, devil-polluted ones, who could have charged Him with injustice? But, thank God, "He came to seek and to save" (Luke 19:10). Ponder this demon-possessed one's question in the light of Isaiah 53 and the glory of His Cross. "Sin is of the devil."

3. Shun His Presence. "What have we to do with You?" (v. 34). There is certainly nothing in common between the "Holy One of God" and an "unclean devil." "What communion has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:15). Satan and all who are his servants will forever hate the light because it reproves their deeds (John 3:21). This question, "What have we to do with You?" might be profitably turned into "What have You to do with us?" "He loved us, and gave Himself for us!" Better have to do with Him now in mercy than delay until we have to do with Him in judgment.

4. Seek Rest in their Sins. "Let us alone" (v. 34). This is still the cry of those wedded to the devil and impurity. All the Heaven such desire is just to be allowed to lie peaceably on the bed of their carnal pleasures, and when the Gospel of salvation comes knocking at their door they cry, "Trouble me not, for I am in bed." If Jesus had come to give men peace in their sins the godless world would have gladly received Him.

II. The Word of Jesus. The Word of God is quick and powerful. It is—

1. A Convicting Word. "Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold your peace" (v. 35). The first work of Jesus Christ is to silence the sinner. Such foul mouths must be stopped (Romans 3:19). In the presence of this heart-searching One every clamorous devil must be speechless. The Word of Christ turns self-justification into self-condemnation. To see sinfulness in the light of His holiness is enough to shut us up to the cry of the leper, "Unclean! unclean!"

2. A Converting Word. Jesus said to the unclean spirit, "Come out of him." This is the Gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto Salvation. There is no spirit too evil for the overcoming power of Jesus, no soul too unclean for His cleansing blood (1 John 1:7). No thought, however proud or polluted, that He cannot cast out. This Almighty Deliverer can make prisoners of every enemy that wars against the highest interests of the soul (2 Corinthians 10:5).

III. The Work of the Devil. "The devil threw him in the midst" (v. 35). This helpless demon-possessed man got his last throw of the devil in the very presence of the Savior. The prince of darkness will never let his subjects go without a desperate effort to render them useless by throwing them down. The hour and power of Satan is sure to be manifested when the Great Deliverer is at hand; even at the very feet of Jesus the devil will dare to throw a man down, but this proves his last throw. This bull of Bashan only threw the man at the feet of the Savior.

IV. The Victory of Jesus. Jesus said, "Come out of him," and he came out of him, and hurt him not (v. 35). If unclean spirits are not exorcized by the word of Jesus Christ, then for man Paradise is lost. Who but He can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? The unclean spirit came out, so that man's soul was rescued as a prey from the destroying power of the mighty. You are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. When an unclean devil hears the word of Christ he must obey because he is under law. Shall we be less obedient because we are under grace? God forbid!

V. The Astonished Onlookers. "They were all amazed, saying, What a word is this" (v. 36). It is possible to be amazed at the "authority and power" of Christ, and yet not be amended. Many are confounded at the manifest power of the Gospel of God who are not converted. Better is it to be a devil-driven soul at the feet of Jesus than a mere amazed self-righteous onlooker. To gape and wonder at the overcoming power of the grace of God in others who were worse than ourselves is no token of grace. There are many who devoutly talk about churches, ministers, and religious affairs who are in heart far from the Kingdom of God. "Marvel not that I say unto you, You must be born again."

LAUNCH OUT INTO THE DEEP. Luke 5:1-10.

"Your love, O Christ, is boundless,
More boundless than the sky;
To deepest plummet soundless,
For You for me did die.
Your love is 'grace abounding,
With fullness like the sea;

Still, still it is forth-sounding.

Glad tidings unto me."

"That you may know what is the breadth and depth of the love of Christ" (Ephesians 3:18). "Launch out into the deep."

Blessed light, to see the people pressing to hear the Word of God. Oh, that today we could witness this soul thirst for the message of life! Blessed anxiety that presses the people to Jesus. He knows how to speak a word to the weary. Grace and truth flow from His lips. Notice here—

I. Devoted Possession. "He entered into Simon's ship, and taught the people out of it" (V. 3). His ship was ready for the Master's use. Oh, what an honor to be the means of helping Jesus to reach the pressing crowd! He did this through Simon's ship. How is this same Jesus to reach and teach the heathen millions? Much in the same way, through your possessions. But how few are willing to lend their all to the Lord. Simon's loan was abundantly rewarded, even in this life, by the marvelous draught of fishes. Let us not talk boastfully nor think presumptuously about our possessions; if we are withholding them from the cause of Christ we are robbing God and our own soul, and what shall it profit? etc.

II. A Gracious Commission. "Launch out, and let down" (v. 4). When Christ takes possession He also gives commission. If you have been sitting fretting over your own weakness, "Launch out into the deep" of divine strength. If you are despairing over your own unworthiness, launch out into the deep of God's infinite love (Ephesians 3:18, 19), and let down the net of restful trust. If you are floundering in the shallows of your own feelings, launch out into the deep of God's faithfulness. The great fishes are in the deep, and those who launch out may hope to find them. God's footsteps are in the deep, and there His wonders are seen (Psalm 107:24). Are you a preacher? Then, like Paul, you will be all the better of being a "night and a day in the deep" before coming forth to the people. Come with a heart filled with the treasures of the deep, the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10).

III. A Humbling Confession. "We have toiled all night, and taken nothing" (v. 5). It is always very trying after honestly and earnestly toiling and struggling all the night to catch men to find you have taken nothing. But this is not all loss, for even then we are in a better condition for giving God the glory when He gives the blessing. Are you ashamed to confess your failure in the past? Would you gladly hide the fact that your labor has been fruitless? Surely not! Like Simon, confess it to Jesus, for this is necessary before the launching out on the tack of faith. Tell Him all that is in your heart, keep nothing back. He has a remedy for your weakness and failure. He can turn your mourning into dancing (Psalm 30:11).

IV. A God-honoring Resolution. "Nevertheless at Your word I will" (v. 5). The way to victory is the pathway of faith. Simon's feelings said, "It's no use; I've toiled all night, the most likely season, and taken nothing;" but Simon's faith says, "Nevertheless." This was not a point to be reasoned, but simply believed. Christian toiler, let not the past hinder the present. Like Simon, make a fresh start on the authority of Jesus. Peter knows now where to find "launch out." He knows now how to find "At Your word." Those who go out at His word will have good cause to praise Him. Unbeliever, your case is sad, toiling and struggling in the darkness of night, thinking by your own efforts to gain God's blessing and taking nothing. Here is the more excellent way, "At Your word I will."

V. An Amazing Satisfaction. "They enclosed a great multitude" (v. 6). This time they are more successful "out of season" than they were before "in season." The word of Christ believed made all the difference. They had the habit of fishing at night; but sometimes our old forms have to be broken through before we can see the power of Jesus manifested. If Simon had contended for the form he would have lost the haul. Ah, yes, soul-satisfying fullness through the power of Christ can only be enjoyed in the way of doing His will in His presence. Let not habits, forms, or customs, however good, stand in the way of doing what now plainly appears to be the will of your Lord. Follow Him, and He will satisfy the longing soul (Psalm 107:9).

VI. A Brotherly Cooperation. "They beckoned unto their partners, and they came and filled both ships" (v. 7). Had they not invited their brothers to co-operate, how much would have been lost? Alas, how much is still being lost in Christian work for lack of union! What hinders it? Pride and selfishness. The blessing came to Simon's boat, through faith in Christ, but He did not mean it all to remain there. Others were needing as well as he, so he beckoned his brethren to come and help. Notice, it is the helpers that share the results. If pastors do not come to help in the times of blessings they need not wonder although they should not gather much of the fruit. When will churches, like these boats, come together, and gather the fruits of the promise of Christ?

VII. An Sincere Humiliation. "I am a sinful man, O Lord" (v. 8). This is always the effect where His greatness and goodness are realized. The goodness of God leads to repentance. God forbid that success should ever lead to pride and self-sufficiency. And yet sometimes it does on the part of Christian workers. Has the goodness of God, as seen on the Cross, ever led you to cry "I am a sinful man?" If so, you need not say, like Simon, "Depart from me," when He says "Come unto Me." If you are a sinful man, Jesus is the sinful sinner's Savior. In bidding Him depart you know not what you do.

VIII. A Complete Consecration. "They forsook all, and followed Him" (v. 11). You would have thought that they had as much here as would have satisfied them for a long while, but, no, they "forsook all." We are not to live on our experience, no matter how wonderfully gracious it may be. We must forget the things that are behind, and press on to follow and to know. We cannot feed on

the souls we win for Jesus, however precious or numerous. We must learn to follow Jesus for our joy and strength; our life is in Him only. Friend, where are you? Are you still sitting by your boat gloating over your good works and past accomplishments, loving these more than Christ; or are you sitting mending the meshes of broken resolutions after much fruitless effort? In either case, hear the Master's call, and arise and follow Jesus (Philippians 3:7, 8).

THE LEPER CLEANSED. Luke 5:12-15.

"What though my harp and vial be
Both hung upon the willow tree?
What though my bed be now my grave,
And for my house I darkness have?
What though my healthful days are fled,
And I lie numbered with the dead?
Yet I have hope by Your great power,
To spring—though now a withered flower."
—Herrick.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." This is Heaven's jubilee note of hope for the inhabitants of this great, needy world. Man's withered hopes are resurrected at His touch, and the leprous breath of the unclean made sweet by His grace. He can turn the dolorous cry "Unclean" into joyful songs of praise. He is as merciful and mighty on the lonely sea (v. 8) as in the crowded city (v. 12). Wherever the presence of Jesus Christ is there is "the power of God." Observe his—

I. Miserable Condition. "A man full of leprosy" (v. 12). His terrible disease had reached its final stage; he was now full of leprosy. Like sin, this loathsome malady may work slowly, but its course is irresistible and deadly. It poisons the blood, and so the whole physical being becomes polluted. Sin affects the heart, out of which are the issues of life. In the early ages the Church of Rome regarded lepers as dead, and had "the rites" said over them. There is a law in France that such shall be disinherited. A man living in sin is a man dead to God, and disinherited of Heaven's love and peace.

II. Inspiring Revelation. "Who seeing Jesus" (v. 12). Seeing Jesus will never fail to awaken hope in the darkened, sin-crushed heart. He had doubtless heard of Christ's "mighty works" without ever uttering a prayer; but now those dull, despairing eyes suddenly brighten with a new light as they gaze upon the living Person of the merciful Wonder-worker. He believed the report, and faith has been turned into sight. What a contrast is here between the Man "full of compassion" and the man "full of leprosy;" between a seeking Savior and a seeking sinner!

III. Humble Position. "He fell on his face" (v. 12). Seeing the face of God always makes us hide our own. It is the outward expression of a deep inward conviction. It was so with Isaiah (chapter 6), with Job (chapter 42:5, 6), with Peter (Luke 5:8), and with John (Rev. 1:17). They are only lip-professing Pharisees, who stand afar off. We have never seen ourselves as in His sight if we have not been overwhelmed in the dust through shame.

IV. Earnest Petition. "Lord, if You will, You can make me clean" (v. 12). The prayer of this poor outcast was more to the point than that of Peter the disciple (see v. 8). This prayer reveals—

1. A Knowledge of the Character of Christ. Out of this knowledge there springs up an intelligent faith in His power. "If You will You can." "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14). To doubt His divinity and almightiness is to knock at a locked door. He who comes to God must believe that He is a rewarder of them who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). This petition brings out also —

2. The One Burning Desire of the Leper. "To be made clean." He frankly confesses his need, and pleads for personal cleansing. It was the work of the High Priest of old to make atonement, that the people might be clean from all their sins before the Lord (Leviticus 16:30). If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us.

V. Instant and Perfect Salvation. "He put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be you clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him" (v. 13). Every miracle is linked on to the "I will" of Jesus Christ. Before the critics can eliminate the miraculous from the Bible they must turn out the "I wills" of the Son of God. These few words of our Lord are weighted with precious meaning. There was the—

1. Atoning Touch. "He touched him." The holiness of God comes into contact with man in all his defilement. But the Holy One, like

the light which shines in darkness, is not in any way defiled by the touch. He who bore our sins was no sinner. As never man spoke like this Man, so never man touched like this Man. All the resources of the Godhead are in the touch of Christ.

2. Assuring Word. "I will: be you clean." With His healing touch comes His word of assurance. We are saved by His blood, and assured by His word. His touch of love is accompanied with His word of power. He speaks, and it is done.

3. Complete Deliverance. "Immediately the leprosy departed from him." Where the leprosy went would not trouble him. The joy of salvation was now his. Our sins are said to be cast behind His back and buried in the depths of the sea. Where God's back is, or how deep the sea is, need not concern us, since they have departed from us through the almighty grace of God.

VI. Special Commission. "Go and show yourself unto the priest, and offer" (v. 14). In showing himself unto the priest, and offering according as Moses commanded, he was bearing "a testimony unto them" that Jesus Christ came not to set aside the law, but to fulfill it. The work of Christ can stand the minutest inspection, not only of the law and the prophets, but also of the world and the devil. Go, show yourself, if so be that yourself has experienced His perfect cleansing from the power of sin. Every saved soul should be a testimony unto Him.

STRANGE THINGS. Luke 5:17-26.

"The Lord lacks nothing; yet makes—
Makes power in weakness;
So that this fallen race of ours basketh—
Basketh in His meekness."

"We have seen strange things today," was the language of some of those who were eye-witnesses to the healing and forgiving of this poor palsied sinner. Christianity will always be a "strange thing" to a gaping, godless world. The saving, healing power of Christ will never cease to awaken amazement in the minds of men. Christ Himself is to many the most perplexing wonder of all. The mystery of the divine working in the soul of man is the mystery of the incarnation. It is as easy for Christ to create a world as to forgive a sinner. Each is equally strange. But what were some of the "strange things" that they saw that day?

I. An Unlettered Man Teaching. Those who heard Him in the synagogue said, "Whence has this Man this wisdom?" (Matthew 13:54). While He taught in the Temple the Jews marveled, saying, "How knows this Man letters, having never learned?" (John 7:15). Here we have Him teaching in the presence of "doctors of the law." Christ, who is the wisdom of God, said of Himself, "I am from above, you are from beneath." A man may be "lettered" and "scholarly," and yet blind to the wisdom that comes from above through the eye salve of the Holy Spirit (Rev. 3:18). To be taught of God is the heritage of every soul that has been born from above.

II. A Sick Man let Down through a Roof (v. 19). Those who really believe in Jesus will some way or other bring their burdens to His feet, as those four men brought the helpless paralytic. Whatever burdens us should lead to the breaking up of everything that stands between us and Jesus. Such roof breaking is sure to appear as needless waste to those who stand unconcerned, with no burden of grief, no pressing request on behalf of a wasted life. If we have no burden of our own, let the need of others bring us into His presence.

III. A Man Forgiving Sins. "He said unto him, Your sins are forgiven you" (v. 20). What? A Man forgiving sins! "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" This is a strange thing. Yes, it is. Had not Jehovah said, "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, and will not remember your sins?" (Isaiah 43:25). Who is this that forgives sins also? Let those who deny His divinity answer. The Man Christ Jesus forgiving sins is the crowning act of the matchless grace of God, and will be one of those "strange things" at which we shall marvel through all eternity.

IV. A Man Receiving Forgiveness Through Faith. "When He saw their faith He said" (v. 20). The faith of the four men who carried, as well as the faith of the anxious man lying sick on the couch. To the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees a man receiving the forgiveness of all his sins through believing in Jesus was indeed a startling sight. By the works of the law shall no man be justified in the sight of God (Romans 3:28). It is of faith that it might be by grace. He saw their faith. The eyes of Jesus are always quick to discern the trust of the heart, and His hand is equally quick to help.

V. A Man who could Read their Thoughts. "Jesus perceived their thoughts" (v. 22). While they were reasoning in their hearts the Lord was reading their thoughts. "All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13). Thus says the Lord, "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them" (Ezekiel 11:5). In the workshop of men's minds there are many weapons forged secretly against the people and purposes of God, but they shall not prosper, for our Lord and Master perceives their thoughts. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked."

VI. A Man Perfectly Healed at Once. "And immediately he rose up before them, and departed to his own house glorifying God" (v. 25). This was another "strange thing" seen that day. This is not after the fashion of men, but it is very God-like. His work is perfect. No man will ever be able to add a finishing touch to the saving work of Christ. The work of healing and forgiving was done suddenly and completely. It was such a blessed work wrought on him that he could rise up and go to his own house glorifying God. That man is well saved who can glorify God in his own house. Man's chief end is to glorify God, but until he is healed and forgiven through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the chief end is lost.

VII. Scribes and Pharisees Filled with Fear. "They were all amazed, and filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things today" (v. 26). When the worldly-wise and those stuffed full of religious pride confess their amazement and fear at the sayings and doings of Jesus Christ it is in itself a "strange thing." Why should the exhibition of sovereign mercy fill religious men with fear? What has worldly-wiseman to say to this? Self-satisfied souls can never be the recipients of the saving grace of God. They that be whole need not a physician. "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." It is possible to see these "strange things" performed on others, and to be for a time both amazed and fearful, yet never profit personally by the healing power of the Redeemer (Psalm 103:1-5). "He who believes not shall not see life."

BLESSINGS AND WOES. Luke 6:20-26.

These words of our Lord, though in substance the same as those spoken by Him on the mount, were not delivered on the mount, but "on the plain" (v. 17). They were spoken with "His eyes on His disciples" (v. 20), as if the teaching was specially meant for them first of all, and through them by their lives and teaching to the generations that were to follow. The blessings and the woes are equal in number (four), as if every blessing had its corresponding woe. Every privilege neglected brings its woe of remorse. There is no via media between blessing and woe. All who are not in this marvelous light are in darkness.

I. Here are Four Conditions of Blessedness.

1. Poverty. "Blessed be you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (v. 20). Of course poverty in spirit must be meant (Matthew 5:3), for with respect to material things a man may be as poor as Lazarus and yet be as proud as the devil. When a man is really sensible of his personal destitution before God he has entered into a blessed state, "for to this man, says the Lord, will I look, that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at My Word" (Isaiah 66:2). Such poor ones in this world God has chosen rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom (Isaiah 2:5).

2. Hunger. "Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be filled" (v. 21). This is the hunger that cannot be appeased with the things of earth and time. It is not goods, but goodness, that alone can fill the hungry soul (Psalm 107:9). "He fills the hungry with good things" (Luke 1:53). Spirit hunger is the cry of real need, the silent language of a soul in distress; a feeling never felt by those who are dead in trespasses and sin.

3. Sorrow. "Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh" (v. 21). The blessedness of being able to weep in the presence of Christ is utterly unknown to the world of frivolity and fashion. Such sorrow is not the result of disappointment through the blasting of selfish hopes or the upsetting of one's own personal interests. It is the sorrow of Christ begotten in the heart through sympathy and love. "Unto them that mourn in Zion He shall appoint beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning" (Isaiah 61:3). The sorrow of crucifixion shall be turned into the joy of resurrection (John 16:20). As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:4-7; Rev. 21:4).

4. Persecution. "Blessed are you when men shall hate you, separate you, reproach you, cast you out for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice, for your reward is great in Heaven" (v. 22). Persecution is part of the promised heritage of the Christian (Mark 10:29, 30). It is blessed, because it lifts the sufferer into closer fellowship with the Savior (John 17:14). The early disciples rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name (Acts 5:41).

II. Here are Four Conditions of Woefulness.

1. A Woe for the Rich. "Woe unto you that are rich, for you have received your consolation" (v. 24). There is no sin in having abundance of riches any more than in having abundance of health, but if not used for the glory of God, truly you have your reward. The woe of laying up treasure for ourselves is poverty towards God (Luke 12:21). In the rush of life the pre-eminent object of many is to be rich in the sight of men, while they are utterly indifferent and insensible to their abject poverty in the sight of God. Like the inhabitants of Bashan, "God spoke unto them in their prosperity; but they said, I will not hear" (Jeremiah 22:21). Here is a Heaven-sent epitaph for their tombstones: "You in your lifetime received your good things, now you are tormented" (Luke 16:25).

2. A Woe for the Full. "Woe unto you that are full, for you shall hunger" (v. 25). A life stuffed full of worldly pleasures and

possessions, but not satisfied. They are like drunken men craving for drink. The iniquity of Sodom was pride and fullness (Ezekiel 16:49). A heart filled with the love and enjoyment of earthly things has done its very best to shut out God, as every corner of the being has been already crammed with Christless interests. "Have you any room for Jesus?" The woe of graceless fullness is the gnawing of eternal hunger.

3. A Woe for the Merry. "Woe unto you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep" (v. 25). This now implies the time of our Christ rejection. The Lord fills the mouths of His people with laughter when He turns their captivity. When the prodigal came home they "began to be merry," but the mirth of fools is folly (Ecclesiastes 7:6). The mirth of the ungodly shall die away into everlasting mourning. Frivolous worldly minds hunt after the latest joke, and when it is found they immediately gape after the next. Their mirth is like the crackling of thorns beneath a pot, there is more noise than heat. The woe of Christless mirth is the tears of eternal shame.

4. A Woe for the Applauded. "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you" (v. 26). The maxim, *Vox populi, vox Dei*, is another failure here. The teaching of Scripture is tremendously emphatic on this point, and so contradictory to the wisdom of this world. "The friendship of this world is enmity with God." "Whoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). The world loves its own; if it loves you, then you are of the world. If you have been chosen out of the world the world will hate you (John 15:19). It is our highest wisdom to choose, like Mary, that good part that shall not be taken from us. The woe of the applauded, worldling is everlasting contempt.

BE MERCIFUL AS YOUR FATHER. Luke 6:27-38.

True charity is the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit. Love is of God. God is love. He who loves not knows not God. These words of our Lord, "Love your enemies," "Bless them that curse you," come with greater force as they do after the "blessings" and the "woes" that go before. This Great Teacher come from God rightly divides the Word of Truth. Let us look at—

I. The Precepts. These Heaven-made laws laid down here for us by Jesus Christ are mirrors that reflect the merciful character of our Father in Heaven, and their purpose is to help us into His likeness. "Be you therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful." These precepts touch us in a fourfold manner.

1. Concerning Loving. "Love your enemies" (v. 27). Of course this does not imply that we should not love our friends, but that our love should be God-like, who, while we were yet sinners, gave His Son to save us (John 3:16). If your enemy hunger give him bread to eat, for this your Father did for you in the time of your enmity, and so heaped such coals of fire upon your head as melted your heart (Proverbs 25:21, 22).

2. Concerning Blessing. "Bless them that curse you" (v. 28). You will bless the reviler by reviling not again. This is after the divine example (1 Peter 2:23). The apostle Paul obeyed this command to the letter (1 Corinthians 4:12). "Not rendering evil for evil, but contrariwise blessing" (1 Peter 3:9), will evidence that we are possessed by the Spirit of the Father.

3. Concerning Prayer. "Pray for them that despite-fully use you." To be able to pray for our enemies in the Spirit of Christ is a notable triumph for the grace of God. Christ gained such a victory when He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). This grace abounded also in Stephen (Acts 7:60). This love springs from the mercifulness of the Father.

4. Concerning Giving. "Give to every man that asks of you" (v. 30). This does not teach that we are to give all that every man may ask of us, but to every petitioner we are to give. This is after the mercifulness of the Father. A drunkard may ask you for a sixpence, but instead of that you give him a word of warning. If giving to the poor is not an evidence of the love of God dwelling in us, withholding is a certain proof that it does not (1 John 3:17).

II. The Examples. The mercifulness of our Father in Heaven is here contrasted with the natural kindness of ungodly men. The world loves its own. This comes before us in a threefold negative aspect. Our mercifulness is not to be like the sinner's, but like the Father's. The one is like a muddy pool, the other like a river clear as crystal.

1. Let not your love be like the love of sinners. "If you love them that love you, what thank have you? for sinners also love those that love them" (v. 32). The love of the unregenerate heart only goes out to those who love in return. The love of God embraces even those who hate Him without a cause. "Be you therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

2. Let not your works be like the works of sinners. "If you do good to them which do good to you, what thank have you? for sinners also do even the same" (v. 33). The motives of the Christian worker must be infinitely higher than those who are mere time-servers. The ungodly will show kindness to those who are kind to them. But our Father is kind even to the unthankful. "Be you therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

3. Let not your grace be like the grace of sinners. "If you lend to them of whom you hope to receive, what thank have you? for sinners also lend to sinners to receive as much again" (v. 34). Unbelievers will show grace and lend to their skeptical brethren in the hope of receiving as much again. But our Father in Heaven gives to the evil and the unjust, "hoping for nothing again" (Matthew 5:45). "Be you therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." Your righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, because it is not you that act, but the Spirit of the Father which is in you (Matthew 10:20).

III. The Promises. If the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, so that we can love our enemies and do good to them, hoping for nothing from them, then your Father which sees in secret will reward you openly.

1. Your Reward shall be Great (v. 35). It will be great in this life in that the divine nature will be manifestly ruling in our being. It will be great in the life which is to come, because that in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation you have glorified your Father in Heaven by letting your light shine before men.

2. You Shall be the Children of the Highest (v. 35). The God who rules over all shall claim you as His own children, and as the sons of the Highest your life shall be lifted up in Him who is "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1:21-23). "Be you therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

THE TREE AND ITS FRUIT. Luke 6:41-45.

This great Teacher come from God uses the simplest and most common illustrations in pressing upon the hearts of men the profoundest truths of revelation. In these verses He speaks of the "mote," the "beam," the "good tree and the bad tree," "thorns," the "bramble bush," "figs and grapes." All nature, like the burning bush, is ablaze with flaming thoughts of the divine. But, like Moses, we have to turn aside to see this great sight, and for this the beam had better first be taken out of our own eye. Christ here deals with the state of the eye (uncharitableness), and the condition of the heart (unfruitfulness). The corrupt heart has much to do with the marred eye. The clean in heart have always a merciful eye, for the pure in heart see God. When the beam of prejudice or envy is in our own eye then the motes of weakness and failure are easily seen in the eyes of others. Let us see that there is no beam marring our own spiritual vision while we talk of the motes which hinder the eyesight of others. The only remedy for a beam or a mote in the eye is to pull it out. It is a great mercy and a very blessed ministry to be able to take a mote out of a brother's eye, but it must needs be done very gently, for the eye is a most tender and sensitive member. It takes the tenderness of Christ to deal with mote hindrances in the doctrine and life of a brother. This is no work for hypocrites.

In this parable of the good and evil tree there is brought before us—

I. Two Classes of Character.

1. The Good Tree or the Good Man. A good tree is one which serves the purposes for which it was made. It is a reflection of the goodness of God, and constrains to thankfulness and praise. So with a good man, he is the image of God whose name is Good. The goodness of a tree is the gift of God through nature; the goodness of a man is the gift of God through grace. "There is none good but God." The good man is in perfect harmony with the mind and will of God. The chief end for which he was made is fully achieved through His abounding grace.

2. The Corrupt Tree or the Evil Man. A rotten or bitter tree is the likeness to which the Holy One compares the evil man. The evil does not lie so much in appearance as in character. A tree whose root is bitter or whose heart is rotten and corrupt may still have a beautiful and attractive exterior. This rottenness of heart is the result of a hidden disease. The Lord looks upon the heart. The evil man in the sight of God is he whose heart is still in the gall of bitterness. A heart not right with Him who is both Creator and Redeemer. He is one in whose heart the corrupting power of sin has unbridled sway like rottenness in the bones. He may be learned, courteous, fashionable, and even religious, but if the heart is not right he is an evil man. Jesus Christ says nothing about that large class of people who are neither good nor bad, but just "middling." In these latter days we are called upon to try, not only the professions, but the spirits whether they be of God (1 John 4:1).

II. Two Classes of Fruit.

1. The Good Fruit or Good Treasure out of the Heart. Fruit is the visible outcome of the inward character. This is a universal and unalterable law. "The good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." The acts of a good or godly man come out of his heart, and so partake of his real character; they are called "good treasure," because they are precious and go to enrich others. "Poor, yet making many rich." If the heart is not sound and filled with the goodness of God good treasure will never come out of it. The fruit of the Spirit in us—as the unpolluted sap is in the good tree—is love, joy, peace, etc. (Galatians 5:22).

The wisdom that is from above is pure, full of mercy, and good fruits (James 3:17). The good man brings forth the good treasures of his heart just as naturally as the tree brings forth fruit. There is no conscious effort, no thought of self-display, just that sweet constraining of love that makes giving a delightful necessity. We have this treasure in this earthen vessel because God has shined in our hearts and given us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6, 7).

2. The Corrupt Fruit or the Evil Treasure of the Heart. The evil man brings forth the evil treasure out of his heart just in the same way that a rotten and polluted tree brings forth bad fruit. The poisoned fountain of the carnal mind will never send forth the refreshing waters of spiritual thought. It seems strangely paradoxical to speak of the evil treasure of an evil man. He heaps up wrath against the day of wrath, while imagining that he is the heir of precious things. The character of the fruit reveals the condition of the heart of a tree. "Out of the heart are the issues of life." The evil is not only in the eyes or the lips, but deep down in the core of the being. "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." "Son, give Me your heart."

DIGGING DEEP. Luke 6:46-49.

There are three words here that characterize a wise man in the eyes of Jesus Christ. "Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings, and does them" (v. 47). To come to Him as a Savior, to hear Him as a Teacher, and to obey Him as a Master is an evidence that we have been and are being taught of God and made wise in Christ. These two builders are representatives of two great classes or conditions of men—those who live by faith on the Son of God, and those who walk in the light of the sparks of their own kindling.

I. The Wisdom of the Obedient. Our Lord says, "He is like a (wise) man which built an house, and dug deep, and laid the foundation on a rock" (v. 48). He is like such a man—

1. Because He Believed in the Rock. He had no faith in the sandy earth as a foundation, and because he believed in the rock he would do nothing in the way of building until he found it. Jesus Christ is the Rock. "Apart from Me," He says, "you can do nothing." Do you believe on the Son of God?

2. Because He Spared no Trouble to get at the Rock. "He dug deep." These are most suggestive words. A life that is to be pleasing to God by resisting temptation and finally triumphing over all the assaults of the world, the flesh and the devil must not begin in any superficial fashion. Its foundation will be deeply laid. There is much that may lie between the seeker and the Savior. Much pride, prejudice, and false teaching. It is no loss of time for a man to examine himself and to dig deep down through everything until the strong and mighty Christ stands revealed before him. Every builder knows that even dust will hinder the stones from being cemented together. Let there be "nothing between."

3. Because He Built his House upon it after He did Find the Rock. He was not satisfied with merely finding a good foundation, he sought the rock for the purpose of building thereupon. How many there are who seem perfectly satisfied in that they have found Christ as the Rock of Salvation, as their Atonement for sin, but who are utterly indifferent as to what they build thereon. They rest on the foundation, but they do not build on it. They are saved, but their lives do not reveal the structure of faith (1 Cor 3:12). Peter tells us how this building is to be done. Add to faith virtue, etc (2 Peter 1:5-7). We are laborers together with God. You are God's building.

4. Because He was not Disappointed with the Results. "The flood arose, the stream beat upon that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock." Christianity is no failure. The life that is built on Jesus Christ will be found as stable as the Eternal Throne. "He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." He is able also to keep us from falling. The Church or soul that is built upon this Rock "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). "The foundation of God stands sure" (2 Timothy 2:19).

II. The Foolishness of the Disobedient. "He who hears, and does not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth" (v. 49). The foolishness of this man is seen in that—

1. He Disregarded the Rock. He no doubt believed about the rock, but he imagined that he could get on equally well without it. He is a type of those who have been spoiled through false philosophy and vain deceit (Colossians 2:6-8). "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes" (Isaiah 5:21). The scribes and Pharisees went on with their building, although they had rejected "the Chief Corner Stone." If we wish to end with Christ we must begin with Him.

2. He Commenced Building too Soon. He began to plant the stones of hope before he had found the rock of safety. He would be saved by his works before he found rest on the Eternal Rock. What a picture of many modern religious builders! They set to the rearing of a strong and beautiful life before they have ever come into contact with the saving strength of Christ the Rock. They begin building when they should be digging, so anxious are they for something pleasing to the eyes of men.

3. He Built Without a Foundation. "He built an house upon the earth." The loose sandy earth beside the rolling river was treacherous

ground. He felt the need of a house of refuge for his soul, but he did not realize his absolute need of an infallible rock for his house. We need salvation, but we need an Almighty Christ to save. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11; Isaiah 28:16).

4. His Hopes were Suddenly Cut Off. "The stream did beat vehemently, and it fell, and the ruin of that house was great." "He who believes shall not make haste." But this man made haste because he trusted not the rock, and his earnestness only hastened on his ruin. Earnestness in religious life avails nothing where the foundation of atoning blood is lacking. He did not perish because he was lazy or indifferent to his need of a shelter. He did his very best, but it was His best without the "one thing needful." Your works may be many and beautiful, but if Jesus Christ is not at the foundation of all, "one thing you lack," and the lack of this "one thing" renders useless and fruitless every other thing. It is too late to build another house when the flood has come (Malachi 4:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:8).

A SOLDIER'S FAITH. Luke 7:1-10.

"Faith is a courier swift and sure who will carry us to the absent." All things are possible to him that believes. In this Roman centurion we see a thoroughly practical man in ethical and spiritual warfare. His matter-of-fact manner in dealing with the Lord Jesus Christ is like a refreshing breeze from the mountains of Lebanon. Is his servant sick? He does not talk about his pity; he sends at once for the physician (v. 3). Does he love the Jewish nation? Then it is not in word but in deed "he builds them a synagogue" (v. 5). He does not speak of his faith, but he shows it in a way that makes the Lord Himself marvel at its simplicity and greatness (vv. 8, 9). How beautifully simple is his holy logic! "Say the word, and my servant shall be healed, for I also am a man under authority, and I say, Go, and he goes." Soldier-like he believes that the Great Commander has but to speak and it shall be done. Such a compliment from a Gentile army captain could not pass without special mention. He said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Lord, increase our faith. This incident is full of Gospel to us. Observe—

I. The Servant's Need. He was in a condition of—

1. Utter Helplessness. "He was sick" (v. 2). Although a bond-slave, he may have been surrounded with many mercies and favors, but he was unable to help himself. A picture of every one under the spirit-sickening power of sin. The helplessly sick have no thought of earning anything by their works. This hope has died away.

2. Great Misery. "He was grievously tormented" (Matthew 8:6). One may be helpless and yet unconscious of it, but this servant was in sore distress. When a man is deeply convicted of his guilt and utter inability to help himself he will be grievously tormented. But such timely torment is infinitely better than the fatal insensibility that will inevitably result in the eternal scourge of remorse. Fools make a mock of sin.

3. Immediate Danger. "He was ready to die" (v. 2). He was just at the point of dying. His disease had brought him to the very brink of eternity, and all the wisdom and power of man were vain and impotent to deliver. The danger of perishing at any moment should add to the torments of every unsaved one.

II. The Centurion's Petition. He made intercession for his devoted servant "when he heard of Jesus," clearly implying that he had believed what he did hear. Faith comes by hearing. The manner of those elders who came to Jesus with his request shows the character of the centurion's prayer. It was—

1. Earnest. "He sent unto Jesus, beseeching Him" (v. 3). Real anxiety and heart-felt sympathy are the parents of earnestness. When Peter's wife's mother was sick they kept continually telling Jesus of her (Mark 1:30). His servant was dear unto him, so love warmed up his prayer. All coldness and formality in prayer means heartlessness on the part of the petitioner. Where there is love for those "ready to die" there will be earnest beseeching on their behalf.

2. Humble. "I am not worthy," said he, while the Lord was on the way to his house (v. 6). The elders said, "He is worthy, for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue." But this good man did not believe that his good works could merit such worthiness as having the Son of God beneath his roof. Nothing we can do will make us worthy of having Christ dwelling in us. This humility of spirit, like the self-unconsciousness of a little child, is the very breath of Heaven, and is refreshing to the soul of Jesus. In the sight of God unworthiness felt is worthiness shown. When Saul was little in his own sight the Lord exalted him (1 Samuel 15:17).

3. Believing. "Say in a word, and my servant shall be healed" (v. 7). Faith has always to do with the Word of God, and is satisfied with that, knowing that He is faithful who promises. His Word cannot fail. How many are serving the Lord in sorrowful bondage, looking for signs and feelings instead of acting confidently on His Word. The Lord has already spoken many words that exactly suit our case, and they are as valid for us now as they were of old. "The words that I speak unto you are spirit and life" (John 6:63).

Come believing.

III. The Savior's Response. It was—

1. Prompt. "Then Jesus went with them" (v. 6). The grace and truth that comes with Jesus Christ never comes too late. The prayer made urgent through intense love will speedily find a response in the love of God. "In due time Christ died for the ungodly;" how will He not also in due time answer the cry of faith?

2. Encouraging. "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (v. 9). These faith-honoring words were spoken to the people that followed Him. He marvels at his faith, but He does not rebuke him for expecting too much. He is marvelously pleased with great faith. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. "O you of little faith, wherefore do you doubt?" Why have we not the faith of God in His own Son? (Mark 11:22, margin).

3. Effectual. "His servant was healed in the selfsame hour" (Matthew 8:13). He sent His Word, and healed him (Psalm 107:20). "As you have believed, so be it done unto you." This "so be it done" is the Amen of Christ to the prayer of faith. Christ Himself is God's Amen to the agonizing, trustful cry of humanity (Rev. 3:14). Little faith belittles the Christ of God and narrows up the channel of blessing. Doubting hearts may call Him great, but they trust Him little; they are like the soldiers who cried, "Hail, King!" then put on Him the mock robe.

THE WIDOW'S SON. Luke 7:11-16.

"The valley of dry bones,
Insensate as the stones,
Beneath Your quickening breath
Rose up a living host.
O midst our sin and death
Come stir, You Holy Spirit."
—Grosart.

It is a hope-quicken thought that the Holy Spirit, that "other Comforter," who is the gift of the risen Savior, possesses the resurrecting power of Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit that quickens. The raising of a dead body demonstrates His power to raise a soul dead in sin into a new life.

Who has not seen a funeral? Who has not buried a friend? We can easily lift the hat off our head as the mournful cortege passes; but Jesus Christ alone can lift the load of grief from the aching heart of the bereaved. As D. L. Moody used to say, "Jesus spoiled every funeral that He went to." The darkest night of gloom He can turn into midday brightness. We have here—

I. An Afflicted Woman. Her circumstances reveal a—

1. Sorrowful Past. "She was a widow" (v. 12). The scene of her husband's death-bed, the heart-rending parting, the mournful funeral, and the dread loneliness that followed; these were bygone sorrows, but perhaps merciful time had somewhat rubbed off their keen edge. It may be that we have had deep convictions of sin in the past when the pleasures of the world partly lost their savor, and by and by that spirit-wound got healed.

2. Bitter Present. "Now her dead son is being carried out." Another season of trial has come; again the thick dark pall of sorrow has been spread over her sky. Once more she is face to face with death. Learn that if the Spirit awakens a second time the past will greatly aggravate the misery of the present.

3. Hopeless Future. This was the funeral of "the only son of his mother" (v. 12). The alone source of her comfort and help has been cut off. She is now without hope, having no promise, utterly cast down, but to such Jesus draws near. It is only when we are "without strength" that the power of God is manifested on our behalf. They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. All her future prospects, like the centurion's servant, were "ready to die." But the Resurrection and the Life are at hand.

II. An Almighty Friend. "A friend in need is a friend indeed." The nearer she comes to the grave the nearer does she come to the life-giving Savior. The darkest hour is the hour before daybreak. The sorrow that endures for a night shall be turned into joy in the morning when Jesus comes. Jesus meets the funeral, life and death come into contact, earthly weakness, sorrow, and disappointment in this woman are met by heavenly strength, consolation, and hope in Jesus Christ. Sin's ruin and God's remedy have come together. What are the results?

1. An Expression of Sympathy. "When the Lord saw her He had compassion on her" (v. 12). As soon as the Lord saw her the love of

His heart flowed out to her. Although as yet she is a stranger to His sympathy He is no stranger to her sorrow. Surely the sting of human suffering is the unconsciousness of divine compassion.

2. An Unusual Word of Comfort. "He said unto her, Weep not" (v. 12). Weep not? Does she think these words spoken in mockery? Does He not know that this is the "only son of a widow?" He knew Himself what He would do. We may dry our tears at His bidding, no matter how bitter they may be. But perhaps it is not your tears so much as your cares that He bids you put away, saying, "Take no thought for your life," etc. (Matthew 6:25), as He Himself knows what He will do.

3. A Timely Arrest. "He touched the bier, and they that bare him stood still" (v. 14). This was the arresting touch of the mercy that saves. A little while longer and he would have been buried out of sight. Who shall arrest that soul which time, like a death-car, is carrying off to the grave of eternal doom if Jesus Christ is not met on the way?

4. A Strange Command. "Young man, I say unto you, Arise" (v. 14). Who is this that commands the dead to rise up? This is He who speaks as one having authority. As the coming of the light commands the darkness to vanish, so does the coming of His Word imply the power to overcome. Ignorance may cavil where faith is blessed. He is the mighty to save, who speaks and it is done.

5. A Wondrous Change. "He who was dead sat up, and began to speak" (v. 15). An example of one begotten again by the Word of God. What a change His life-giving Word brings! He who was a minute ago cold, helpless, silent, and corrupting is now aglow with the warmth of a new life, and able to testify by speech to His resurrection power. He is now a new creature, old things have passed away, all things have become new.

6. A Happy Reunion. "He delivered him to his mother" (v. 15). Oh, praise Him for His tenderness, He not only saved the son from death, but delivered him (gave him back as His own) to the comforting of the broken-hearted widow! She could truly say, "This my son was dead, and is alive again." A foretaste of Heaven's reunited fellowship and joy was hers. Death has been conquered, and loved ones meet each other again in the presence of the living Son of God.

7. A God-honoring Result. "There came a fear on all, and they glorified God" (v. 16). Those who follow Jesus (v. 11) will always have good cause for glorifying God, for they shall see great and mighty things done by Him. Yes, Jesus will be glorified in every word that He speaks. All His words and works shall praise Him. It will be forever to the praise of His grace that "He saved others," but because of the might of His love for us "He could not save Himself" (Matthew 27:42).

THE TWO DEBTORS. Luke 7:41-43.

This little pithy parable was spoken in Simon's house, who desired Jesus to eat with him, and Jesus did not refuse. He never does. Then Simon sat in judgment on Him in allowing this woman to touch Him.(v. 39). Simon's cold heart was a stranger to the love of Christ. Like many a modern Pharisee his religion was an outward form. But Jesus had a meat to eat that Simon knew not of. The woman's love was more precious to Him than Simon's feast. It is the heart He seeks. Giving can only grieve Him when it is heartless. There are many Simons who show outward respect to religion, but who have no heart sympathy with Jesus Christ in His saving mission.

I. The Certain Creditor (v. 41). The great Creditor, no doubt, represents God Himself. There is something graciously beautiful about this thought, because—

1. A creditor is one who is supposed to have a good reputation. Can God deceive? Is His character not trustworthy? He cannot lie.

2. A creditor is one who has sufficiency for others. Our sufficiency is of God. Human need can be fully met only in Him. "All my salvation and all my desire." The sinner's needs are deep and many, but the fullness of His mercy is enough. "Come unto Me."

3. A creditor is one who looks for some return for his outlay. He gives only on loan. God gives His best, and expects our best; but, alas, we have returned Him evil for good. Evil is poor payment for good; hatred is a miserable return for love. Could you reckon up the good He has given? How much owe you my Lord?

II. The Different Debtors. "Two" (v. 41). The 500 and the 50. Representing two classes of actual transgressors, the great and the little, and implying all the grades that lie between. The fifty pence debtor is the religious moralist who lacks "one thing." The five hundred pence debtor is the open profligate that lacks everything. But there is the hundred pence debtor, who has been somewhat indifferent to the goodness of God. The two hundred pence debtor who has been wholly indifferent to the gifts of God, and the three hundred pence debtor who questions His love and mocks at His people, and the four hundred pence debtor who denies God and despises His mercy, yet whose outward character is counted respectable. But all with whom the Great Creditor has been dealing in grace are His debtors. "All have sinned," "all have come short." He who offends in one point is guilty of all.

III. The Helpless Bankrupts. "They had nothing to pay" (v. 42). The great and the little debtor were both alike in the same insolvent condition. "No difference." Just so with every sinner in God's sight. Our responsibilities to God may be different, but the hopelessness of our condition in His sight is the same. By nature all are alike, "without strength." Where there was no sprinkled blood Jehovah could make no difference (Exod. 12:13). All outside of the ark were treated alike in His judgment. They had nothing. Who but God only can create out of nothing? We can only make nothing out of nothing. Then payment is impossible. There is no other creditor from whom we can borrow. So one of two things must follow—a pardon or a prison.

IV. The Happy Deliverance. "He frankly forgave them both" (v. 42). These few words reveal the heart of God as big with abounding grace. Notice—

1. What He Did. "He forgave." He did not compromise. How suited His way was to their sad circumstances! Forgiveness is God's gracious remedy for the sinner's debt. "I believe in the forgiveness, not the payment of sins" (Luther). Oh, that men would believe God's willingness and readiness to forgive!

2. Whom He Forgave. "Both." Both alike needed it. The self-righteous moralist and the respectable church-going fifty pence debtor need forgiveness just the same as the five hundred pence ne'er-do-weel. One can have no more claim than another, both are debtors.

3. How He Forgave. "Frankly." In a free, liberal, loving manner, not grudgingly, just as the father forgave the prodigal, with open arms and joyful heart. "He delights in mercy." He keeps mercy for thousands. When God pardons a sinner He does it as Joseph forgave his brethren, with a heart ready to burst with deep, unutterable compassion.

4. When He Forgave. "When they had nothing to pay." It was when the prodigal had spent all that he had that he came and was accepted. When Joseph's brethren had nothing to eat, then they were enriched by him whom they had despised. The young ruler came with a great price in his hand, and he went away sorrowful. The Laodicean Church "had need of nothing" while Christ stood outside. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Jesus paid it all." Accept His settlement. Buy without money. "Nothing to pay."

V. The Grateful Evidence. "Love." Which of them will love Him most? "He to whom He forgave most," says Simon. "You have rightly judged," says Jesus. It is right judgment, then, to expect the forgiven to manifest in some way or other their love for Him who frankly forgives all. The poor woman had been forgiven much, and she loved much, and showed it.

1. Much love Weeps (v. 44). Not only tears of regret for the past, but of deepest gratitude toward God, and of tenderest sympathy toward the perishing. The world needs such tears. Christ shed them, so did Paul (Philippians 3:18).

2. Much love Washes. "She has washed My feet" (v. 44). Many a dusty foot and life love has washed. "He loved me, and washed me." Love covers a multitude of sins. Christ, as our Head, is in Heaven; we, as His feet, are on earth.

3. Much love Stoops. "She wipes His feet with her hair" (v. 44). She puts her glory at His feet. If He is to increase, I must decrease. The heart must bow if Jesus is to be served.

4. Much love Kisses. Her lips of affection are pressed to His feet (v. 45). The feet of the body of Christ, the dusty, naked members, are often neglected. Love seeks contact with them.

5. Much love Anoints. The Father anoints His head, but the forgiven one must anoint His feet (v. 46). "Do as I have done unto you."

6. Much love Follows. She followed Him into Simon's house. She heeded not the reproach of others. Love constrained her (1 John 4:19).

7. Much love Gives. "She brought her box of ointment" (v. 37). This was all her treasure, and she laid it at His feet, not only her ointment, but herself.

Love you Me? How much? Let the life testify.

Contrast the three characters: (1) The proud-hearted Pharisee. (2) The broken-hearted sinner. (3) The loving-hearted Savior.

THE QUESTION OF JOHN. Luke 7:17-35.

The raising of the widow's son had evidently produced a profound impression; the rumor went throughout "all the region round about," and was carried also to John while lying in his dismal prison. Every resurrected soul is a mighty testimony to the saving power of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:1). By reason of such many have believed on Him (John 12:10, 11).

I. The Question. "Are You He who should come, or look we for another?" (v. 19). It does seem strange that such a question should come from John Baptist; from him who saw the Spirit descend like a dove upon Him, and who bore record that this is the Son of God, and who said, "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:32-36). Yes! But why should this almighty Deliverer allow His forerunner to pine away in a dark and loathsome dungeon? It may be as easy for us as for John to say, "He must increase, I must decrease," but when the decreasing goes on and on until we almost question our relationship to Christ it is a trial of faith. But the trial of your faith is precious.

II. The Answer. Christ's reply shows no displeasure at the question of John. Our Lord is very gracious, and knows the frailty of our frame. "Go your way, and tell John what things you have seen and heard" (vv. 21-23). Those who would speak for Jesus and comfort the tempted must speak what they have seen and heard. Christ never sends any one to tell what they think. "We speak that we do know" (1 John 1:1-3). And what a story they had to tell: "The blind see, the lame walk," etc. Such a Gospel is enough to drive away all doubts and fears.

III. The Testimony. As soon as the messengers are gone Jesus bears witness to the true character and divine mission of John (vv. 24-30). He was no silly reed shaken with every wind of doctrine that may blow; he was no city dandy in soft clothing seeking to make a display of himself; he was more than a prophet, in that he prepared the way of the Lord Christ. Even John's martyrdom prepared the way for the Crucifixion. If John's faith had not been tested we would not have had this beautiful testimony to his noble nature. "All things work for good," etc. (Romans 8:28). To reject the testimony of His servant is to reject the testimony of God (v. 30).

IV. The Application. "Whereunto shall I liken the men of this generation?" etc. (vv. 31-35). The children in the market place often played at funerals and marriages; at the one they mourned, and at the other they piped and danced. "This generation" had been called upon by the austere life of John to mourning and repentance, and by the gracious, winsome life of Jesus to joy and gladness; but they charged John as being possessed with a devil, and Jesus as being a "gluttonous man, a friend of publicans and sinners." The testimony of both was rejected. If the warnings of the law and the wooings of the Gospel fail to bring us to God, how shall we escape? "But the wisdom of God is always justified in the children of such wisdom" (Proverbs 8:35).

SAVED BY FAITH. Luke 7:36-50.

This Pharisee desired Jesus that He would eat with him, but he did not desire this woman, branded with the name "sinner," to come into his house. Her faith in the pity and compassion of Christ must have been strong when it constrained her to follow Him into such a house and at such a time. Such sorrowful sinners are never found weeping at a Pharisee's feet. There is a holy, winsome magnetism in the love of God, as manifested in the Person of Jesus Christ; the vilest may draw near and find the blessing of "eternal redemption."

I. The Character of this Woman. "She was a sinner" (v. 37). Evidently a great sinner, for the Lord speaks of "her sins which are many" (v. 47). The Pharisee called her a sinner with emphasis (v. 39). Such a sinner as should not be touched; but Christ had to designate the Pharisees themselves as hypocrites (chapter 11:44). She was a sinner, so was Simon, but she had this advantage, that she knew it, while he was proudly unconscious of it. The one owed five hundred pence, the other fifty, but in their relation to God they were both alike, "having nothing to pay." "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no, not one."

II. The Workings of Her Faith. "Even in a spark there is fire." Little faith may cling to an almighty Savior. Faith is an operative energy of the soul that will not rest until the object desired has been grasped and enjoyed. Observe how it wrought in this woman. It constrained her to—

1. Come to Jesus (v. 37). Perhaps the sneer of the self-righteous Pharisees had awakened hope in her heart. "Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners" (v. 34). Her faith constrained her to draw near to Him without any personal invitation. Does such an act not put to shame the many who are still refusing the call of God? (John 5:40).

2. Repent of Her Sins. "She stood at His feet behind Him weeping" (v. 38). When one stands at His feet and contrasts his own life with His the bitter tears of contrition are sure to fall. Seeing ourselves in His light is always a humbling revelation. Such tears are precious jewels in the sight of God; they tell of mountains of guilt flowing down at His presence (Isaiah 64:1). What effect has your faith had in this direction?

3. Show the Tokens of Her Love. "She kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment" (v. 38). Hers was the faith that worked by love. The kiss spoke of the affection of her heart, while the precious ointment poured out told of a willingness to consecrate her all to Him. The faith that does not work in this fashion is a dead faith (James 2:26). The lips of love must come into contact with Christ as well as the hands of faith. With the heart man believes unto salvation.

III. The Blessed Results. She was—

1. Approved. "See you this woman?" (vv. 44-46). These words spoken to Simon would fall on the poor, sin-smitten soul of the woman as the music of Heaven. Jesus Himself knew the joy of being "a man approved of God" (Acts 2:22). Study to show yourself approved unto God (2 Timothy 2:15). Her manner of approach had His most gracious welcome, although she had no promise to plead. But what a solace to her heart that He commended her!
2. Forgiven. "Your sins are forgiven" (v. 48). She was forgiven much, for she loved much. There was a great difference between the cold, calculating belief of Simon and the simple, loving, heartfelt faith of the woman. She came, and with her tears and kisses she reasoned together with her Lord, and her sins, which were as scarlet, were made white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). What encouragement for the wicked to forsake their ways is found in His abundant pardon! (Isaiah 55:7).
3. Assured. "Your faith has saved you" (v. 50). Faith in Christ not only saved her from the guilt of sin, but also from the tyranny of its power. She was now freed from the very love of sin. His grace saved her, His Word assured her. It was not the tears of her eyes nor the kisses of her lips that saved her, but the faith of her heart. By grace are you saved through faith, and by the record given are we assured (1 John 5:11-13).
4. Commissioned. "Go in peace" (v. 50). Go in peace with God, because justified by faith (Romans 5:1). Go in the peace of God, because now a child of God and an heir to the kingdom. Go and publish the Gospel of peace, as an ambassador for Him, who is the Prince of Peace, and who has made peace by the blood of His Cross. Go in peace back to your home and to your associates in sin as a messenger of mercy, telling them what great things He has done for your soul. Your faith has saved you, go!

THE MAN WHOSE NAME WAS "LEGION." Luke 8:26-39.

Love is the mightiest moral force in Heaven, Earth, or Hell. It was love that constrained God to give up His Son (John 3:16). It was love that constrained His Son to speak such words of grace, to perform such miracles of mercy, and to give His life a ransom for many. "God is love." Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, in that through His Son He has delivered us from the power of the devil and from this present evil world. In the salvation of this demoniac we have a grand exhibition of that divine power which works by love.

I. His Dreadful Condition. He was—

1. Shameless. "He ware no clothes" (v. 27). Naked, and he knew it not. He was so completely possessed and occupied by evil spirits that he was utterly unconscious of his own nakedness. When Adam and Eve sinned they knew that they were naked, and sought to cover themselves. To be insensible of our nakedness before God is an evidence of satanic possession and delusion.
2. Friendless. "Neither abode he in any house, but in the tombs" (v. 27). Being in league with the devil, he was cut off from all his relatives and friends; he could have no fellowship with the inhabitants of the tombs, although the abodes of the dead are always more congenial to such than the houses of the living. No man could help him. While we are the slaves of sin vain is the help of man.
3. Helpless. "He was driven of the devil" (v. 29). He could in no wise help himself. He was driven like a beast by the powerful impulses wrought in him by the wicked spirits. Led captive by the devil at his will because his mind was blinded by that God of this world. Christ was driven by the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:12). Which is your master?

II. His Attitude Towards Christ. It was one of—

1. Fear. "He cried, and fell down before Him" (v. 28). When a soul comes face to face with the Son of God the inner thoughts and intents of the heart are sure to be revealed. Those who live under the dominion of sin, while they may know that they cannot escape the presence of Christ, yet they dread Him, although He is the most merciful of all. They fear a separation from their sins.
2. Opposition. "He said, What have I to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God Most High?" (v. 28). It is quite true that devil-possessed have nothing in common With the Holy Son of the Most High, any more than the darkness of the pit of Hell has to do with the glory of Heaven. Where is the link of connection between the sin-driven sinner and the sin-hating Savior? It is only found in the love of God in Christ. There is absolutely nothing in us but what is opposed to His holy will. "What have I to do with You?" I am animated by a spirit that is at enmity with Your. You are from above, I am from beneath.
3. Entreaty. "I beseech you torment me not" (v. 28). In this prayer there is the confession of an inner conviction that the final judgment is in the hands of Jesus the Son of God, and that the last end of a sin-governed life is torment (Jude 6). The way to be saved from the eternal torment of sin is to be washed in the blood of the Lamb. "He has loved us, and loosed us from our sins by His

blood" (Rev. 1:5, R.V.);

III. His Perfect Deliverance. Let us note the process. There was—

1. Confession. "Jesus asked him, saying, What is your name? And he said, Legion" (v. 30). Some think that a legion was a company of 6666. It was a confession at any rate that many demons had influence over him. In making such a statement he was simply declaring the truth. No good can come through seeking to hide our true state from the saving Son of the Highest. If our sins and our iniquities have carried us away like a legion of devils, let us say so in the ears of Him with whom we have to do.

2. Emancipation. "They found the man out of whom the devils were departed sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind" (v. 35). The devils departed out of him. The salvation of Jesus Christ implies the deliverance of the man from the grip and tyranny of evil. It is a loosing from the dominion of sin, a translating of the soul out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. It is a homeless, restless soul finding a refuge in the loving heart of Jesus, and rest at His conquering feet. The driving of the devil has now given place to the leading of Jesus.

3. Witness-Bearing. "He went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him" (v. 39). The Lord had indeed done great things for him. He had lifted him out of a horrible pit, and put a new song in his mouth. To be the slave of sin and the devil is to be in a horrible plight. Let the redeemed declare what the Lord has done for their souls (Psalm 66:16). The tongue of testimony will surely be loosened when the bands of iniquity are broken. "Lazarus, come forth. Loose him, and let him go." Deliverance, then liberty.

THE VIRTUE OF CHRIST. Luke 8:43-48.

The riches of the glory of Christ are like the riches of the glory of the sun. Just as every flower finds its beauty and variety of colors in the sunshine, so may each soul find in Christ that very blessing and adorning that becomes them. He met the need of the one who came for Him to heal another (v. 41) as well as this woman who touched Him for herself. In the sunshine of His grace there is all-sufficiency for all. It does not matter much how we come into the fresh air of His healing presence if we are only there; the health of His countenance will revive and strengthen. Let us learn here that—

I. There is Healing Virtue in Christ. The soul-healing power can be found nowhere else. Why? All the virtue of the Eternal God is in Christ for the purpose of healing the sin sores and woes of the world. This virtue is threefold. There is: (1) The virtue of a holy, blameless, God-pleasing life. (2) The virtue of an all-atoning substitutionary death. (3) The virtue of an all-conquering resurrection. There is none other name under Heaven that has such virtue. Through sin man has lost the virtue of holiness. If this virtue is to be restored it must be wholly through another than himself. This virtue or saving health is in Christ as the fragrance is in the flower, as the light is in the sun, or as the electricity is in the cloud; and He can shed it forth just as easily.

II. This Virtue is Sufficient for the Most Desperate Case. This woman's disease had lasted for "twelve years," and she had "spent all her living; neither could be healed of any" (v. 43). Her disease, like the workings of sin, was a secret life-wasting malady. But even for such there is hope in Christ, for God is in Christ. While she was spending her all she met with many a disappointment. "Nothing bettered, but rather grew worse." In the anguish of her soul, as she stood on the border of despair, her faith looked to Jesus, muttering, "If I could but touch His garment I would be made whole."

III. This Virtue goes out at the Touch of Faith. "She came and touched the border of His garment" (v. 44). Sin, with all its consequences of impurity, and misery, came by coming into contact with the forbidden thing through unbelief. "Eve took of the fruit thereof, and did eat" (Genesis 3:6). To touch the dead made a man ceremonially unclean (Leviticus 5:2). The fringe of blue on the border of the garment spoke of obedience (Numbers 15:38-40). In touching the border of Christ's garment was she thinking of His obedience unto death for her sake? This thought must be uppermost if our touch is to bring the healing life of Christ into our diseased and wasted souls. Her needs were fully met by the incoming of His strength and power, so that the life she now lived was the life of Christ in her (Galatians 2:20)

IV. This Virtue is Consciously Given and Consciously Received. Christ said, "I perceive that virtue is gone out of Me" (v. 46). As for the woman, "she felt in her body that she was healed" (Mark 5:29). Her thirsty soul had received a cup of cold water out of the ocean fullness of His saving grace. She did not steal the cure. The virtue was deliberately given by Jesus Christ in answer to her practical faith. She believed, and therefore she touched, and her touch was rewarded with the assurance of perfect deliverance. Is it not always so? (Matthew 15:28). The virtue of Christ, imparted at the touch of faith, vaccinates the soul against the plague of sin and the contaminations of this present evil world. The law of the "survival of the fittest" does not hold good here, for the virtue of Christ makes the most helpless and hopeless to survive. This battle is not to the strong. Christ's life is always an overcoming life (Acts 14:8-10).

V. The Thronging Multitude need not Hinder from such a Healing Touch. "Master, the multitude throng You and press You, and say You, Who touched Me?" (v. 45). The throng and the press of earthly cares and duties are often made the excuse for not seeking personal contact with the Savior of men. The "more convenient season" is tarried for, which seldom comes. "The kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." If this poor, bloodless, dying woman had waited until the throng and the press were over she would have waited until Jesus the Savior had passed beyond her reach. Behold, now!

VI. This Virtue when Received should be Publicly Acknowledged. "Who touched Me?" The woman came and declared before all for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately (v. 47). Before them all she testified of two things: (1) For what cause she had touched Him. She had touched Him because every other physician had failed, and because she wanted to be healed at once. (2) How she was healed immediately. Blessed testimony to the infinite grace of God. Healed perfectly, and in a moment of time. Her open testimony brought to her His additional word of assurance. "Daughter, be of good comfort, your faith has made you whole" (v. 48). Tradition says that she declared Christ's innocence before Peter, and wiped His face while He was on the way to Golgotha. At any rate, such faithful testimony and loving service surely become those who have been saved with so great salvation. Made partakers of the divine nature.

THE TESTING PRESENCE. Luke 9:18-27.

In gathering up the most salient features of this portion we observe that they all center on the Lord Himself. We have here—

I. Christ and Private Prayer. "He was alone praying" (v. 18). Many there be who don't like to be alone, because they have no delight in prayer. Jesus often sought for solitude that He might be alone with His Father whom He loved so much. If the holy and sinless Jesus found it needful and blessed to pray in secret, how much more do we need it? Those who pray in secret will have their open reward (Matthew 6:6).

II. Christ and Public Opinion. "Whom say the people that I am?" etc. (vv. 18, 19). Common reports are not always to be trusted. "The voice of the people" is not always "the voice of God." In this case it was the voice of willful ignorance and unbelief, for had He not been publicly declared to be "The Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), and had not His Word and works declared Him to be the Son of God with power? It is always more easy for us to say what others think of Christ than to say honestly what we ourselves think of Him.

III. Christ and Personal Conviction. "But whom say you that I am?" (v. 20). It will not satisfy the Savior to tell Him what our fathers, and mothers, and teachers said about Him. This question is one that we have all to answer individually for ourselves. "What think you of Christ?" Peter's answer, "You are the Christ (anointed, of God," reveals more than natural wisdom (Matthew 16:16, 17). "If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart, you shall be saved" (Romans 10:9).

IV. Christ and Substitution. "The Son of Man must suffer," etc. (v. 22). As the Captain of our Salvation Christ was made perfect through suffering. He was "rejected by the elders and chief scribes," showing that the carnal mind, even though religious, is enmity against God. With wicked hands they put Him to death, but by the authority of the Father He laid down His life and took it again (John 10:18). It was according to the Scriptures that He died for our sins, and rose again for our justification.

V. Christ and Discipleship. "If any will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily" (v. 23). Our sinful self ever plays the part of the elders and chief priests in rejecting Christ. Self must be denied if we would follow the steps of Him who "pleased not Himself." The Cross of Christ will ever be a shameful thing in the eyes of the world, but God forbid that we should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which we are crucified unto the world. This cross of discipleship is not thrust upon us, we are to take it up daily. It is absolutely necessary to a life of fellowship with Him (2 Timothy 2:11, 12).

VI. Christ and Service. "Whoever shall lose His life for My sake shall save it" (v. 24). This losing our life by saving it, and saving our life by losing it, is very paradoxical to all who are strangers to the Power of Christ's Cross. The life that is spent in the service of Christ is a saved life; the life that is spent for self is a lost life. We may have a saved soul by trusting the Cross of Christ, and yet have a lost life through not living for Christ (1 Corinthians 3:15) All the riches of this world will bring us nothing worth calling an advantage unless we ourselves are saved (v. 25).

VII. Christ and His Coming Glory. "Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words," etc. (vv. 26, 27). Christ and His Word stand or fall together. We cannot trifle with His words without trifling with Him. He who emptied Himself that He might become obedient unto death for us shall yet come in His own glory to reward all who have been faithful to Him in the days of His rejection (2 Corinthians 5:10). Are we able to say with Paul, the bond-servant of Christ, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ?"

FEATURES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD. Luke 9:27-36.

What did Jesus Christ mean when He said, "There are some standing here which shall not taste of death until they see the kingdom of God?" (v. 27). This question is not easily answered. Some think that the kingdom of God came, in judgment, at the destruction of Jerusalem, although we fail to see the kingdom then or there. Others, that this prediction was fulfilled at Pentecost by the coming of the Holy Spirit, when that kingdom, which is not of this world, was set up in the hearts of those who believed in Jesus. Perhaps so; but how did Jesus speak of some seeing it instead of knowing it experimentally? Looking carefully at what happened eight days after on the Mount, when some of them that stood by were with Him, do we not see visible characteristics of that invisible kingdom of God which is now within us? There was—

I. A Changed Countenance. "As He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered" (v. 29). If we take the countenance as the outward expression of the inward condition of the soul, then we cannot be in the kingdom of God without having an altered countenance. Those in the kingdom of God have passed out of darkness into His marvelous light. The outward effect of this inward change must be "as the shining light." "Except you be converted, and become as little children, you cannot enter into the kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

II. Glistening Clothing. "His clothing was white and glistening" (v. 29). White (bright, margin) clothing is emblematical of the righteousness of the saints (Rev. 19:8). This is a whiteness that no fuller on earth can produce (Mark 9:3). All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. In the eyes of God the Father the clothing of Christ's righteousness was always white and glistening (Matthew 3:17), but now the glory of His hidden life is made manifest, and they were "eye-witnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Such will be Christ's appearance when He shall come the second time without sin unto salvation (Hebrews 9:28).

III. Heavenly Fellowship. "There talked with Him two men, Moses and Elijah" (v. 30). Communion with the unseen (Father and Son) is a marked characteristic of the kingdom of God. Those in the kingdom are in perfect harmony with the law and the prophets, as represented by Moses and Elijah, and will be fellow-partakers of the resurrection and the translation which they both represent. Spiritually we have already been resurrected from the dead (Colossians 2:13), and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Colossians 1:13), and made to sit together in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). At the coming of Christ in that glory which was revealed on the Mount there will be with Him those who, like Moses, have been raised from the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:14), and also those who, after the manner of Elijah, have been caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). The kingdom of God is the kingdom of His saving glory.

IV. A Particular Interest in the Death of Christ. "They spoke of His decease" (v. 31). Another special feature of the kingdom of God is that the death of Christ is the center of profound and unfailing interest. All those in the kingdom should ever realize that they are there by virtue of His Cross and Blood. Let us learn from the talk of the glorified on this Mount that the atoning death of the Lamb of God should be uppermost in our hearts and minds in the midst of our greatest privileges and blessings. The Cross is the key to the glory; it is the foundation of the kingdom of grace.

V. A Glorious Overshadowing. "There came a cloud and overshadowed them" (v. 34). This cloud, called "the excellent glory" (2 Peter 1:7), was the visible symbol of the all-enveloping presence of God, in which the children of the kingdom live, and move, and have their being. Abiding in Him is another distinguishing feature of those who are in the kingdom of God (1 John 2:28). As they entered into the cloud, by the cloud overshadowing them, so may we by faith enter into "His marvelous light" by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. The surrounding, all-enveloping glory of His presence may be ours now through that other advocate who dwells in us, and of whom Jesus said, "He shall glorify Me" (Romans 8:28).

VI. A Christ-Honoring Voice. "There came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him" (v. 35). That clear, "still small voice" that acknowledges Jesus as the eternal Son of God is another well-defined characteristic of the kingdom. This voice from Heaven still speaks in the hearts of all those who have through grace come under the blessed rule of the Lord as King. It was first heard when Jesus took the place of a sinner, and yielded Himself to the perfect fulfillment of the will of God (Matthew 3:17). Jesus sought the honor that comes from God Only, and He got it. Are we seeking only the honor that comes from one another? (John 5:44).

VII. A Joyful Experience. "Peter said, Master, it is good for us to be here" (v. 33). When Peter said "Let us make three tabernacles" he was speaking foolishly and in ignorance, for the glorified cannot abide in temples made with hands; but when he said "It is good for us to be here" he was uttering the deep and happy feelings of his soul. It is good for us to be in such company as this, to hear such a voice, and to be surrounded with such a glory. Blessed are such, for theirs is the kingdom of God. "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

GRACE AND GRUDGE. Luke 9:51-56.

A straw may indicate which way the wind blows or in what direction the river runs; a trifling event may have a tremendous significance. One had been casting out devils in the Name of Jesus, and some of His disciples forbade him (vv. 49, 50) "because he follows not with us." Observe the grace of the Master in allowing a stranger so to use His Name and the grudge of the disciples in forbidding him. The marked contrast between the spirit of the Master and that of His followers will become more apparent as we consider further the—

I. Savior's Devotion. "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem (v. 51). Now that it has become the fixed purpose of His heart no power on earth or Hell can hinder. "The time was come that. He should be received up." He will go to Jerusalem that He might suffer and die in obedience to the Father's will, and that He might overcome him that had the power of death, that is the devil (Hebrews 2:14). Blessed be His Name, His heart was in His great self-sacrificing work. He went on steadfastly, like a warrior to the battle, confident of victory. He knew that the time was at hand when He would be received up (v. 51).

II. Samaritan's Bigotry. "They did not receive Him, because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem" (v. 53). The Samaritans had their temple on Mount Gerizim, but because He was making for the city of His Father's House they would honor Him not. This Christ-rejecting bigotry manifests itself in many ways. There are still those who will not receive Christ.

1. Because He does not Honor their Works. They have, like these Samaritans, built a temple of their own, fashioned after their own thoughts and opinions, and unless the Lord Jesus Christ compliments them in some way for their good works they will receive Him not (Romans 10:2, 3; Luke 18:9).

2. Because He will not go with Them in their Ways. They had made up their minds to do their worship at Gerizim, and unless Jesus Christ would condescend to meet with them there they would have nothing to do with Him. The self-righteous devise their own plans, determine their own ways, and if Christ does not acknowledge such they simply receive Him not, and go on with their Christless work and worship.

3. Because He seems to Favor Those whom They Despise. "His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem." The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. They were like some High Churchmen who will have nothing to do with the Christ that blesses Dissenters. In setting His face toward Jerusalem He was setting His face to the Cross which still makes Him an offence to many.

III. Disciples' Intolerance. "When His disciples saw this they said, Lord, will You that we command fire to come down from Heaven and consume them?" (v. 54). Perhaps James and John remembered that it was hereabout where Elijah had wrought such a miracle of judgment (2 Kings 1:10). The sudden outburst of this ungracious and odious spirit reveals at least three things: Their—

1. Faith. They believed that the Heavens would answer their call, and that fire would come down at their bidding. Such faith is not to be lightly esteemed. Men of like passions with ourselves have wrought by faith such mighty works (James 5:17).

2. Zeal. Their indignation was hot at the insulting attitude of these Samaritans toward their Master. They could not stand by, as perhaps some of us can, and see the Lord being despised and rejected without any moving of the soul, either with divine pity or selfish rage.

3. Ignorance. They knew not what manner of spirit they were of, neither did they know the manner of their Master's spirit, nor the great deep purpose of His mission. "I am not come to judge the world, but to save the world" (John 12:47). The devotion of which ignorance is the mother is both blind and merciless.

IV. Master's Rebuke. "He turned and rebuked them, and said, You know not what manner of spirit you are of" (v. 55). Zeal without knowledge is bigotry. It was this manner of spirit that kindled the fires of Smithfield and soaked the Scottish heather with the blood of Covenanters. It is this "mariner of spirit" that still reveals itself in such prayers as this: "Lord bless me, and my wife, my son John and his wife; bless us four, and no more, Amen." It is this same manner of spirit that does not, and cannot, rejoice and praise God for the good work done by others. In this connection study James 3:16, 17.

V. Gracious Explanation. "The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (v. 56). While in the days of His humiliation He made Himself of no reputation, being reviled He reviled not again. He remained true to His divine character and mission, to love, to suffer, and to die (John 3:17). Behold now, not the judgment time, but the accepted time; hence the long suffering patience of God. If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of His, "As He is so are we in this world." Our mission, then, like His, is not to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

SENT ONES. Luke 10:1-20.

These seventy were appointed by the Lord, and sent forth, two and two, and surely it was a great comfort for them to know that they were going "before His face," and into the very places "where He Himself would come" (v. 1). May not every sent one now rest in this same assurance, that wherever they go, at His will and in His Name, there shall He manifest His presence. But there is to be no selfish monopolizing of this work on the part of the sent ones, for it was to them the Lord said, "Pray you the Lord of the harvest, that He may send forth laborers" (v. 2). In this spirit of prayer, begotten by real love for the Lord and His work, we do become "co-workers together with Him." There are precious lessons here for all who seek to do the will of God.

I. A Great Commission. "Go your ways; behold, I send you forth" (v. 3). They went as—

1. Lambs. "Behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves" (v. 3). They were not sent as rams to fight their way by the power of their heads, but as lambs, entirely under the protection of the ever-watchful Shepherd, and as such they represent heart life more than head life. The influence of love is always more powerful than that of reason. The wolves represent those who live the grossly selfish life—men of the world.

2. Forerunners. "They went where He Himself would come" (v. 1). As such they were to "salute no man by the way." Their coming into any city or place was a testimony that the King Himself was coming. Have we, as sent ones (chapter 20:17, 18), been animated by a like faith in the promise and power of Christ? Do we expect Him to follow up our word and work in His Name with His own convincing presence?

3. Heralds. Saying, "The kingdom of God is come near unto you" (v. 9). From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:19). The kingdom itself was brought near by the very presence of the heralds of it. If the kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17:21; Romans 14:17), then when you come into contact with those who know not God, nor His Christ, does not the kingdom come near to them in you?

4. Ambassadors. Jesus said of them, "He who hears you hears Me, and he who despises you despises Me" (v. 16). "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

II. A Joyful Testimony. "They returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Your Name" (v. 17). Those who go at His bidding and in His Name will always have a joyful testimony to bear. They will be more than conquerors. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). Our foe is not in the form of "flesh and blood" (human), but in the character of wicked spirits which rule the kingdom of darkness—invisible demons—that possess the hearts of men, and that can only be cast out through the power of the Name of Jesus (Ephesians 2:2). The works of the devil are still being destroyed in those to whom the Son of God is being manifested (1 John 3:8). Thus, the lifting up of the Son of God is still the power to bring the devils of doubt and impurity into subjection (John 12:13).

III. A Suggestive Comment. "Jesus said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from Heaven" (v. 18). What a strange and startling statement, coming as a reply to their exultant account of "devils being subject to them." It appears that Satan shot down from the heavenlies with lightning speed when he saw that his angel demons were being routed and overcome by those seventy messengers of the Son of God. The more we triumph in the Name of Jesus, the more intensely will we be tried and opposed by the powers of darkness. The wrestling mentioned in Ephesians 6:12 implies a real and desperate struggle in very close quarters—wrestlers grip each other.

IV. An Assuring Promise. "Behold, I give you power to tread on... all the power of the enemy" (v. 19). Although Satan has come down like lightning in all his power to oppose the mission of Christ through you, I give you power to tread all his power beneath your feet. The sphere of Satan's work is now on the earth. Let us treat all "criticisms" and "teachings" that are opposed to the mind and purposes of Jesus Christ as the "doctrines of devils" (1 Timothy 4:1). Take courage from His promise, "I give unto you power" (Acts 1:8). The time has come when the God of peace can bruise Satan under your feet (Romans 16:20). One of the signs of faith in His Name is the casting out of devils (Mark 16:17).

V. A Source of Joy. "Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in Heaven" (v. 20). To have our names written there is a guarantee of deliverance (Daniel 12:1). Overcoming devils is, in the mind of Christ, a comparatively small matter, but to have our names written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev. 21:27), and to belong to the General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn, which are written in Heaven, is something to rejoice over, as it is a privilege that will be fruitful of joy and honor through all eternity, for a man may cast out devils and yet himself be a castaway (Matthew 7:22, 23).

THE GOOD SAMARITAN. Luke 10:30-37.

This lawyer, being "willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?" (v. 29). The world has never seen anyone better fitted to answer such a question than Jesus. "He knew what was in man." There are but few who are not willing to justify themselves in their neglect of that mercy (v. 37) which constitutes true neighbourliness. This is a parable, beloved, for the Samaritan's sake. A beautiful reflection of the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, unexpectedly coming into contact with a destitute and alien heart. Observe here—

I. A Threefold Misery. He was—

1. Stripped of his clothing (v. 30). This certain man in going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, a distance of about eighteen miles, fell among thieves and was stripped. Ever since the fall of Adam this world has been a den of thieves. Every man's business, more or less, is just to get out of others all he possibly can. Only those taught of God can look, not at their own, but at the good of others. All who fall into the clutches of sin and iniquity are sure to be stripped of their clothing of righteousness and of their "garment of praise." The devil is still seeking whom he may devour.

2. Wounded (v. 30). He in all likelihood received His wounds in His desperate attempts to withstand the robbers. Our own strength and wits are a poor defense against the sudden onslaughts of evil. The morally wounded and disabled in the battles of life are found lying everywhere along the highways of human concourse. Their name is legion who have sunk into the ditch of a city slum through being stripped of their reputation and having their hopes and prospects wounded to the death (Isaiah 1:6).

3. Half Dead (v. 30). In this wretched condition he could do nothing but wait and pray. Waiting for the compassion of some loving heart and the kindly touch of some neighborly hand. To be half-hearted about anything is to be half-dead to the matter. With regard to the things eternal, how many are half-dead and quite unconscious of it. Backsliders in heart (Rev. 3:16). But let us not in our pride condemn this poor outcast, for if we had gone the same way we might have been in the same plight. If we had gone the way of those who are born and reared in the city slum, or in dark heathendom, what better would we be than they are?

II. A Threefold Attitude. In the Priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan we see three different attitudes toward the helpless and unfortunate. That of—

1. Perfect Indifference. "The priest passed by on the other side" (v. 31). This priest was doubtless on his way home from the Temple service. In the discharge of his ceremonial duties he is very punctilious, and would pass by nothing, but a needy, dying brother by the wayside is unworthy of his notice. "Weighed in the balance and found wanting." No hope can on the Law be built.

2. Interested Curiosity. "The Levite came and looked, and passed by on the other side" (v. 32). This man is a type of those who are not a little inquisitive, but who are not even a little compassionate. They want to know, but they don't want to help. This Levite could tell a story about this poor man when he went home, and justify his heartless conduct by saying that the place was too dangerous for him to tarry and lift the fallen. He also by his act is "weighed in the balance and found wanting" (1 John 3:17).

3. Practical Sympathy. "The Samaritan came where he was, and had compassion on him," etc. (vv. 33-35). Although the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, this Samaritan in mercy would have dealings with the half-dead Jew. This is the point in the parable. A despised one, compassionates, shows mercy, and saves one who was living at enmity with him, thus manifesting that love of God in Christ Jesus which stoops to show mercy with a self-sacrifice that slays the enmity (Ephesians 2:16).

The Good Samaritan bears the features of the despised Nazarene, who comes to seek and save the lost.

(1). "He came where he was." Christ comes to us right where we are. In our stripped and wounded condition we could do nothing for ourselves (Romans 5:6).

(2). "He had compassion on him" (v. 33). His heart was moved toward him. The Salvation of Christ was heart work. "He loved us, and gave Himself for us."

(3). "He bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine."

Although we are full of wounds and bruises (Isaiah 1), Christ can bind up and heal (Luke 4:18). This He does by the oil of His Spirit and the wine of His Word.

(4). "He set him on his own beast." Those whom the Lord lifts up are also set in His own place. "Now are we the Sons of God."

(5). "He brought him to an inn." The saved of the Lord also find shelter and new friendships.

(6). "He took care of him." In the Salvation of Christ there is not only a great deliverance, but also a special providence (Romans

8:28). He cares for you.

(7). He left a promise concerning him (v. 35). Our Great Shepherd has also left enough for our need during His absence in "the exceeding great and precious promises." "And inasmuch as you did it unto these, you did it unto Me." "When I come again I will repay you."

The Great Lesson.

Christ has suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps. "Go you and do likewise" (V. 37).

"MARTHA, MARTHA." Luke 10:38-42.

"Nor can the vain toil cease,
Until in the shadowy maze of life we meet
One who can guide our aching, wayward feet,
To find Himself our Way, our Life, our Peace;
In Him the long unrest is soothed and stilled;
Our hearts are filled."—F. R. Havergal.

The heart that is only half-conquered by Christ's peace will be easily tossed about when assaulted with the "cares of this world." Martha comes before us here as one cumbered and troubled about her work. A weary, burdened servant, just at the point of breaking down. What to her was duty has become drudgery. There is wholesome food for thought here for every servant of Christ. Martha—

I. Received Jesus. "Martha received Him into her house." Being perhaps the oldest in the home the right of receiving guests into the house would be hers. Her receiving Him was the proof of her faith in Him. It is vain and presumptuous for us to talk about our faith in Christ if we have not actually received Him into the house of the heart (see John 1:12).

II. Sat at His Feet. "She had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His words." This word also surely proves that Martha had sat and listened to His words as well as Mary. The faith that received Christ will certainly desire to know His will. This is the second step in the Christian life—learning. "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest. Learn of Me, and you shall find rest" (Matthew 11:28, 29).

III. Was an Active Worker. She busied herself with "much serving." She was none of those spongy Christians who can do nothing but drink in. There are many whose sole conception of the Christian life is to hear. Martha was not only a hearer, but a doer. She had listened to His words, and she would minister to Him. Her service, too, was no ordinary service. She had planned to do much. The honest, earnest design of her generous heart was to accomplish much for the honor of Jesus.

IV. Became Worried over her Work. "Martha was cumbered about much serving." Tersteegen has said: "We are not always to be seeking, we must sometimes have found Him. The seeker works actively; the finder enjoys quietly." Whenever work for the Lord brings upon us the worry of "carefulness and trouble," we may be assured that we have somehow got out of Christ's yoke, for He says, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. Take My yoke upon you, and you shall find rest unto your souls."

V. Began to Complain. "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me." The worried and cumbered worker will soon be found in the ranks of the grumblers. Martha's big task of "much serving" was self-imposed, and she, like all those in similar circumstances, soon got burdened and wearied. God-given work will never be cumbersome when done in His strength. But let it be noted to Martha's credit that she made her complaint, not to her sister, but to her Lord. Those cumbered and grumbling workers who are continually pouring their grievances into the ears of their fellow-servants ought to be shamed out of their cowardliness by the straightforward heroism of Martha. Dare to be honest, and say as she did, "Lord, do You not care?" Have the question of worry settled with your Master. Find out in His presence whether your harassing anxiety about His service is pleasing to Him, or whether there is not someone that He might bid come and help you, or whether you are not "careful and troubled" about things which the Lord has no interest in.

VI. Was Rebuked by the Lord. "Jesus said unto her, Martha, Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful." It is no honor to the Prince of Peace that His servants' hearts should be filled with restless solicitude about His business. "My peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). "I would have you without carefulness" (1 Corinthians 7:32). "Take no thought (anxious concern) for your life." Your Father knows (Matthew 6:25; see also v. 8). If the Lord had bidden Mary go and help Martha He would have partly justified her in her complaint, but, no, He said in

substance, "You take too much upon you. The one thing you need is not a helping hand, but a restful heart."

Mary had chosen that good part, and He will not take it from her. There are many Matthews as well as Marthas, whose countenances bear the traces of a worried and troubled heart, even while they are seeking to serve Jesus. "Cumbered about much serving." Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Rest in the Lord.

PRAYER: ITS PRIVILEGE AND POWER. Luke 11:1-13.

It would appear that while the Lord was praying in a "certain place" His disciples heard Him, and were deeply moved, as never man prayed like this Man. What calmness of spirit, what assurance of faith, what holy familiarity with the unseen Father of Spirits, what an overawing reality and power there was in these simple utterances of their Master! No wonder that when He ceased they came with tear-filled eyes, saying, "Lord, teach us to pray." The power of prayer lies more in what we are than in what we say. They pray well who have "holiness unto the Lord" written across their lives. Prayer, wrote a deaf and dumb girl, is "the wish of the heart." If the heart is right with God, then the desires of the heart will be granted (1 John 5:14, 15). Desires are plentiful in human hearts, but how few are confidently breathed into the ear of God. Notice here—

I. Need of Prayer. "Lord, teach us to pray" (v. 1). All men pray in the way of wishing, or earnestly desiring, but not to the living God. "Before I was converted," said one, "I said my prayers to nobody, now I pray to God." We have never learned to pray if we have not learned to speak personally to a personal God, and to know that He hears us. Fellowship with God is a crying need of the soul of man. We need more than human sympathy. We need a greater than human help. Divine power and compassion are the counterparts of human weakness and need. "Lord, teach us to pray."

II. Teacher of Prayer. "Lord, teach us." Surely this "Teacher come from God" is well able to instruct us in the way to God. His whole life was lived in the atmosphere of prayer. He constantly breathed the breath of Heaven. In His every act we hear the voice of His pleading on our behalf. His incarnation, His holy life, His agony in the garden, His atoning death, and His rising again from the dead were all mighty voices of supplication unto God. He who spent whole nights in prayer had too much to do to be in a hurry or to neglect secret communion with His Father. "Lord, teach us." He teaches us to pray by giving us a deep insight into the poverty of our own natures that we may hunger after righteousness (Romans 8:26). He teaches us to pray by revealing to us, through His Spirit, of His own unsearchable riches that we may covet earnestly the best gifts (Hebrews 4:16).

III. Spirit of Prayer. In answer to their requests the great Prayer Teacher said, "When you pray, say, Our Father which are in Heaven," etc. In putting this prayer into their mouths our Lord was not only teaching the order in which our prayers should be formed, but, we think, the very spirit and condition of heart necessary to true prayer. Looked at in its subjective aspect this prayer implies a condition of—

1. Sonship. "Our Father." Before we can say "Our Father" in any real sense we must have received the Spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15). We must be made sons through receiving His Son before we can honestly say Father (John 1:12).

2. Sanctification. "Hallowed be Your Name." His Name stands for all that He is in His holiness, righteousness, love, and almightiness. How can an unsanctified soul hallow, set apart as holy, the great Name, of God in the daily life? What communion has light with darkness? If His Name is to be hallowed in us we ourselves must be hallowed to His Name.

3. Subjection. "Your kingdom come." How can we utter this petition if we are not willing that our own hearts and thoughts should be subject to His rule? So, to be able to pray, there must be entire submission to the will of God (Romans 14:17).

4. Consecration. "Your will be done." To pray "Your will be done" there must needs be a willingness to do His will.

5. Brotherly Love. "And forgive us as we forgive every one," etc. Our prayers may often be hindered for lack of tender-heartedness toward those who may be indebted to us (Ephesians 4:32). Does this reveal the spirit in which we pray?

IV. Manner of Prayer. "Because of his importunity he will give him as many as he needs" (vv. 5-8). The word importunity here stands for "shamelessness," and this is the only time it is used in the New Testament and employed by our Lord in connection with prayer; it is exceedingly expressive. It means that in offering our requests to God for things needful we should take no denial; turn not aside through any seeming providential rebuff, being utterly shameless in our persistent, confident waiting (Exod. 17:11).

V. Simplicity of Prayer. "Ask, and it shall be given you," etc. (vv. 9-12). The child in its own way begins to ask as soon as it is born, and the mother has no difficulty in interpreting its cry. As long as we maintain the childlike spirit prayer will be a simple, delightful, and soul-strengthening exercise. The more we get conformed to the image of Christ the nearer do we come to the very presence of God. And the nearer we approach to Him in our real soul likeness to Him the more simple and childlike will our prayers be. "Ask, and

you shall receive."

VI. Efficacy of Prayer. "If you, . . . how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (v. 13). The Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, and in giving the Spirit He is putting within the reach of each child of His every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 3:14-19). Many of us have yet to learn what our gracious Father is willing to do for us, and through us, by His gift of the Holy Spirit. As workers together with Him we beseech you that you receive not this grace of God in vain. "If you ask anything in My Name I will do it" (John 14:12-14).

THE STRONG AND THE STRONGER. Luke 11:16-22.

How strange that they should seek "a sign from Heaven" (v. 16) when they see devils being cast out. But men will yet try to ignore the divine character of Christ while there are infallible proofs of it before their eyes in the changed lives and hearts of men. They are like owls sitting in the dark, and crying, "Where is the sun?" Every evil overcome is a proof of the existence of a holier power. Evil cannot expel evil. This principle leads to God. "There is none good but God." If sin has been conquered and hated, and the heart changed and filled with love to God, then this is not of man. This is the finger of God. In these verses we have two great princes representing two great kingdoms. To one or other all belong, and peace and safety can only be enjoyed by the subjects of the greatest, as the one is most bitterly antagonistic to the other. Here we see the warriors described, the battle fought, the victory won, and the spoil divided. Consider then—

I. The Great Enemy. "Satan," the chief of the devils (v. 15), and his chief end is to deceive and destroy. His deadly campaign commenced in Eden, and goes on still (Genesis 3:1). Notice—

1. His Character. "A strong man" (v. 21). The strength of the devil is in his cunning and deceit. In the garden we have a revelation of the wisdom of this serpent. He is strong because he knows exactly where human weakness lies. He enters the citadel of man's soul as a pledged friend when he comes as an angel of light; how few can discern him in his real malignant form. He is strong to overcome the righteous scruples of the young, and also to deceive the Godward longings of the old. Too late, too late, he whispers, or, you are too great a sinner. But although he is strong he is but a strong man; his is limited strength, not almighty. Yet his "wiles" are innumerable and his darts are fiery.

2. His Condition. "Armed" (v. 21). His is the armor of darkness; he loves the darkness rather than the light. "While men slept he sowed tares, and went his way" (Matthew 13:25). He is the prince of darkness, and those who are in darkness are under his power (Ephesians 2:2). His armor is just the opposite of God's. 1. His belt is the belt of falsehood—a liar from the beginning, and so his children go speaking lies from the womb. 2. His breastplate is that of wickedness, for wickedness is in his heart. 3. His feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of enmity. 4. His shield is the shield of doubt. 5. On his head is the helmet of damnation. 6. His sword is the imaginations of the evil heart, and with this he slays the word of truth that darkness and death might reign (compare Ephesians 6:11-18).

3. His Occupation. "Keeps his palace" (v. 21). His palace is the dungeon of the unrenewed heart, where every window is glazed with perverting glass, so that things can never be seen as they really are. Here the occupant is a prisoner of darkness and ignorance. He may boast of what he knows of the world of light, truth, and liberty outside, but he knows nothing as he ought to know. Did he but know the truth he could abide no longer in bondage. This his vigilant keeper knows right well, so he keeps his palace that his goods may have peace. This is the "peace, peace, when there is no peace." The more anxious the soul is to escape the more closely is he kept. If fair promises will not do, the iron fetters of despair will be applied. Notice some of the ways in which he keeps his palace. "I can read my Bible at home." "You can tell me nothing new." "I go regularly to Church." "I do as well as I can." "You make too much ado," etc.

4. His Possession. "Goods" (v. 21). He who occupies the palace of the heart also possesses the powers and faculties of the whole being. These powers and faculties are valuable "goods," their intrinsic worth, who can calculate? The precious blood of Christ speaks volumes as to the value of these "goods." These "goods," generally speaking, may represent all who are under Satan's keeping.

Let us look at the character of an individual article, the qualities of a single soul. There is— (1). Reason, the Governor. (2). Understanding, the Receiver. (3). Memory, the Recorder. (4). Conscience, the Discerner. (5). Will, the Decider. (6). Affection, the Distributer.

All these are prisoners to Satan under his power, used for his dark, devilish purposes. "His goods," not even your own free will! Ah, "strange liberty."

II. The Great Deliverer. "Christ."

1. His Character. "Stronger than he" (v. 22). Not merely a stronger man, but one whose strength is almighty. "If I speak of strength, lo, He is strong." The strength of hills is His. "I will send you a Deliverer and a strong One." "Help has been laid upon One that is mighty." How mighty is the sun to overcome darkness; how strong are the hills to bear the crushing tempest. So man's deliverer must be strong both to bear and to overcome. His arm is strong; it upholds the universe and guides the helm of providence. His Word is strong, none can gainsay it, none can hinder it from working. His work is strong, His foundation stands sure. Neither time nor eternity, nor the powers thereof can ever displace one single stone of His building. Hallelujah! One has come to seek and to save, with whom nothing is impossible. No enemy too strong for His power, no difficulty too monstrous for His strength. "The Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Exod. 14).

2. His Encounter. "He shall come upon him" (v. 22). The Prince of Life and the prince of darkness must come into close combat according to Genesis 3:15. David must go out to Goliath, come upon him, strip him, and overcome in behalf of Israel, for he fought not for himself, but them, and love constrained him, although, like Christ, his brethren despised and rejected him. Yet he had the King's favor, and in overcoming the enemy he secured for himself a bride (1 Samuel 17:25). Beautiful picture of our Deliverer who came forth from the Father, like David, to conquer the great enemy and purchase the Church as His bride. He "came upon the wiles of the devil" in the wilderness, upon his enmity and hate in the Pharisees, upon his works in the demon-possessed, upon himself on the Cross. Then was the hour and power of darkness; dreadful conflict!

3. His Victory. "Overcome him, and takes from him all his armor" (v. 22). Goliath is slain with his own sword. "Through death Christ destroyed him that had the power of death." His helmet was broken and his head bruised; his whole armor of darkness wherein he trusted has been destroyed, and the "true light now shines." None need now be under his power as He came to set the prisoners free. But, alas, men love darkness rather than the light, and the bondage of Satan rather than the liberty of Christ, saying, "I love my master, and I will not go free." And so become a slave forever. Jesus Christ is the rightful owner of the soul. "You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive: You have received gifts in the man" (Psalm 68:18, marg.).

"The number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying... worthy is the Lamb that was slain" (Rev. 5:11, 12).

4. His Grace. He divides His spoils as the fruit of His warfare. He possesses pardon, peace, power, and paradise. These He willingly divides with the mighty many (Isaiah 53). All who believe shall share in His victory. All is yours, for you are Christ's (1 Corinthians 3:22). This great battle was substitutionary. Man had been spoiled of his goods by the devil, but Christ overcomes and recaptures the possession, as Abraham overcame the kings and brought back all the goods, and also his brother Lot (Genesis 14:16). You shall keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You. None can pluck them out of His hand. Will you share Christ's victory or the devil's overthrow? If the Son make you free, you shall be free indeed (John 8:36). The spoils of Calvary's Cross has made many rich.

SINGLENESS OF EYE AND FULLNESS OF LIGHT. Luke 11:33-36.

"Light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun." So is it also with the light of truth that beams from the Son of Righteousness. It is in His light that we see light clearly. Blessed are such eyes that see. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is here teaching us the blessedness of the single eye, bad in Himself in a pre-eminent degree the single eye; so His whole body was full of light. His light was not put in a "secret place" nor "under a bushel" (v. 33), but was "lifted up" on the lampstand of the Cross that all in the house of this world may see it. "There was the true Light which lights every man coming into the world" (John 1:9, R.V.). You are the light of the world; let your light so shine. In examining this portion we would note—

I. The Medium. "The light (lamp) of the body is the eye" (v. 34, R.V.). The eye is—

1. Passive. It does not, and cannot, create the light, neither can it form or transform any object. It is simply a receiver and a reflector of outward objects to the inner consciousness of man, a channel through which visible things are revealed to the invisible spirit.

2. Very Sensitive. A little thing mars the vision of the eye. It is very easily offended. So with a tender conscience. They are blessed indeed who are as careful about their conscience as they are about the apple of the eye (Acts 24:16). Oh, that our spirits were as sensitive to the things of the Spirit of God!

II. The Means. "Light." The light was made for the eye, and the eye for the light. The successive waves of light that lash with infinite tenderness upon the eye prove the divine adaptation of the one to the other. But light is not more suitable to the eye than Christ is to the soul of man. There is a deep meaning in the words of Goethe, "Were your eye not sunny, how could it ever see the sun?" So were your soul not God-like, how could it ever enjoy God? No one would be foolish enough to say "I have an eye of my own, I don't

need the light." The eye is utterly useless without the light, so the spirit of man is utterly helpless and powerless to discern the things of God apart from the revelation of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). The true Light now shines. Oh, that the eyes of the understanding might be opened (Luke 24:31, 32).

III. The Manner. Christ is the Light of the World, but there are two ways of looking at or dealing with this Light. These are represented by the "single eye" and the "evil eye," the pure and the impure, the honest and the deceitful, the new heart and the old.

1. The Single Eye and its effects. The single eye is one that has been anointed with the heavenly eye salve (Rev. 3:18). The blood-washed spirit that looks through this eye has been reconciled to God, and seeks to know the truth as it is in Jesus. There is now no mixed motives in the life, no mingling of self-interest with the kingdom of God. The whole forces of the soul are now concentrated in "this one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, I press on toward the mark." Such an eye fills the whole body with light, because the Spirit of God takes the things which are Christ's, and reveals them to those who have the pure eye for the glory of His Name. If our motives are single, one with Christ's, then we shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of His life within us. To be filled with the Holy Spirit of Truth is to be filled with light. The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened" (Ephesians 1:17, 18).

2. The Evil Eye and its effects. The evil eye is the colored lens of an unclean heart. The eye of prejudice can only see objects in a contorted fashion. The unrenewed heart of man can no more appreciate the light of revelation than the blinking owl of the night can enjoy the sunshine. The "evil eye" is like the eye of the hawk, always staring downward when flying upward. Remember Lot's wife. "If your eye be evil, your whole body is full of darkness." The darkness within is an evidence of an evil and doubting heart. We look to Christ with an evil eye if we look to Him only that self may be honored and gratified; as Keble put it:

"We flee far in holy ground
If duly purged our mental view."

IV. The Message. "Take heed therefore that the light which is in you be not darkness" (v. 35). If the light that is in us is not a revelation from God it is but the flickering "spark of our own kindling," a light that is certain to deceive. The light that was in the Church of Laodicea was darkness, for although they said that they had need of nothing, yet was Christ, the Light, outside (Rev. 3:17-20). There is no darkness so great as the darkness that is mistaken for light (Matthew 6:23; Proverbs 16:25). Woe unto them that put darkness for light (Isaiah 5:20). "When the pilot is drowned, the light quenched, and the captain taken prisoner, what hope is left for the crew?" While you have the light, believe in the Light (John 1:9).

THE HYPOCRITE. Luke 11:37-44.

"A lie which is half a truth is ever the blackest of lies!
A lie which is all a lie may be met and fought outright,
But a lie which is part of a truth is a harder matter to fight!"
—Tennyson.

This mongrel lie which is part of a truth finds its incarnation in the hypocrite. The one is as difficult to deal with as the other. The names scribe and Pharisee as used by our Lord here are synonymous of hypocrite. Their characteristics as detailed before us in these verses are the outstanding features of the hypocrite.

I. He is more concerned about the traditions of men than the truth of God. "The Pharisee marveled that He had not first Washed before dinner" (v. 38). The Pharisee of Christ's day not only held the traditions of the elders about hand-washing, but in their superstitious zeal bathed their bodies before meat (Mark 7:4, R.V.). Jesus Christ in the heavenly truthful dignity of His character simply ignores it, so that the hypocritical marvel at His liberty. The sons of God are not to be in bondage to the opinions of men. Whom the Son of God makes free are free indeed. Although Christ Himself, the embodiment of truth and holiness, stood before this Pharisee, yet would he despise Him because He did not conform to his petty theory of hand-washing. The popular tradition about the way of salvation is, "Do as well as you can," to the denial of the truth of God's saving grace. There are other traditions concerning the Lord's coming and Church worship that are equally subvertive of the truth as it is in Jesus.

II. He is more careful about outward than inward purity. "They make clean the outside of the cup, but the inward is full of ravening and wickedness" (v. 39). The only good side of a hypocrite is the outside, for they do "make clean the outside." They live as in the eyes of their fellow-creatures, seeking not the honor that comes from God only. They are men pleasers. They will make their hands clean, although their hearts should be full of wickedness. They look upon the things which are seen. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him (Titus 1:16). They practically deny that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts," etc., and that these are the things which defile a man (Matthew 15:19, 20). He is utterly indifferent about the righteousness of God if he can only get his own established (Romans 10:3), and when he prays it is with himself (Luke 18:11). He flatters men with his outward manners, while the

inward manner of the heart is an abomination to God (James 4:8).

III. He stickles for trifles, and neglects the things which are indispensable. "You tithe all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God" (v. 42). God demanded that the fruit of the land should be tithed (Leviticus 27:30), but they would tithe even the fragrant plant, and pass over justice and the love of God as if these were unworthy of notice. Such would not rob a child of a pin, but they would unblushingly rob God of their whole life. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22). By their fruits you shall know them; they stand up stoutly for orders and forms of worship, while they pass over the promises of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. They will argue vehemently for the rules of the Church, and pass over the law of the spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus. He is very particular in adapting certain tunes to certain psalms, but it concerns him nothing as to whether he himself is reconciled to God and adapted to the kingdom of Heaven. He could not pass the plate at the Church door without putting something into it, but he can pass through a whole service without giving to God one grateful feeling for the gift of His Son. They pass over the Love of God.

IV. He seeks self-glorification through his religious profession. "Woe unto you, Pharisees! for you love the uppermost seats in the synagogues," etc. (v. 43). The hypocrite is religious, but only so far as it will help to honor himself and minister to his vanity. He has no thought of adorning the doctrine of God our Savior, but he seeks to be adorned by the doctrine. If he holds office in the Church it is that it may add to his dignity. He would appropriate all the privileges purchased by the agony and death of the Son of God for the exaltation of his own deceitful self. He is seldom out of his place in the house of prayer, but his God is himself. It is not the synagogue or church that he loves so much as those "uppermost seats" that help to lift him up. He will be very zealous in religion if he can thereby gain the flattery of others. He is one who sits in the place of God, and who robs Him of His honor and glory. A hypocrite, it has been said, is "like a glow-worm, it seems to have both light and heat, but when you touch it it has neither."

V. His real character is loathsome, although it appears not in the sight of men. "Woe unto you, hypocrites! for you are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them" (v. 44). Those who walked over or passed by those whited sepulchres little thought of the foulness and rottenness that were inside. "Within, full of dead men's bones and of all impurity" (Matthew 23:27). A sow that is washed is only a washed sow. A hypocrite may manage by his white-washing to give no offence to his fellow-man, but God looks upon the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Be not deceived, God is not mocked; the hidden man of the heart is naked and bare before the eyes of the Lord, and that is the man that must give his account unto God (Psalm 7:9). The hypocrite lives for that which is "highly esteemed among men," but this is "an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). Your woe, O hypocrite, is coming, for has not the Lord Jesus Christ said, "I am He which searches the hearts?" (Rev. 2:23). What will you do on that solemn day?

A GREAT FAILURE. Luke 12:13-21.

This parable of the rich and prosperous fool was given to rebuke the covetousness of the man who said to the Master, "Speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me." But the Lord could see that under the mask of justice there gleamed the greedy eye. Who made Me a judge or divider over you? Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. This socialistic brother, who wanted the inheritance divided, misunderstood the mission of Christ, who came to save us from our sins. But the time is coming when He will be made both Judge and Divider over all the earth, for He shall judge His people and divide to every man according to his works. In turning our attention to the "certain man" referred to in the parables we would note his—

I. Prosperous Condition. "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully" (v. 16). He was on the highway to worldly honor and applause. "For men will praise you when you do well yourself" (Psalm 49:18). He was evidently a land proprietor, the ground seemingly belonged to himself. He could pull down his barns at will, without consulting any one. The day of prosperity is perhaps a greater test to a man's character than the day of adversity. The Rev. Mr. Jay once had this request handed to him: "The prayers of this congregation are asked for a man who is prospering in trade." He needed them.

II. Present Dilemma. "He thought within himself, saying, What shall I do?" (v. 17). Ah! this thought within himself was not hid from Him who is a discernor of the hearts of men. He had probably just gone for his night's rest, after having surveyed those fields so heavily laden with a plentiful harvest. The vision of lavish abundance is before his eyes, the tide of good fortune is coming in like a flood. "What shall I do?" He is quite unconscious of the tremendous importance of this crisis. What he does now will fix and determine his eternal character. Let us also take heed.

III. Settled Purpose. "He said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater" (v. 18). The die is cast. He is weighed in the balance and found wanting. There is no recognition of God in all his plans, no acknowledgment of His goodness. God is not in all his thoughts. He has made the greatest miscalculation that any scheming mortal can make in allowing the Giver of all no place in his

reckoning. We may deliberately vote God out of our lives by our "This will I do," but every "I will" of self has to do with the "You will" of God (Acts 9:6).

IV. Self-Congratulation. "And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have much goods; . . . take your ease," etc. (v. 19). This rich pauper's life was entirely absorbed in his own selfish ease and gratification. A self-centered life is for ever a lost life. "Much goods." O, soul, be these your gods? They will certainly be deaf and dumb to your cry in a famishing eternity (Luke 16:19-25). The writer once received a one-pound note with these words written on the back of it, "This is the best friend I ever had." So that poor unknown soul had to part with his best friend. Not so with those who have the living unchanging Christ as their Friend.

V. Terrible Awakening. "But God said unto him, Fool, this night your soul shall be required of you" (v. 20). This sudden handwriting of God on the wall of his self-satisfied soul was a fearful interruption to his godless plans. This night "they require your soul" (R.V., margin). They! Who? They by whose spirit he had been ruled (Ephesians 2:2), and to whom he had yielded himself a willing servant (Romans 6:16). God does not require such world-sodden souls in the kingdom of Heaven. "Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches" (Psalm 52:7). Covetousness is a kind of lunacy that makes men fools in the sight of God. Blessed are they who are fools for Christ. Then notice lastly—

VI. The Lord's Application. "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (v. 21). To make it our life's business to live only for self-interest is pure unadulterated madness. Not to be rich toward God when He has brought within our reach the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8); riches of His grace and glory is to play the fool. Sell not your soul's birthright to heavenly and eternal treasure for the "much goods" of this world, which, if you set your heart on them, will only be to you as Esau's mess of pottage. There is a poverty that makes rich (2 Corinthians 6:10). "Covet earnestly the best gifts" (1 Corinthians 12:31).

LESSONS FROM A BANKRUPT. Luke 12:22-34.

"Heart-buried in the rubbish of the world—
The world, that gulf of souls, immortal souls."
—Young.

Our Lord never lost an opportunity of letting the light of truth shine into dark sin-beclouded souls. He had just spoken the parable of "a certain rich man" to expose the sin and folly of covetousness. Then, in these verses quoted above, He presses home upon the hearts of "His disciples" the needlessness of harassing anxiety about worldly and material things. The "rich man" who suddenly died a spiritual pauper should teach us to lay up treasures in Heaven. The Great Teacher come from God bases his application on a sevenfold argument—

I. The Value of Life. We should not be troubled with anxious thoughts about our life, for "the life is more than meat" (vv. 22, 23). We do not live to eat, but eat to live, and life is the gift of God. This thought is specially precious to the children of God by faith. They have been made partakers of the divine nature, a new creation, through the incoming of this new and eternal life. This life is surely more than the meat that supplies it with fresh energy. Your life, as the followers and servants of Christ, is of more value to Him than the food and clothing needed to sustain that life. Therefore take no thought for your life. He who gives the greater will not fail in the less. "Cast all your care upon Him" (1 Peter 5:7).

II. The Manner of the Ravens. "Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, . . . and God feeds them; . . . you are better than birds" (v. 24). The second reason Christ gives us why we should rest ourselves in God, concerning the things of this present life, is, "God feeds the ravens, and you are better than they." They were not redeemed by the Blood of His Son, nor called with a holy calling. The ravens, with neither "storehouse nor barn," were happily unconscious of their poverty; the rich man who would "pull down his barns and build greater" (v. 18) was equally unconscious of his spiritual bankruptcy. The raven's ignorance is its bliss; the rich man's ignorance was his curse. Christ's next argument is drawn from—

III. The Growth of the Lilies. "Consider the lilies how they grow. . . . If God so clothe the grass, . . . how much more you?" (vv. 27, 28). If God clothes and adorns the grass that may go to the oven tomorrow with the lilies, how much more carefully will He clothe you who are going into the Father's house above? The lily-glory of the grass was greater than Solomon's; the righteousness which is unto all, and upon all who believe is the righteousness of God. Therefore, with regard to supply and adorning, the disciples of Christ must rest in the Lord. This rest does not mean idleness (1 Timothy 5:8). Neither can it mean failure (Philippians 4:19).

IV. The Knowledge of the Father. "Your Father knows that you have need of these things" (v. 30). Oh, the sweetness of these words to the care-burdened heart! "Your Father knows." Coming as they do from the lips of Him who is the eternal Son, they are unspeakably precious, for He does know the deep, real love and faithfulness of the Father's heart toward those who are His blood-

bought children. Your Father knows that you have need of these things. Then why harass your hearts with anxious thoughts about them, as if your Father neither knew nor cared about your need? If you can say, "The Lord is my Shepherd," you may confidently add, "I shall not want." Be content, for He has said, "I will never leave you" (Hebrews 13:5).

V. The Promise of Christ. "Seek you the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you" (v. 31). Those who seek first the Kingdom of God as the object of the soul's life will have all those things which "the nations of the world seek after" added as a matter of course and of necessity. It is a small matter to give the clothing when we have parted with the child. Those things which the restless worldling seek after are to be added to the servants of God as things that are as needful for the life as the sunshine of Heaven or the air we breathe. Solomon asked that he might have understanding, for the Kingdom of God's sake, and there was added both riches and honor (1 Kings 3:11-13). Godliness has the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come (1 Timothy 4:8).

VI. The Littleness of the Flock. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (v. 32). The more weak and helpless the child is the more love and care will the mother lavish upon it. Our felt and confessed weakness is the secret of our spiritual strength (2 Corinthians 12:10). It is not to those wise in their own eyes, but "unto babes," to whom the Father reveals His great and precious secrets, and for this Jesus was thankful (Matthew 11:25, 26). It is the poor of this world that are most frequently the rich in faith (Jas. 2:5). The flock may be very little, as the word means, but the pleasure of the Father-Shepherd towards them is very good. Therefore, take no anxious thought about your life.

VII. The Character of the Heart. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (v. 34). It is not so much what the treasure is as where it is that determines the nature of it. The human heart has always a something that is dearly coveted as treasure. So the affections of the heart and that real or imaginary treasure will always be wedded together. Seeing, then, that the things needful for this present life are freely promised us, we are thereby relieved from any anxious thought about them, that we might be entirely free to set our whole hearts' affections on things above (John 8:36). "Whatever He says unto you, do it" (John 2:5).

HE IS COMING. Luke 12:35-48.

"You are coming, O my Savior!
You are coming, O my King!
In Your beauty all resplendent,
In Your glory all transcendent,
Well may we rejoice and sing.
Coming in the opening east,
Herald brightness slowly swells;
Coming! O my glorious Priest,
Hear we not Your golden bells."—Havergal.

In this portion there are several lessons which are of tremendous importance in these latter days in which we live. We learn that—

I. The Lord is Coming. "He will return from the wedding" (v. 36). This is not the coming of death—at death we go to Him—but the coming of the "Lord Himself," who said, "I will come again" (John 14:3). Were the disciples not told by the heavenly messenger that "this same Jesus shall in like manner come again?" (Acts 1:11).

II. He will Come like a Thief (v. 39). He will come suddenly, like lightning (Matthew 24:27), and like a thief, unexpectedly to the many. A thief would never think of telling the day and the hour when he was coming to break through and steal. The day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night. This terrible Christ-dishonoring night is fast settling down upon us. "But you, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6).

III. We should be Looking for Him. "Blessed are those whom the Lord, when He comes, shall find watching" (v. 37). We are not to look for death, but for the "glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us" (Titus 2:13). It is said to the credit of the Thessalonian converts that they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from Heaven." Do we not always watch and long for the return of loved ones when they go away from us for a season? If Christ is precious to us we cannot but look and long for His personal appearing.

IV. We should be Ready to Meet Him. "Be you therefore ready" (v. 40). This readiness consists in having our "loins girded and our lamps burning" (v. 35). The "girding" and the "burning" speaks of teaching and testimony, the twofold need of these latter days, when many are turning away from the faith and giving heed to fables and the traditions of men which make the Word of God of none effect (Mark 7:13). The loins of the mind are to be "girt about with Truth," the speculations of critics will never do this. The lamp of

life is to be trimmed and brightly burning through the oil of the Holy Spirit.

V. The Faithful shall be Rewarded when He Comes (vv. 41-44). All the servants of Christ are "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1), and as such are expected to give to the household of faith "their portion of meat in due season." We, as servants, "must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive according to that he has done" (2 Corinthians 5:10). His "Well done," will never be spoken to those who have lived only for themselves. A selfish life is a cowardly God-dishonoring existence. Such truly have their reward.

VI. The Unfaithful shall Suffer Loss at His Coming.

He will be cut asunder, separated from the faithful ones, and appointed the portion of the unbelieving (v. 46). The portion of the unfaithful is shameful disappointment (1 John 2:28). Looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ has a powerful effect upon the daily life. It was the man who said, "My lord delays his coming," that began to smite his fellow-servants (v. 45). Children in school will be on their good behavior when they know that the master is just at the door, coming in. It is possible to be saved and yet to suffer the loss of every reward by having our works burned up in the fire of His testing judgment (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). But there will be degrees of punishment, because there are degrees of privilege. To whoever much is given, of him shall be much required (vv. 47, 48). Whether the stripes be many or few, the Judge of all the earth shall do right. Let us praise His Name, "that with His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

THE BARREN FIG-TREE. Luke 13:6-9.

The Jews as a nation were more highly favored than any other. Taken out of barren Egypt and planted by the hand of God in fertile Canaan, with all the care and protection that divine wisdom and power could bestow, much fruit was naturally expected. But the heart of Him who planted was grieved and disappointed. For three years God in Christ sought fruit and found none. Yet the compassionate Savior interceded, crying, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). And though spared for a season to get the "digging" of His teaching and proofs of His resurrection, yet remaining in unbelief they were cut off (Romans 11:20). Cumberers will not always be permitted in His vineyard. This parable contains solemn and searching lessons for every Christian.

I. The Tree Mentioned. Observe its—

1. Hopeful Character. "A fig-tree" (v. 6). It is the right kind of a tree for a garden. It was a fruit tree. It belonged without doubt to a valuable class of trees. None could dispute its good connection. This fig-tree represents one who has been born from above, who has received a new nature, and who is a new creature, one who belongs to the family of God. He is perfectly assured of his honorable connection. Once he had another name and a more disreputable character, but now he is classed as a Christian.

2. Great Privilege. "Planted in the vineyard" (v. 6). This fig-tree did not grow by the wayside. It was more highly favored. It was chosen by the Lord of the vineyard and carefully planted in the most favorable place, under the immediate eye and hand of the skillful dresser, and within the enclosure of the separating walls. In short, it was chosen, planted, supplied, and protected. Such is the privilege of every chosen one. "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should bring forth fruit" (John 15:16). You are the Lord's planting, and in the place of blessing has He put you "by the rivers of water" (Psalm 1:3).

3. Barren Condition. "Fruitless" (v. 7). Fruit sought and none found. Is it possible? A fruit tree in a vineyard and yet no fruit? Quite possible, and, alas, far too common. Then who is to blame? Neither the dresser nor the ground, but the tree, which refuses or neglects to rise up to its great privilege. It was planted there not for an ornament, not merely to be fed, but to bear fruit, failing this all is failure. It might boast of its life, leaves, and opportunities, but there is nothing to satisfy the Lord. Many are fruitless Christians just for the same reason. Failing to prove their nature by their fruits they fail to rise to their high calling. The Lord seeks fruit, and has a right to expect it from every fruit-tree in His vineyard. Your presence in the vineyard proves His claim.

II. The Master's Complaint. "Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree" (v. 7). From His own language we have suggested three thoughts. His—

1. Long suffering Grace. "These three years." (v. 7). "He is long suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9). The three years suggest something like a threefold failure. Yet hitherto no judgment was passed. It stands by grace alone. How his heart must have been grieved at seeing such great grace bestowed in vain, or worse, only used for self-aggrandizement. How is it with you? What about all your privileges? Has the Master found fruit in your life? He, no doubt, has been seeking fruit. How long is it since you was converted, or planted in the vineyard? Have you only been a receiver, drinking up the sap and the sunshine of His gifts, while he, the Master, receives nothing? Oh, ungrateful heart!

2. Wearied Patience. "Cut it down" (v. 9). "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Isaiah 7:13). The trees in the vineyard are judged by

their works, those outside by their nature. By our works are we justified or condemned. Fruit-bearing constitutes the only title we have to our continuance in the vineyard (Isaiah 15:2). "My Spirit will not always strive with men." Privileges abused will be privileges lost. He who hid his lord's money lost it, and suffered besides. Shall we sin that grace may abound? God forbid! for the grace of God teaches us to deny ungodliness and to live soberly and righteously in this present world. Mere lip profession will not save us from becoming a castaway as a servant (1 Corinthians 9:27).

3. Solemn Question. "Why cumberst thou the ground?" Every fruitless tree is a cumberer. Why should it be a hindrance? Who can reply against this? Who can defend the fruitless? Every unfruitful professor is a burden and a hindrance. Their roots, or motives, get intertwined with those of the fruit-bearing, and drink up that which should have gone to the fruit-making. And how often we spread forth our barren branches over others, hindering the bright sunshine, and so affect their fruit-bearing. The inconsistencies of professing Christians have been the destruction of much fruit; they act as a biting frost upon the tender bud.

III. The Dresser's Intercession. He—

1. Pleads for More Grace. "This year also" (v. 8). How interesting that he who had been at all the labor and watchfulness, without receiving any credit or honor through it, should yet advocate its cause and plead in its name. Here Jesus is seen, and His voice is heard. He makes continual intercession for us. "I pray not that you should take them out of the world" (John 17:15). That some Christians are still in the place of fruit-bearing, but in a barren condition, living only for self, how much is this owing to the priestly work of Jesus? "This year also." This may be your last.

2. Promises More Work. "I shall dig about it, and dung it" (v. 8). This speaks of grace more abundantly. If fruit is found at all it must be the result of grace alone. Other trees are not to be impoverished for the sake of this, hence the extra digging, etc. The unfruitful Christian has often been perplexed and amazed at the unusual digging about the roots of his being, which looked very much like a removal at the time. Such times of affliction and trial are solemn warnings. They seem to whisper, "More fruit," or less privilege. The shaking of the roots indicate the presence of the Gardener. After the digging comes the additional supply.

3. Agrees that the Results should be Final. "After that" (v. 9). Oh, how very solemn is this "after that!" This is known only to themselves, the owner and the dresser. The last effort grace may expend in order to fruit bearing may be a season of affliction, a searching sermon, or some providential incident. In the case of many this may have already taken place. The present may be the brief season of His waiting. Waiting on God, and God waiting on us, are widely different thoughts. The fruit of a fig-tree is figs, the fruit of a Christian is Christ.

MADE STRAIGHT. Luke 13:10-16.

Coleridge's definition of freedom is, "The unfettered use of all the powers which God for use has given." Before all the powers that God has given us can be used for Him the fetters of sin and the power of Satan must be broken. The woman before us here, "whom Satan had bound," and whom Christ set at liberty, is a perfect example of how a sin-bound soul may enter into the freedom of God. She was—

I. Crooked. "Bowed together" (v. 11). She had been bound by Satan for eighteen years (v. 16). Completely deformed by the power of the Devil. It is always Satan's business, wherever he can, to bow down the souls of men to the earth. Sin never fails to make a crook in the will and thoughts of those under its dominion. Their name is legion, who are so bound together by the love of the world that they cannot lift their faces to Heaven. Crooked through the constant use of the muck-rake.

II. Helpless. "She could in no wise lift up herself" (v. 11). It was utterly impossible for her to break the cords that bound her face to the earth. She had been so long bowed down that her deformity had become fixed, like a crooked tree of eighteen years old. She was perfectly conscious of her outward disfigurement, and had often tried to straighten herself up, but "she could not." How like this is to those who are morally "bowed together" through drink, lust, or temper, and who again and again have attempted to lift themselves up, but they cannot, back they go to their natural deformity.

III. Anxious. She was in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, when Jesus was there (v. 10-11). Perhaps it was because He was there that she was there; at any rate she was putting herself in the way of getting blessing. It does not matter where we take our sin-crooked souls, there is no deliverance for them so long as we avoid the presence of the Son of God and refuse to hear His Word. If Bartimeus had bolted over the fence when he heard that Jesus was passing by, instead of praying, he would have certainly remained in his blindness.

IV. Invited. "Jesus called her to Him" (v. 12). He saw many in the synagogue, but He called her, for He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. The Spirit of the Lord was upon Him to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to

them that are bound (Isaiah 61:1). True to His mission, He searches out this helpless one "whom Satan had bound, lo, these eighteen years." Jesus Christ alone has the keys of all the prison houses of Satan (Rev. 1:18). When He opens no man can shut.

V. Touched. "He laid His hands on her" (v. 13). Jesus Christ comes into personal contact with every soul whom He saves. He cannot delegate this great work to another. He is ready to lay His healing and fetter-breaking hand upon all who accept His invitation, as this poor woman did. The woman mentioned in Luke 8:44 came without any special invitation, and touched His garment, and was instantly delivered. The results are the same, whether He condescends to touch us, or suffers us to touch Him, it is all of grace on His part. His hands are the hands of infinite love and power, they are never exercised in vain.

VI. Delivered. Notice the terms used, "Loosed from your infirmity,... made straight,... loosed from this bond" (v. 12). It was to her a full salvation. It consisted of a deliverance from her own weakness, a freedom from the binding power of Satan, and a being made straight for future life and work. She was now a monument of His gracious wonder-working power. Such is His salvation. A loosing of the soul from the bondage of Satan and moral infirmity, and a making of the heart straight for an upright life and loving service. Therefore the song of the saved is, "Unto Him who loved us, and... loosed us from our sin by His own blood" (Rev. 1:5, R.V.).

VII. Thankful. "Immediately she glorified God" (v. 13). A new song was put into her mouth as soon as her feet had been taken out of the horrible pit of her eighteen years' bondage through Satan (Psalm 40:2, 3). The snare was broken by the power of Him who came "to heal all that were oppressed by the Devil" (Acts 10:38), and now her soul had escaped like a bird, and was singing her song of praise high up in the wide, pure Heaven of God's redeeming love.

THE GREAT SUPPER. Luke 14:16-24.

"My need, and all ray need, You will supply;
I take You at Your Word, and ask not why."—Grosart.

The supper time is this present dispensation. The supper refers to the blessings and privileges provided for men in the sacrifice of God's Son. The many bidden (v. 16) are the Jews who received the first invitation, and who had been advised a long time beforehand. The excuses are the silly objections brought by them against Jesus and His claims. The poor and maimed are the publicans and sinners among both Jew and Gentile who accepted the invitation. Those compelled to come in from the highways and hedges are the strangers afar off who had no hope. Those who shall never taste of this supper are the unbelieving Jewish nation, who have been "cut off" (Acts 13:46; Romans 11:20). Such may be the dispensational teaching of the parable, but let us look at some practical thoughts. A—

I. Threefold Reason for Coming.

1. "Come, for all things are now ready." "All things." Every spiritual and temporal blessing for time and eternity is now ready in Christ Jesus. We often see a notice about some new book being in the press or now ready. Here is an advertisement that all things pertaining to a sinner's salvation is "now ready." Do you need a substitute? Then behold the Lamb of God. Do you need forgiveness? Then this is ready (Acts 13:38). Do you need peace? Then "Peace is made," etc. Do you need power? Then "Power is offered" (Acts 1:8).

2. "Come, for all classes are invited." Surely these four classes include all sorts. First, the poor—those who feed on stale scraps, and who have never known what it is to have a thoroughly satisfying feast. Those who go from door to door of the world's pleasure-haunts, begging for something to satisfy and getting nothing. Second, the maimed—those who have been deprived of some of their limbs, and have become hopelessly mutilated. Morally, this class represents those whose conscience has been seared, and whose will-power may have been cut off. What a helpless object! Yet come, for all things are ready. Third, the halt—those who have all their limbs, but in a crooked and deformed condition, whose manner of walk is neither straight nor steady. They do their best to appear all right, but they cannot possibly conceal their deformity. Fourth, the blind—those who can walk pretty straight, but are in the blackness of darkness all the time. Their outward life may be all right in the eyes of men, but they know not where they are going and are unconscious of their danger. You may explain the truth to them, but their answer is, "I cannot see it."

3. "Come, for yet there is room." The house is being rapidly filled, but yet there is room. How much room still remains none can tell. We know not the hour when the Master may rise up and shut to the door. Yet there is room—room in the Father's love, in the Savior's atoning death, in the ministry of the Spirit, and in the offer of the Gospel.

II. Threefold Excuse for not Coming. To put them briefly, they may stand thus—

1. "I have something else to see." "I have bought a piece of ground, and must needs go and see it" (v. 18). Why is it that men must needs go and see after their earthly possessions, and have no time to look at the provision God has made for their eternal safety

and inheritance? There are certainly many interesting things in the world to be seen, but what can be compared to the saving glory of the Cross of Christ?

2. "I have something else to do." "I must go to prove them" (v. 19). He was more anxious to prove the oxen than to prove the riches of the kingly offer. Some people seem to think that the time to obey the call of God will be when they have nothing else to do. There are those who will persist in going on proving their own worldly interests until they finally prove themselves to be fools. While they are "busy here and there" their chance for eternal life is gone.

3. "I have something else to enjoy." "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come" (v. 20). All new relationships, whether they be business or matrimonial, are sure to have a powerful influence in one way or another. There may be no sin in marrying a wife, in buying a house, in forming a new companionship, or looking forward to some coming event; but if the affections of the heart are so centered on these that the Gospel of God's grace must take a secondary place, then the life becomes a positive insult to the Son of God. God will not be mocked, He has emphatically declared that those who treat lightly His gracious invitation "Shall not taste of My supper." They who prefer to make their own suppers in time will in the end feel the pinch of that poverty which is eternal. No man has ever yet been able to form a God-satisfying excuse for not accepting His Son as their Savior. It is you God invites, not your excuses; these can never stand for you.

THE LOST SHEEP. Luke 15:1-7.

The murmuring of self-righteous scribes and Pharisees drew from our Lord those three pet parables that have brought healing under their wings to many a sin-laden soul. They said sneeringly, "This man receives sinners," and with merciless feet they sought to trample on the grace of Christ. But all the more did this "plant of renown" send forth its heavenly fragrance. The obvious meaning of this parable is to reveal Christ's personal interest in the salvation of sinners. It brings before us—

I. A Painful Discovery. "One is lost" (v. 4). Whether this one represents a world, a nation, or an individual, the underlying thought is that the Shepherd's restfulness of heart has been disturbed by the discovery that He has lost one. The lost one immediately draws out the sympathy and longing desires of His soul. When this discovery on Christ's part was first made it may be difficult to say (Ephesians 1:4), but it has been made.

II. An Altered Purpose. "He leaves the ninety and nine, and goes after that which was lost" (v. 4). He counted ninety and nine, but He did not count the lost one. To be out of His count is to be lost. The ninety and nine left in the wilderness may represent the Jewish nation, who are in the wilderness still, being without a Shepherd and without a home—a separated people, having neither king nor country, and priding themselves in their righteousness. But the Shepherd of Israel goes forth in humiliation, agony, and death to seek and save that which was lost. He does not seek the lost sheep merely because of its value, but because of His love. Fallen angels might have been of more value than fallen man, but God so loved the world.

III. A Patient Search. "He goes after the lost until He finds" (v. 4). There is no turning back with Him until His purposes are fully accomplished. "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." Christ's determination is to find the lost ones, and every lost one He will yet find, if not in His saving mercy certainly in His righteous judgment. Has He not said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me" (John 12:32). If sinful men are not drawn to Him by the grace of His Cross they will be drawn by the power of His throne. Every human soul the atoning Son of God must find, either as Savior or as Judge. Don't you hear the gentle footfall of His blessed presence in His Word even now?

IV. A Joyful Finding. "When He has found it He lays it on His shoulders rejoicing" (v. 5). To find the lost, while He is a seeking Savior, brings gladness to His gracious heart. Oh, the infinite tenderness of this self-sacrificing Shepherd! there is no word of reproach or of blame uttered. What a wonderful moment this is when the weary sin-worn sinner finds himself alone with the gentle Shepherd, and feels His tender yet mighty hands raising him up into the great bosom of love! At this blessed crisis the sheep is everything to the Shepherd and the Shepherd is everything to the sheep. Each rejoicing in each, and having nothing else besides. What a picture of the great salvation! Until the lost ones meet the Savior they are living solitary, selfish, hopeless lives.

V. A Restful Journey. "He lays it on His shoulders" (v. 5). The weary, aimless wanderer has now found a resting-place on the shoulders of Him who came to seek and to save. The Lord neither drives nor drags those whom He saves, but undertakes to carry them every step of the way to the home beyond. The way of salvation for this lost one was very simple—just "abiding." The sheep did absolutely nothing but rest on Him who was able and willing to save. His shoulders is the place of strength and safety; the government of the universe rests upon them, then surely they are strong and broad enough for your weary soul.

VI. A Happy Home. "When He comes home, He calls His friends,... saying, Rejoice with me" (v. 6). As surely as the Shepherd goes home, so surely will He take His trustful sheep with Him. "Where I am, there shall you be also" (John 14:3). While in the wilderness,

seeking to save the lost, the Son of Man was away from home. But He comes back rejoicing, bringing His sheaves with Him. The "friends and the neighbors" may represent the redeemed; and the angels in glory, who must be everlastingly interested in all that glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of men. Are we sharing Heaven's joy just now by rejoicing with Him over sinners repenting?

THE LOST SILVER. Luke 15:8-10.

There is no exaggeration or false coloring in the word-picture of this heavenly artist. Every touch bears the impress of what is absolutely true. The pictures of ordinary mortals look best in the shade, but Christ's always improve in loveliness as the light increases. This little gem of a parable has been lightly esteemed, because its true meaning and value have not been generally understood. In the first parable we have the Love of the Son in seeking the lost; in the third the love of the Father in seeking the lost; in this second we surely have the love of the Spirit in seeking the lost. The woman is a fit emblem of the Holy Spirit in search of a lost but precious thing that might be put to some honorable use. The small silver coin referred to here was a drachma, about the value of a shilling. As representing a human soul, we would point out that it was—

I. Precious. To a poor woman, whose fortune consisted of ten shillings, it was a great privation to lose one. It was a loss that was keenly felt. It also bore the image of the king, and so was good current coin. Such are souls redeemed by Christ in the estimation of the Holy Spirit. They are precious to Him, and fit for circulation in the interests of the Kingdom of God.

II. Lost. It had slipped out of her hand, so that now she had no control over it. It is a sad, sad thing for any one who has known what it is to be in the hand of the Spirit to slip out of touch with Him through pride or unbelief. To be out of His hand is to be lost to Him. The fall may have been in a moment, but the grief created was intense. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby you are sealed until the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

III. Lost in the House. It was not like the sheep, lost far away from home. It was in the house, but as utterly useless as if it had been in the depths of the sea. It is possible to be in the house of God's salvation, in the place of safety and privilege, and yet to be lost to the management of the Holy Spirit. It is one thing to be justified by faith before God; it is quite another to be ready for service in the hand of God. We may be in the home of the Spirit for salvation, and yet not be in the hand of the Spirit for service.

IV. Lost to Usefulness. As long as this silver coin was not in the hand and at the disposal of this woman it was lost to all the good it might do. If you throw a sovereign into the sea it would not be only so much gold that would be lost, but all the good that gold might do is lost. So is it with our lives after we have been brought into the household of God. If we are not in the hands of the Holy Spirit, that He might use us by spending us for the glory of God, then our lives are lost. Christ seeks to save, but the Holy Spirit seeks to find that He might use. No one is able to get so much out of our lives as He. Be assured He will spend you to the best advantage, whether it be at home or abroad.

V. Lost in the Dust and Darkness. In seeking to find she had to "light a candle and sweep the house." The candle of God's Word and the broom of providence are needed before He can get a hold of His lost treasure. The dust of sin and the darkness of unbelief always hinder the Spirit of God from rejoicing over us as a means in His hands for bringing glory to the Lord Jesus Christ. Though the sweeping process may be attended with much that is painfully unpleasant, as the dust of our unconfessed sin gets stirred up and the covering of our guilty darkness is being taken away, there must be a disturbance in the house if the Lord the Spirit is to get possession of His lost treasure.

VI. The Cause of Great Joy in the Finding. "Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost" (v. 9). As Jesus, the Shepherd, rejoices over the saving of the sinner, so the Holy Spirit, like this woman, rejoices over the recovery of a precious soul that had been lost to communion and service. It is worthy of notice that the woman does not say, "My piece which was lost." The very omission of the my (see vv. 6, 24) is strong evidence that the work of the Holy Spirit is here indicated. Believers are the property of Christ, but are to be used by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

THE LOST SON. Luke 15:11-24.

"Alas! how have I served the Devil,
Still lusting after all things evil;
For, O my God, I saw the light,
Yet plunged into the foulest night."

In studying the three parables (so-called) in this chapter we should not overlook the fact that they were spoken by our Lord as one parable (v. 3) to show how God, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit "receives sinners" and companies with them. The Son, like the shepherd, seeks the lost that He might save them; the Spirit, like the woman, seeks the lost that He might use them; God, like the father, seeks the lost that He might have fellowship with them. This is the threefold aspect of this great and perfect salvation. This parable of the prodigal has been called "the prince of parables." It has been the door of hope to many a weary wanderer. Let us consider his—

I. Selfish Demand. "Give me the portion of goods" (v. 12). Like many in our own day, he wanted to have all the goods and blessings that the father could give him, that they might minister to his own personal gratification, utterly regardless of the father's wisdom or feelings. It is dishonoring to God that we should seek to manage our own lives with His gifts.

II. Wayward Journey. "Into a far country" (v. 13). The "far country" represents that condition or sphere of living where God the Father is unknown. A son must have got into an awful sad and sinful state of soul when he feels that he must leave a rich and gracious father in search of pleasure. The self-will is a rebel against God.

III. Reckless Living. "And there wasted his substance" (v. 13). The sweet fellowship of the father was exchanged for the "riotous living" of the ungodly, and the result was, as it ever is with a backslider from God, a wasting of His precious gifts. We cannot keep the substance of God's forgiveness—peace and joy—when we willfully forsake Him for the pleasures of sin. All will be wasted; the enjoyment of them will speedily die away.

IV. Miserable Plight. "When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine" (v. 14). A "mighty famine" is sure to overtake all who have wandered away from God. Hunger of soul will certainly come upon those who spend their gifts for that which is not bread. He found out by bitter experience that "the rebellious dwell in a dry land."

V. Despairing Effort. "He went and joined himself to a citizen" (v. 15). He had willingly given away his substance, now he is compelled to give himself. Such is the course of sin. If we waste our gifts and privileges we ourselves will finally become bond-slaves. Lot took the same foolish and fruitless step when he became a ruler in Sodom.

VI. Friendless Condition. "No man gave unto him" (v. 16). He had sold himself for naught. Wretched and self-ruined, he longs for even the satisfaction enjoyed by the beast, envying the swine. "No man gave him." No man ever will give a sin-wasted sinner what he needs. You might as well expect heat from an iceberg.

VII. Noble Resolve. "I will arise and go to my father" (v. 18). This is the language of one whose pride had driven him to acts of madness, but is now "come to himself." He remembers the "father's house" and the provision there, and the fire of hope springs up from the smoldering embers of his wasted life.

"While the lamp holds on to burn.
The greatest sinner may return."

He not only said "I will arise," but he did it. Herein was the evidence of his sanity.

VIII. Gracious Reception. "He fell on his neck and kissed him" (v. 20). The father's love at once cast out the prodigal's fears. He began to confess, but his coming home was to the father the best confession. What value is there in confession if there is no turning away from sin? (Isaiah 55:7). No one gave him in the far country, but now all that the father has is at his disposal. By taking his portion he had forfeited all right to further blessing, but he is saved by grace, and the father is happy. "By grace are you saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). His grace is sufficient for all who come.

LOST SYMPATHY. Luke 15:25-32.

In its wider scope we think this part of the parable (the elder brother) is brought in to illustrate the attitude of the Jewish nation towards that manifested grace of God which has brought salvation to all men. The Gentile prodigal is being saved by grace, while the self-righteous Jew is angry and will not go in. Yet all the while, whether he will or not, this religious elder is the prodigal's brother — both alike in need of the Father's forgiveness. There are some things about this elder brother, so often neglected, that are worthy of special attention. He stands before us here as one—

I. Who was Willing to Work. "Now his elder son was in the field" (v. 25). Whatever else he was, he was not lazy, he had a mind to work. While others were feasting and dancing he was busy looking after the flocks or the crops. He is a type of those who like to be doing, and whose hands are constantly filled with some kind of good and useful work. So active are they that they would much rather be in the field of service than in the closet of prayer.

II. Faithful to Duty. He could say, "Neither transgressed I at any time your commandment" (v. 29), and he was quick to say it. As regularly as the clock, does he go the round of his daily task. His motto is, "I must do my duty." This type of Christian is as straight as an arrow, as regular as the post, and equally as formal. He speaks and acts from a sense of duty and prides himself on doing the right thing, although it may be done with a heart as cold as an icicle. The other brother was the sinner, but this one is the Pharisee (Luke 18:11). It is not duty but love that constrains the true servant of Christ.

III. Who had never Received a Mirth-making Gift from the Father. "You never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends" (v. 29). The reason why he had never received even a kid was doubtless because that in his self-complacency he had never asked it nor even felt the need of it. He was working away without ever seeking any definite token of the father's grace and love, serving without receiving his mirth-making gift. What about those who week by week go the round of religious performances, but have never at any time received the soul-gladdening gift of God (John 1:12). It was not the father's fault that his son's service had been so joyless. "Ask and you shall receive" (John 16:24). It is honoring to the Lord Jesus Christ when others are constrained to say, like the Queen of Sheba, "Happy are these your servants" (1 Kings 10:8).

IV. Grievously Offended. "He was angry, and would not go in" (v. 26). His pride was wounded to think that one whose life had been a public scandal should now receive more honor than himself who had never done anything very bad. He would not go in with this way of doing things, so he gets entirely out of sympathy—

1. With his Father. The father's heart was brimful of joy at the finding of the lost one, but it brought no gleam of gladness into the selfish soul of the elder brother. The conversion of sinners brings no mirth into the heart of those who are out of fellowship with God.

2. He got out of Sympathy with his Brother. If he had had any love for his wandering brother he would have rejoiced over his home-coming. To get out of sympathy with God is to get out of sympathy with sinners. How can a man say that he loves God if he love not his brother also?

3. He got out of Sympathy with the Servants. The servants were evidently sharing the joys of the feast, for this one that he questioned had to be called (v. 26). The true servant of God must and will rejoice in all that brings gladness to His heart and glory to His Name. To be out of sympathy with the Lord's happy servants, and to refuse to go in and share their joys in the saving work of God is a sign of haughtiness of heart and grievous backsliding.

V. Graciously Entreated. "Therefore came his father out and entreated him" (v. 28). The love and longsuffering patience of the father in his willingness to receive the prodigal has always been recognized and confessed, but his love in plying with melting entreaty this prodigal in heart has not been generally acknowledged. It is often more easy to pity the profligate sinner than the self-righteous one. The pleading of the father with the offended son was that he might enter into real hearty sympathy with him in his desire after and joy in the salvation of the lost. Are we, as His servants, in full sympathy with the Lord in His desire to seek and to save?

VI. Greatly Encouraged. Could the father have given him any greater inducement to cast aside all coldness and indifference to his highest interests than this, "Son, you are ever with me, and all that I have is your" (v. 31).

The return of prodigals unto God is not going to lessen your inheritance in Him any more than the opening of a blind man's eyes can hinder your enjoyment of the sunshine. Christian workers, are you offended because the grace of God lavishes such blessings upon the really unworthy? Are you out of sympathy with soul-saving work? Out of sympathy with God? Be entreated, come in, all the fullness of God is awaiting you.

LESSONS FROM A LOST SOUL. Luke 16:19-31.

This "rich man" had to waken up in eternity before he could tell the dream of a wasted life. "No man can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24), especially when the masters differ in character as much as "God and Mammon." Mammon stands for the "love of riches" and the "pleasures of sin." Both God and Mammon demand the mastery of our beings. If the love of God does not master us the love of the world will. If we hold to the one, we must of necessity despise the other. The covetous, in the pride of their heart, are always ready to "justify themselves in the sight of men," forgetful that they may esteem things very highly which are an abomination in the sight of God (vv. 14, 15). The words which follow about "a certain rich man" and "a certain beggar" are heavy laden with solemn and weighty meaning. The Lord does not call this a parable. His meaning is clear and unmistakable. Then what are the lessons we may learn from this portion?

I. That a man may have a beautiful appearance in the sight of men, and yet be utterly corrupt in the sight of God (v. 19). The "purple and fine linen" of man's righteousness will never beautify in the eyes of God. There are those who think that they have need of nothing, and know not that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked (Rev. 3:17).

II. That a man may be poor and loathsome in the eyes of his neighbor, and yet be rich and beautiful in the sight of God (vv. 20, 21). The poor beggar may have been an object of disgust to many, but the Lord looks not upon the outward appearance. It is no uncommon thing for the character of a poor afflicted child of God to stink in the nostrils of the covetous and wealthy man of the world. But the soul of Lazarus was a precious jewel to God, although the casket was in a broken condition.

III. That a man may have but the burial of a dog, and yet be attended by the angels of God (v. 22). No poorhouse inmate ever got a more unceremonial funeral than Lazarus.

"They rattle his bones over the stones,
He is only a pauper whom nobody owns!"

Yes, God owns him, and white-robed angels bear his emancipated spirit to the Father's bosom.

IV. That a man may have a pompous funeral, and at the same time be a miserable soul (vv. 22, 23). There would be more real mourners at some funerals if only they could see within the veil. Men eulogize the past of the world's departed great ones, but what about their present? The wail of the "Dead March in Saul" is mockery compared with the wail of a lost soul in eternity.

V. That a man may have abundance of this world's goods, and yet, in the world to come, be utterly destitute of the commonest mercy (v. 24). This worshiper of Mammon on earth has found out in eternity that a "smiling providence" is no evidence that the soul is right with God. This everlasting thirst for a drop of water is an awful experience to a man who never knew what want meant, and who only lived for the gratification of his own desires.

VI. That if a man neglect his opportunities in this life, in the life to come he will have good cause to remember his folly (v. 25). "Son, remember your lifetime." The remembrance of a wasted lifetime, in the midst of many "good things," will be, in the world to come, the undying worm of remorse.

VII. That though saints and sinners may meet together now, the time is coming when they must be eternally separated (v. 26). Earthly relationships will avail us nothing when the "great gulf is fixed." Everything depends on our relationship to God and His Christ. All the prayers and penance of the Papacy or of purgatory will never bridge this gulf, for it is fixed (Matthew 13:30).

VIII. That the prayers of the lost can avail nothing, neither for themselves nor others (vv. 24, 27, 28). Those who set no value on prayers in this life will have no value set on them in the life which is to come. It is not enough to be in earnest when the day of grace is past. "Behold, now is the accepted time."

IX. That those who will not hear and believe the Word of God shall perish without remedy (vv. 29-31). Signs and wonders would profit us nothing if we will not hear Him whom God has sent to bless us (Luke 9:35). The Israelites saw His wonders, and murmured against Him. Many saw the miracles of Christ, and yet hated Him; even Lazarus "rose from the dead," and they sought to kill Him (John 12:10, 11). "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31).

TEN LEPERS CLEANSED. Luke 17:11-19.

Wherever Jesus went He always found occasion for the exercise of His infinite compassion and power; and what is better, He was constantly on the look out for the distressed and the despairing, supremely conscious that in Himself He was all-sufficient to meet the need of all. In Jesus Christ all the fullness of the Godhead tabernacled among men, and when He laid down His life for us on the atoning Cross, it was the paying down of His unsearchable riches as the redemption price of our souls. His miracle of healing in this nameless village while on the way to Jerusalem (vv. 11, 12) has for us heart-searching thoughts. Let us see the—

I. Pitiful Sight. "There met Him ten men that were lepers" (v. 12). Ten men bound together by a common misery, and utterly unable to save themselves. Although there were ten of them, that did not lessen the sufferings and dangers of each. Although we may have many companions in sin, that does not in any way detract from the guilt of each. In Scripture leprosy is the outstanding type of sin.

1. Like sin, it brings impurity. The true cry of the leper, with his shame-covered lip, was to be "Unclean, unclean" (Leviticus 13:45). We are only taught, like the leper, to speak the truth when we are asked to make confession of our sins.

2. Like sin, it leads to separation. "They stood afar off" (v. 12). The place appointed for them by the law of God was "without the camp" (Leviticus 13:46). "Far off" is the position of all those who have not been made near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13). Their very character alienates them from the life and fellowship of God.

3. Like sin, it is humanly incurable. Man has no remedy for leprosy; he can only attempt to alleviate their sufferings while the dreadful

plague runs its death-working course.

II. Earnest Prayer. "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us" (v. 13). This may have been a hoarse cry through throats diseased with leprosy, but there was music in it to the ear of Jesus, for it came from the heart, and was for the one thing needful. "Mercy"—that mercy which in Jesus Christ was wedded to Omnipotence, and that had its abode in the tenderest and purest of men.

III. Simple Remedy. "Go, show yourselves unto the priests" (v. 14). This seems a strange command, but the meaning is clearly this: "The priests have condemned you as lepers; then, if you believe that I can heal you, and am healing you, go and show yourselves, that they may see that you are healed" (Leviticus 14:2-4). "And as they went they were cleansed." Two things were absolutely needed:

1. Faith in the Word of Christ (v. 19).

2. Obedience to the will of Christ.

If they had waited until they felt better before they went, they never would have gone. It is while we believe and obey that we enter into life.

IV. Grateful Recipient. "And one, when he saw that he was healed, turned back and glorified God" (v. 15). Personal healing is something we can only see by experience, and a something for which we should be instantly and profoundly thankful. It was a moral impossibility for this man to glorify God while in the terrible bondage of leprosy. It is only when we are made free from sin that we can give glory to God. The healing mercy of Christ not only made this Samaritan very thankful, it also made him humble. "He fell on his face at His feet." Humility and thankfulness are characteristic of those saved by the grace of God.

V. Searching Inquiry. "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?" (vv. 17-19). He who counted the stars will not fail to number those who have been cleansed by His Word. He knows them every one. "Where are the nine?" Surely our Lord expects that those who have been saved by Him should glorify God by making a public acknowledgment of His cleansing power. It is quite possible for us, like those nine, to be very anxious to get salvation merely for our own comfort and happiness, and to be utterly indifferent about honoring the Savior with our new life. Such secret believers—we cannot call them disciples—are ungrateful cowards. This despised "stranger" who turned back to give God the glory got something that the thankless nine did not get. He got the Lord's assurance that the work wrought in him was perfect (v. 19). The belief of the heart should always be accompanied with the confession of the mouth (Romans 10:9). Where are the nine? Are you one of them?

CHRIST'S SECOND ADVENT. Luke 17:20-37.

The Lord Jesus Christ did in no way rebuke those Pharisees who demanded of Him "when the Kingdom of God should come" (v. 20). It has been clearly revealed that the Messiah would redeem His people, and establish the throne of David. So powerfully did this truth lay hold on the people that at one time they were about to take Jesus by force and make Him King (John 6:15). But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, knowing what was in man. Even after His resurrection the disciples asked Him, "Lord, will You at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). But even then it was not fit for them to know when. We are here taught something of the—

I. Nature of the Kingdom. "The Kingdom of God is among you" (vv. 20, 21, margin). They asked when it should come. The Kingdom, as the Rule of God, was already among them in the Person of His Son. There can be no kingdom without a king (see Matthew 12:28). But as to its outward visible glory, it was still hidden, because He was not yet glorified as Prince and Savior.

1. It will come suddenly. "As the lightning" (v. 24). The lightning does not "come with observation," that is, men do not see the lightning before it becomes a present reality. "So shall also the Son of Man be in His day."

2. It will be unmistakable when it does come. When we pray, "Your Kingdom come," we pray for the coming of the King. When He comes there will be no need for saying, "Lo, here," or "Lo, there," for the shining of His influence will be like lightning from one part under Heaven unto the other, that is, from one hemisphere to the other (vv. 21, 24).

II. State of the World at His Coming. "As it was In the days of Noah, so shall it be" (vv. 26-30). Most certainly the world was not converted in the days of Noah. Neither will it be converted at the coming of the Lord (Luke 18:8). The days of Noah were characteristic of backsliding and unbelief (Genesis 6:1-7). They ate, and drank, and married, and rejected the testimony of Noah until the flood came. God had said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever" (R.V.), indicating that in the days of Noah the voice and pleadings of His Spirit were resisted. "So shall it be in the days of the Son of Man." "In the last days perilous times will come, for men shall be lovers of themselves, . . . heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:1-4), And our

rationalistic lower critics are doing what they can to complete this dark picture, striving against the Spirit of God (see 2 Timothy 4:3, 4), and "turning the truth into fables." From such turn away. Whatever teaching does not exalt the Lord Jesus Christ and honor the Holy Spirit is not of God.

III. Results of His Coming. The results will be very many, but there are two definite effects brought before us here.

1. Separation. When Noah, who had been condemning the world by his righteous works (Hebrews 11:7), was taken into the Ark and shut up then the flood came. When Lot was taken out of Sodom, then the fire and brimstone fell from Heaven. "One shall be taken, and the other left" (vv. 34-36). So shall it be when the Son of Man comes. There shall be a taking away of those who are the Lord's. "Caught up to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

2. Judgment. The taking away of the righteous prepares the way for the judgments of God upon the unbelieving. The Lord declared that He could "do nothing" until Lot was brought out of Sodom. When the "salt of the earth" has been removed, then there is no hindrance to the process of death and corruption. When the Church of God has been taken out of this Christ-rejecting world, then the Lord shall take "vengeance on them that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10). Wherever the lifeless and corrupt body is, thither will the eagles of God's judgments be gathered together (v. 37).

SUCCESSFUL PRAYER. Luke 18:1-14.

There is as much difference between the mere form of prayer and the spirit of prayer as there is between a dead body and a living one. The one is but the breathless skeleton of the other.

I. Prayer is a Great Privilege. How black the heavens would be if there were no opening to the cry of human need; how hopeless our lives, in the day of distress, if we had no access to the ear of God. Even this sin-blotched world may become to us the audience chamber of the King of kings; your closet may be gilded with the glory of God. Let your requests be made known unto Him.

II. Prayer is a Necessity. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (v. 1). It is "impossible to believe in God and not feel the need of prayer." It is the Christian's "vital breath." It is absolutely needed to spiritual life and health. We ought always to pray, because we are always dependent upon Him in whom we live and move. If we had more delight in prayer we would have less inclination to grumble; if we loved the presence of the Lord more we would quarrel with our neighbors less.

III. Prayer must be Urgent. "Because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her" (vv. 3-5). Her "continual coming," which prevailed over the indifference of this "unjust judge," is used by our gracious Lord as an argument for persistent prayer. If your desire is for things needful, or for the glory of God, do not be afraid to "trouble the Master" about them. His silence for a time may be but the testing of your faith. If you can possibly be satisfied without this definite answer to your prayer, the likelihood is that no answer will be given. Be importunate, and you will certainly get all you need (chapter 11:8).

IV. Prayer must be Void of Self-confidence. The parable of the two men that went up into the temple to pray was spoken to those that "trusted in themselves" (vv. 9-12). Prayer is a solemn mockery on the lips of the self-righteous. It was quite true that he was not "as other men," for he was neither a saint in the sight of God nor a sinner in his own. The man who would be justified by his works has whereof he might glory, but not before God. The fact is, the spirit of pride and self-sufficiency is at enmity with the spirit of prayer. This Pharisee said his prayers, but he did not pray. The spirit of prayer is the most humble spirit on the face of the earth; compared with other earthly spirits, it is as a lily among thorns.

V. Prayer must be Honest. The publican smote upon his breast saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (v. 13). Out of the heart are the issues of life. The Pharisee compares himself with others, and justifies himself; the publican compares himself with God, and makes confession of his sin. No prayer can be perfectly honest before God which does not express the true conscious condition of the heart. The Lord has an open ear for our cry, but he has also an open eye for our heart. Those are God-pleasing prayers that smite our own breasts; but there are others that smite the breast of God.

VI. Prayer will be Answered. "I tell you that He will" (v. 8). "I tell you that he went down justified" (v. 14). True prayer will never be sent empty away. The prayer of the poor, friendless, but importunate widow, and the prayer of the honest, sin-conscious publican were prevailing prayers, while that of the self-righteous Pharisee only insulted God and ministered to his own pride and self-deception. Our own righteousness will neither save ourselves nor our prayers any more than counterfeit jewels would save a drowning man. The way to get up in the estimation of God is to get down in our own. "He who humbles himself shall be exalted" (v. 14), and he who is so exalted shall ask what he will, and it shall be given him.

THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN AT WORSHIP. Luke 18:9-14.

This parable was spoken as a rebuke to all those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." In the preceding parable He taught that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint," but here He shows clearly that while all men ought to pray, everything depends on the spirit and motives which constrain us to pray if we are to have the answer of God to our petitions. These two men represent two classes of worshippers.

I. A Self-satisfied Professor. Here are some of the general characteristics of such—

1. He Believes in being Religious. This Pharisee goes up to the temple to pray. Like his modern descendants, he goes regularly to his place of worship, and keeps up a kind of bowing acquaintanceship with all the ordinances of God's house. He has a great respect for religion, and thinks that everybody should say prayers. As for himself, he can always pray like an unfallen angel, for he is not like "other men."

2. He Has Great Faith in Himself. "He trusts in himself" (v. 9). If ever there was a righteous man on the earth, he is that man. His brown penny is worth anybody's shilling. He glories in what he is, "not as other men," in what he does. "I fast twice a week." In what he gives, "I give tithes." His every sentence begins with a capital "I." He trusts in himself, not in God. He attends the Church because he likes to patronize things that are honorable. He believes that as long as he is able to trust in himself there will be no cause for His faith getting shaken. He has made himself what he is, so he worships a God of his own making.

3. He has no Sense of Personal Need before God. "He trusts in himself that he is righteous" (v. 9). He is rich in religious works, and increased with the goods of personal qualifications, and has need of nothing (Rev. 3:17, 18). He belongs to that famous generation "that are pure in their own eyes" (Proverbs 30:12). The Cross of Christ makes no appeal to him. He is quite independent of any such provision. He would not demean himself by classing himself with sinners. His eyes are so very innocent that they cannot see anything very bad in anything that he has ever done.

4. He has no Love for Others. "Despised others" (v. 9). This is quite consistent with his hypocritical profession. Others have so many faults and imperfections that his self-righteous soul cannot esteem them. There is no true religious uprightness but in his own pride-puffed bosom. Others may, through weakness, fall, and be caught in a whirlpool of disaster, or may be slowly drifting toward the precipice of eternal rain, but what is that to him. Such drift-souls are unworthy of his notice. His creed is, Let every man care for himself.

II. A Self-abased Confessor.

1. He Believes in Prayer. He may have gone up with the Pharisee, but not like him. The one went up to perform a work, the other to enjoy a privilege. Custom constrained the one, while a deep-felt need moved the other.

2. He is Sensible of God's Holiness. "He stands afar off" (v. 13). He realizes that there is a great moral distance between God's character and his own. "Afar off" describes our true position as sinners before God (Ephesians 2:13). But while the prodigal was yet "a great way off" the father ran and met him. He came not merely to pray, but to have a personal dealing with a personal God. "He who comes to God must believe that He is."

3. He is Conscious of his own Sinfulness. "He smote upon his breast" (v. 13). He is convinced that the source of his guilt lies deeper down than mere words or acts, that his heart was "deceitful, and desperately wicked." He stands before God a self-condemned man, so overwhelmed with shame that he could not "lift up so much as his eyes unto Heaven." He takes his true place as one "condemned already" (John 3:18).

4. He Pleads the Atoning Sacrifice. We infer from the word used, "God be merciful"—be propitiated for me the sinner—that this sin-smitten one had his eyes on the sacrifice smoking on the altar when he uttered this prayer (v. 13, R.V., margin). When a man is thoroughly convinced of his guilt before God he has no difficulty about the doctrine of substitution. He feels that this is his only hope, and thanks God for the Cross of Christ.

III. An Infallible Judge. This "I tell you" of Jesus is the final pronouncement of God upon the attitudes of these two classes as before Him (v. 14).

1. The Self-exalted shall be Abased. No man can lift himself up into the favor of God by his own works. "God resists the proud" (James 4:6). As long as a man covers his own sin he shall never prosper in the sight of the heart-searching God (Proverbs 28:13).

2. The Self-abased shall be Exalted. "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up" (James 4:10). The story of Haman and Mordecai is a perfect illustration of this truth. In Luke, chapter sixteen, we see a proud rich man abased to Hell, while the

humble beggar is exalted to Heaven. This word is settled in Heaven, that if you save your life you will lose it, and if you lose it for Christ you will save it.

ONE THING LACKING. Luke 18:15-30.

Jesus is equal to the need of all, from the ruler of the Synagogue down to the infant in the mother's arms (v. 15). Blessed are those mothers who seek for their children the touch of the life-giving Christ, and who will not be discouraged in this good work by the forbidding or mocking looks of ignorant and cold-hearted disciples. The Kingdom of God must be received in the simple, unquestioning spirit of "a little child" (v. 17). This fact is clearly brought out in the following story of the young ruler. In this short suggestive narrative we note—

I. An Important Question. "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (v. 18). There is no question more becoming a thoughtful young man than this. It is beautiful to see a man, while basking in the sunshine of worldly prosperity (v. 23), anxiously inquiring into the eternal sureties of the unseen. Why should the glory of earthly riches blind the eyes to the greater glory of the heavenly? This ruler came to the right person with this most momentous of all questions when he came to Jesus. He only has the words of eternal life. It was also a very personal question. "What shall I do." Salvation is a matter between Jesus Christ alone and our own individual souls.

II. A Searching Inquiry. "Jesus said unto him, Why call you Me good?" (v. 19). Our Lord would have him understand that He deals not only with the language of the lip, but with the deeper motives of the heart. "There is none good but God" (v. 19). Do you believe that I am God? When we come to Jesus about the matter of "eternal life" we must come with full purpose of heart, believing that He is divine, and that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Believe you this?

III. An Honest Confession. "All these have I kept from my youth up" (v. 21). Doubtless this anxious ruler was perfectly sincere in saying this. He knew nothing against himself. There is a peace of conscience that is not the "peace of God." There is a justness of character in the sight of the law that does not justify in the sight of God, for the just shall live by faith (Galatians 3:10, 11). "Without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6). The Pharisee who "went up to pray" had many good works, but he was destitute of faith in the atoning sacrifice (Luke 18:11-14).

IV. A Testing Command. "Yet lack you one thing; sell all that you have,... and you shall have treasure in Heaven" (v. 22). Those who would have the "eternal life" that is in Christ must be prepared to let everything else go at His bidding. "Treasure in Heaven" is the coveted portion of all those whose heart is right with God. They look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen and eternal. We may possess many good things, and yet lack the one thing needful. One crack in the lantern will leave the pilgrim in darkness; one faulty link will make the chain worthless; one leak in the ship will sink it. If we offend in one point we are guilty of all. The one needful thing is a whole-hearted, unstaggering faith in the Lord Himself.

V. A Sorrowful Result. "When he heard this he was very sorrowful,... and Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful" (vv. 23, 24). To part with his all, even for the all of Christ was to him a sorrowful bargain, proving that he had more faith in his riches than in the Son of God. No man can serve two masters. Christ gave him the Word of life, but the deceitfulness of riches choked it (Matthew 13:22). "He who trusts in his riches shall fall" (Proverbs 11:28). One thing is needful, and Mary has chosen that good part.

VI. A Forcible Application. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God" (vv. 24-30). It is easier for a camel to get unburdened and to crawl through the narrow side gate into the city, and that was no light task. No camel, of itself, could untie the obstructive bundles from its back. No more can the rich free themselves from the burden and love of their riches, but "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (v. 27). To sacrifice self-interest for the interests of Christ is to "receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

BARTIMAEUS. Luke 18:31-43.

God, who made the heavens and the earth, through His Son, and who by Him divided the light from the darkness of old, is both able and willing now, through Christ, to open the blinded eyes and minds of men, and to illumine them with the glorious light of Heaven. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:3, 4). About this blind man, observe his—

I. Wretched Condition. He was "blind" and "begging" (v. 35). His eyes were darkened, and his circumstances impoverished; he was utterly destitute. No fellow-mortals could restore to him the joy of saving light. What a picture of us all by nature, with our sin-blinded eyes and impoverished hearts! Satan has blinded the minds of them that believe not.

II. Anxious Inquiry. "Hearing the multitude pass by he asked what it meant" (v. 36). Although he had lost his eyesight, he had his hearing and his tongue left, and he used them both. If we only put to a proper use the faculties we have, we would find ourselves, perhaps, richer than we imagined. All men have not faith in God, but all men have faith in someone or some thing. There are multitudes still following Christ, and who are willing and ready to lay down their lives for His sake. Have you ever seriously "asked what it means?"

III. Urgent Petition. "He cried, Jesus, You Son of David, have mercy on me" (v. 39). And when those in front of him sought to block his way, "he cried so much the more." The more he was rebuked the louder he cried. This is the holy logic of a man conscious of his need, and of a God-sent remedy within his reach. "Jesus of Nazareth passes by." If the voice of his need does not reach the ear of His mercy now it may never. To Bartimeus this was his "accepted time," and he took full advantage of it. They are un-Christlike followers of Christ who would seek to drown the voice of the prayer of the needy.

IV. Blessed Privilege. "Jesus asked him, What will you that I shall do unto you?" (vv. 40, 41). His importunity has prevailed. The Lord Himself invites him to his presence, and with these words, "What will you?" He lays, as it were, all His divine treasures of wealth and power at the feet of this poor blind supplicant. He is now within the reach of all that his heart could wish. This is what every poor, destitute soul finds when they find the favor of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Seek, and you shall find."

V. Definite Request. "Lord, that I may receive my sight" (v. 41). When we are as conscious of our sinfulness as this man was of his blindness we shall not fail to plead for the one thing needful. He was poor, but he did not plead for wealth; there is something which Christ can give us that is infinitely more precious than silver or gold, and that is eyes to see the Lord Himself as our own personal Savior and Friend. This is what the blind man saw when his eyes were opened.

VI. Instant Cure. "Immediately he received his sight" (vv. 42, 43). The Son of God has but to speak and it is done. His word of power is always spoken in answer to faith. Jesus said, "Your faith has saved you." Instant faith brings instant blessing. In receiving his sight, he received it, of course, from the Lord as the gift of His love and the evidence of His almighty power. "Believe, and you shall see." Worldly wisdom will never make the blind to see. Jesus is mighty to save.

VII. Practical Gratitude. "He followed Jesus, glorifying God" (v. 43). He did not go back to his miserable "begging." Having received his sight, he lost his right and title as a professional pauper, and become a willing disciple of his Savior. How are others to believe that we have been healed by Christ if our lives are not glorifying God by following Him in the way? Those who have been delivered from the enemy of sin and blindness are to serve Him without fear, in holiness all the days of their life (Luke 1:74, 75). Has your faith saved you?

ZACCHAEUS. Luke 19:1-10.

"You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are disquieted until they can find rest in Thee."—St. Augustine.

There is a striking contrast between the case of Bartimaeus and that of Zacchaeus. While they were both near Jericho, yet they were found at the extreme ends of the city; the one was sitting on the lowly wayside, the other was perched on a tree; the one was poor, the other was rich; the one sought Jesus for mercy, the other sought to see Jesus; the one had to get up to be saved, the other had to get down. Jesus Christ is able to save to the uttermost heights of society, as well as to the uttermost depths of it. Let us look at his—

I. Social Position. "He was chief among the publicans, and he was rich" (v. 2). He was, perhaps, a contractor, with many tax-gatherers under him, and so had ample opportunity of enriching himself. These Jewish toll-keepers were severely hated by their brethren, because that through this business the Roman government, under whose galling yoke they groaned, being burdened, was strengthened and upheld.

II. Earnest Desire. "He sought to see Jesus, who He was" (v. 3). He not only wished to see Him, he evidently desired to know Him. He was undoubtedly moved by deeper feelings than mere curiosity. The Son of God never gratifies the professional sight-seer. Had there been no longing in his heart for a personal acquaintance with the Christ, the Lord would in all likelihood have passed him by. He who looks upon the heart has said, "You shall find Me when you shall seek Me with all your heart" (Deuteronomy 4:29).

III. Twofold Difficulty. "He could not for the press, because he was of little stature" (v. 3). A great crowd and a pair of short legs are really formidable obstacles in the way of seeing. The hindrance was both personal and circumstantial—in himself and in others. Who ever sought the Lord without being confronted with these two classes of difficulties? Our own shortcomings and the callous indifference of others to our spiritual interests are sure to test the sincerity of our desires after Christ.

IV. Fixed Determination. "He ran before, and climbed up into a tree to see Him" (v. 4). The chief of the tax-gathering clan running and climbing a tree like a schoolboy! Who would have thought of it? Ah, when there is real anxiety to know Jesus Christ and the power of His salvation there will be no concern about the "fear of man"—no feeling of shame in such a desperate search. Those who are ashamed to show any excitement over Christ and His cause are utterly unworthy of Him.

V. Unexpected Call. "Jesus looked up and saw him, and said, Make haste and come down, for today I must abide at your house" (v. 5). Zacchaeus sought to see Jesus and to know Him, unaware of the fact that to see Jesus as He ought to be seen implies being seen and known by Him. "Make haste," the Lord is always ready to meet the need of an anxious soul. "Today I must abide." Why this must? Does not the real heart anxiety of a sinner after Christ always lay a gracious necessity upon Him who came to seek and save that which was lost? (v. 10).

VI. Ready Obedience. "He made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully" (v. 6). His prompt response to the Master's call and his joyful reception of Him surely prove that the publican was both eager and honest in his new search. False professors have always an excuse to make when the personal call of Christ is pressed upon them (Luke 14:18). A hungry man does not need much pressing to eat when suitable and savory food is set before him. Those who are really anxious to be saved are never very far from the Kingdom.

VII. Instant Salvation. The whole crowd murmured when they saw that He had gone in as the guest of a publican. Perhaps it was to hush their murmurings and justify himself and also the Lord in coming into his house that Zacchaeus "stood up and said, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor," etc. (vv. 7, 8). But Jesus did not come into his house because "he gave to the poor," etc., but because he was an anxious sinner seeking fellowship with Himself—a lost one needing a Savior. We are saved, not by our good works, but by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8). The day that salvation came to his house was the day that Jesus Christ the Son of Man came. "He who has the Son has life." "There is none other Name given, whereby we can be saved." Salvation is certain to "as many as receive Him" (John 1:12).

THE PARABLE OF THE POUNDS. Luke 19:11-27.

Luke has hung up the keys of this parable outside the door for us. He gives us two reasons why it was given—"because He was near Jerusalem, and because they thought that the Kingdom of God should immediately appear." So the parable has reference to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Jews), and the coming of the King. We shall have a little word about—

I. The King. He is called here "a certain nobleman" (v. 12). This nobleman is the Lord Jesus Christ, and surely He is a Noble-man. He is of high birth, for He was born from above (Luke 1:35). As the Son of Man He is indeed the noblest of men. Was it not David Livingstone who called him "a perfect gentleman?" All his words and works have the nobility of God about them.

II. The Journey. "He went into a far country to receive for Himself a kingdom" (v. 12). Jesus went into the far country when He ascended to the Father, and, as the Son of Man, He is now receiving "for Himself" a kingdom (Daniel 7:13, 14). All who now believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are being received by Him, and are being made unto Him a kingdom (Rev. 1:6, R.V.).

III. The Servants (v. 13). These ten servants had delivered to them one pound each, and their commission was plain—"Occupy until I come." They were to occupy His place, and trade with His gift, until He would come again. This part of the parable found its perfect fulfillment in Pentecost, when His servants, gathered together in the upper room, had delivered to them the gift of the Holy Spirit by the Master Himself. This gift was not divided among them, for "it sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:3, 4), Each one received his or her pound, with which they were to do business for Him until He came. It is impossible for us to occupy in Christ's Name unless we trade with Christ's gift, living and acting in the power of the Holy Spirit.

IV. The Citizens. "They hated Him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us" (v. 14). They are called "His citizens" because that Jesus Christ was the rightful heir to the throne of David, established in Jerusalem. These citizens are typical of all those who hate Him without a cause, and who, through unbelief and pride of heart, will not submit to His rule, but cry, "Away with Him!"

V. The Return. "When He was returned...He commanded the servants to be called unto Him" (v. 15). The first thing our Lord will do, when He comes again, will be to call His servants together to give an account of how they have used or neglected His gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the judgment-seat before which all we, as His servants, must appear (2 Corinthians 5:10). Through grace we are accepted in Him, but we must labor in the power of the Spirit if we would be "accepted of Him."

VI. The Reward of the Faithful. Salvation is by faith, but the rewards of the coming King will be according to our works. There are three classes of servants represented here (vv. 16-24). They all had the same gift; the same possibilities were within the reach of each. The first had great faith in his pound, and gained with it other ten. The second had little faith, and gained but five. The third had

no faith in it, and gained only the reproach of his Master. The application is plain and heart-searching. Every believer in Christ has the gift of the Holy Spirit brought within his reach, and in the strength and power of this divine money he is to do business for God in the place and Name of his Lord. He does not send us a warfare on our own charges. In this "pound" there was all-sufficient, whereby each receiver may accomplish all the will and work of their absent Master. Those who trade with their own gifts instead of this gift of God will certainly—like this man (v. 23)—be found fruitless at the coming of Christ. If we are working for Christ in our own strength and wisdom we are hiding our Lord's money, and can never be rewarded with His "Well done" (Matthew 25:21).

VII. The Doom of the Unbelieving. Those who "would not that He should reign over them" were to be slain before Him (v. 27). All hatred and unbelief will be judged when He appears. Those who in their hearts and lives have said, "Not this Man," shall one day hear these awful words from the most merciful of lips, "Depart from Me, you cursed." "For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25).

CHRIST WEeping OVER JERUSALEM. Luke 19:28-48.

"The Son of God was seen Most glorious: in Him all His Father shone Substantially expressed, and in His face Divine compassion visibly appeared."—Milton.

In every single ray of white light we are told there are all the colors of the rainbow. In this portion we have a sevenfold revelation of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. His Wisdom. If the eyes of our Lord had not more light in them than that of ordinary mortals, how could He assure the disciples that they would find a young colt tied at a certain place named (v. 30)? Through faith He spoke as one endued with Omniscience. Distance is as nothing in the eyes of God.

II. His Power. All the apology they were to offer on taking away the man's donkey was, "The Lord has need of him" (vv. 31-34). With this simple declaration there went forth such an influence from the presence of the absent Christ that no resistance could be offered. He will have a willing people in the day of His power. All who go forth, like these disciples, in His Name, to do His will, cannot fail to have the authority of their Master with them (Matthew 28:18, 19).

III. His Humility. "They set Jesus thereon." The King of Glory sitting upon a borrowed donkey, and with "their garments upon the colt" (vv. 35, 36). There was nothing too humiliating for the Son of God, if only the Scriptures might be fulfilled (Zechariah 9:9). He who so humbles himself will surely be exalted (Philippians 2:8, 9). The pride of man is forever opposed to the revealed will of God.

IV. His Royal Dignity. "Blessed be the King that comes in the Name of Jehovah" (Hebrews 5:38). Jesus was a King, although His face was more marred than any man's! He was bedless and penniless; yet His every word and act was stamped with the sovereign majesty of Heaven (v. 37). The glory of His kingly character manifested itself on the holy mount when it burst with overwhelming power through the concealing veil of His flesh, revealing "peace in Heaven, and glory in the highest."

V. His Compassion. "When He beheld the city He wept over it" (v. 41). If we had the eyes and the compassion of Jesus Christ we would be constrained many a time to weep over what others are rejoicing in. Christ as the Son of God and the Redeemer of men can only look upon places and persons in their relationship to Himself. The temple stones may be large and beautiful, but what of that if there be no welcome for Him in His "Father's house" (v. 45). To Him the heart of the city was the heart of the citizen; if this was false and cruel, all else was desolation. "He wept over it." "Greater love has no man than this." What about that city within our own hearts? What does the sympathetic Savior see there?

VI. His Faithfulness. It must have been with a very heavy heart that our Lord uttered these solemn words recorded in verses 42-46, for He wills not the death of any, but rather that they would come to Him and live. But even His tearful compassion does not hinder Him from speaking out these awful words of warning and of doom. It is a fearful thing to fall, as an unbeliever, into the hands of the living God. Neither the city, the nation, nor the individual can finally prosper who reject the claims and resist the pleadings of the Lord Jesus Christ. "While you have the light, believe in the light," for this same Jesus who wept and died shall yet judge the quick and the dead.

VII. His Influence. The chief priests... sought to destroy Him, for all the people were attentive to hear Him" (vv. 47, 48). To some He was a savor of death, to others of life. The sun which melts the wax will harden the clay. Everything depends on the attitude of our heart to Christ as to whether His influence will melt us unto salvation or harden us for judgment. The preaching of the Cross is either foolishness to us or it is the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:23, 24).

PARABLE OF THE GARDENERS. Luke 20:9-19.

"Dare I trust my heart and voice against the voice of the whole? Yet should the roar of the crowd ever drown the true voice of the soul?"—W. Smith.

It is not only Scotch-like, but it may at times be Christlike, to answer one question by asking another. The chief priests and scribes asked, "Who gave You this authority?" Jesus answered by asking, "The baptism of John, was it from Heaven or of men?" They "could not tell," or rather, they would not say, lest they should commit themselves. Neither would He tell them. It is so still. Those who refuse to accept the testimony of His servants shall not know the secret of Christ's authority and power. There must be faith in His Word if we would have revelations of Himself. This parable, like that of the "pounds," has a decided dispensational character.

I. The Vineyard. "A certain man planted a vineyard" (v. 9). This nameless man is intended to represent Jehovah, the Eternal One; the vineyard is the whole house of Israel, whom He has redeemed for Himself (Jeremiah 2:21); the planting refers to their settlement in the land of promise, where they were carefully nurtured and guarded by the presence of God.

II. The Faithless Gardeners. These were the proud rulers of the people, who "entreated shamefully" those sent by God to assert His claims upon them as His professing people. They persecuted and slew those servants of God who testified against them (Nehemiah 9:26). Did not the Spirit-filled Stephen fling the same charge in their teeth when he said, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" These wicked gardeners, like many in our own day, were willing to take all they could get from God that would enrich themselves, but refused to give Him anything in return.

III. The Divine Dilemma. "What shall I do?" (v. 13). His thankless people have transgressed and rebelled; His warnings and entreaties, through His servants, have been neglected and despised. "What shall I do?" Something new must be done if the Lord of the vineyard is to maintain His rights to the fruits thereof. Shall it be vengeance or mercy? Shall it be instant judgment or a further manifestation of His infinite grace? Shall it be the sacrifice of man for his sins, or a sacrifice from God for the sins of man? "Deliver from going down to the pit, for I have found a ransom."

IV. The Gracious Purpose. "I will send My beloved Son" (v. 13). It may be that when they see Him they will turn away their faces from shame, and confess their sins (v. 13). Instead of opening the flood-gates of wrath against those offenders, He opens the treasures of His heart, and sends forth His only Son. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us" (1 John 4:10).

V. The Fond Expectation. "It may be they will reverence Him when they see Him" (v. 13). What did they see when they saw Him? They saw the invisible yet frequently insulted God, manifest in mortal flesh, as a loving, sin-forgiving Savior, the wisdom and the power of God. Surely when they behold such an exhibition of His condescension and forbearance they will feel rebuked for their pride and arrogance. It would seem as if the Lord of the vineyard hoped to kill their enmity with His kindness. The mission of the Son of the Highest was to save us from our sins, and to reconcile us to God. "He who honors the Son honors the Father." To refuse Him reverence is to dishonor the Father who sent Him.

VI. The Deliberate Refusal. "They cast Him out of the vineyard and killed Him" (v. 14, 15). They would not have this Man to reign over them. Although they knew him to be "the Heir," yet, in the pride of their hearts, they refused to submit to Him. What better are we than they, in "acknowledging Christ to be the Son of God, if we have not yielded ourselves unto Him? Is our guilt not greater in that we are casting Him out of our hearts and homes; out of our businesses and pleasures daily. To cast Him out of our lives is to cast our lives into eternal bankruptcy and ruin (v. 18).

VII. The Terrible Results. The gardeners shall be destroyed, and the vineyard given to others (v. 16). Neglected opportunities will bring corresponding judgments. The Word of God was first spoken to the Jews as His people, but they put it far from them, and now the vineyard is given to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). The blessed privileges offered us now will soon have gone to others. Are we laying hold of them for our eternal profit, or shall they pass, leaving us in the deeper condemnation through our pride and unbelief? "When they heard it they said, "God forbid." But all such "God forbids" from the lips of self-righteous rebels will never in any degree avert the just judgments of an insulted God.

CHRIST AND THE SKEPTICS. Luke 20:20-40.

The man is a fool who would suffer himself to be lifted up or cast down according to the length of his own shadow; but not more so than those who would set themselves, in the pride of their heart, against Christ, who is the wisdom of God. The chief priests and the scribes sought to lay hands on Him because He had spoken a parable against them. The light will always be against those who love the darkness (v. 19). We have here two different attempts to ensnare the Lord through His words; but in vain is the snare spread

before Him. There is what we might call—

I. The Tribute Trap. Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or no? It was—

1. Cunningly Set. All the craft of hypocrisy and wickedness was employed to catch Him in His words. Other men were easily caught in this fashion. These deceivers "feign themselves just men" that they might more easily accomplish their diabolical business. Notice their buttery words: "Master, we know... that You teach the way of God truly" (v. 21). The truth was in their lips, but hypocrisy was in their hearts. As no honey was to be put in the meat-offering, so no flattery could move Him who is the Truth and the Life. They expected a "Yes" or "No" to their pressing question. If he said "Yes," then they would rouse the people against Him. If He said "No," then they would speedily report Him to the Roman officials. It was—

2. Quickly Detected. But He perceived their craftiness, and said, "Why tempt you Me?" There is no mask thick enough to hide our motives from His all-searching eye. It is a fearful thing to fall as hypocrites into the hands of the Living God. "Show Me a penny," said the penniless Savior, and as He turned it on His fingers He made that "image and superscription" to bring their wisdom to naught, and to humble their haughty pride. Learn how mighty little things become in His hands. Only a penny, but used of Christ It becomes a witness for Him that all the wisdom of men cannot gainsay. We sometimes say "a penny for your thought," but let us give earnest heed to the thought connected with this penny. "Give to man the things that are man's," and "to God the things that are God's!" If you are Christ's, then you are not your own. You are bought with a price, therefore give to God the things that are His. Then came—

II. The Resurrection Trap (vv. 27-40). It was—

1. Set by the Sadducees. This sect denies that there could be any resurrection, because to them it was contrary to reason. These Sadducees are the forefathers of our modern rationalists, who would limit the workings of God to the understanding of sin-blinded mortals. In referring to this woman who had been married seven times, they were presenting their cause in the strongest possible Sight, but their light was only the blackness of darkness of ignorance.

2. Broken by Christ. The truth of God will always escape (like a bird) out of the snare of the fowler. In the world to come the children of God are equal to angels— they don't need marriage to increase their happiness and bliss; they never enter into one another's possessions there, because they "die no more." And as touching the certainty of the resurrection, it is as sure as that the Lord is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. They are living now, for Jehovah is not the God of the dead, but of the living? He who is our life beyond the grave can easily lift our bodies from the tomb and turn the corruptible into incorruption, and this mortal into immortality. "Thanks be unto God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Have faith in God.

CHRIST'S LAST PASSOVER. Luke 22:1-23.

"With all His sufferings full in view,
And woes to us unknown,
Forth to the task His Spirit flew,
'Twas love that urged Him on."—Cowper.

Lammenais says: "All that Christ asked of mankind, with which to save them, was a Cross whereon to die." He got it without a grudge.

The word "Passover" is derived from a verb meaning "to pass by," or "to spare." It was instituted in Egypt in the most solemn and suggestive circumstances (Exod. 12). Not a bone of the paschal lamb was to be broken. See how literally this was fulfilled in "Christ our Passover" (John 19:33). This last Passover was the final fulfillment of the first. Associated with it here we see—

I. Unreasonable Hate (vv. 1, 2). In seeking how they might "kill Him," these chief priests and scribes manifested the diabolical enmity of their own hearts against the true character of Jehovah, whom they professed to worship. Little did they think that they were planning how to kill God's "Passover Lamb." They hated Him without a cause.

II. Cruel Betrayal (vv. 3-6). Satan always finds a suitable instrument for his wicked work in a hypocritical professor. Satan entered Judas because the door of his heart stood open wide to every evil suggestion. The Devil's bait for him was money, because he knew that he loved it, and that at heart he was a thief.

III. Special Provision (vv. 7-13). The guest-chamber was appointed by Christ, "a large upper room furnished," to be noted forever afterwards as a place connected with His death, resurrection, and with Pentecost. The place was there furnished for them, where Christ, God's paschal Lamb, was "made ready" as a sacrifice for the sin of the world.

IV. Sacred Fellowship (vv. 14-18). There is intense longing in this desire of Christ to eat the Passover with them before He would suffer. The awful shadow of the Cross, falling over His Spirit, seems but to intensify His love for His own. His love was stronger than death; many waters could not quench it. It was a hallowed time when He took the cup, saying, "Divide it among yourselves." The cup of salvation, and also of the "fellowship of His sufferings." Have we taken it?

V. Merciful Substitution (vv. 19, 20). The language is infinitely tender and unmistakable, "My body given for you," "My blood shed for you." If God is to pass over us in judgment, it must be because the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exod. 12:13). The atonement of Christ is the only covering for sin that can enable God righteously to "pass by," justifying the believer in Jesus.

VI. Infallible Prophecy (vv. 21-23). "The Son of Man goes as it was determined" (Luke 22:22). While with wicked hands they slew Him, yet His going was according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23). In the purpose of God, Christ was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). The unbelief and wickedness of men shall never make void the eternal counsel of Jehovah. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

GETHSEMANE. Luke 22:39-54.

There is a deep, soul-moving pathos in these words: "He went, as He was accustomed, to the Mount of Olives." This was Christ's prayer-closet, and this was His last, and forever memorable visit. The saving interests of a dying world, and the eternal honor of His Holy Name are now to be cast into the crucible. The issues of this night's awful work will affect Heaven, earth, and Hell, and stretch out to the uttermost ages of eternity. In a garden the first Adam fell through sin; in a garden the second Adam triumphed through suffering. Gethsemane was to Christ a place of—

I. Solemn Loneliness. "He was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast" (v. 41). Far enough to be beyond their reach of help. He trod the wine-press of atoning suffering alone. On the great day of atonement the High Priest alone had to do the work (Leviticus 16:29-30). "Jesus paid it all." "Nothing in my hand I bring."

II. Prayerful Resignation (v. 42). This woeful cup was enough to crush into nothing an ordinary mortal. Christ knew its terrible contents, for He well knew the holiness of God and the heinousness of sin. The only way this cup could pass from us was through the "nevertheless, not My will," of Jesus Christ.

III. Heavenly Support. "There appeared an angel strengthening Him" (v. 43). This angel was highly honored in having a hand in such needful and glorious work. Doubtless he would be remembered for it after the Ascension. Will we not feel like thanking Him when we go to Heaven for strengthening the Redeemer in His way to make atonement for our sins?

IV. Awful Suffering. The agonizing prayer and the "drops of blood" tell of a tender, sensitive heart, crushed and bruised in the mortar of love by the weight of hated sin—not His own (2 Corinthians 5:21). But this prayer, with strong crying and tears, was heard (Hebrews 5:7). If sin imputed to Him brought such agony of soul, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

V. Cruel Betrayal (vv. 47, 48). The kiss of Judas was to the "Man of Sorrows" as the bite of a serpent. This was the first salutation Christ received from man after taking the cup of the curse on his behalf. "Man's inhumanity to man" is as nothing compared with his inhumanity to God. We but give Jesus the Judas kiss when we give Him the lips of profession and deny him a heart of love.

VI. Merciful Miracle (vv. 50-51). Even Christ's own unparalleled sufferings did not check His sympathy for the misfortunes of an enemy. "He touched his ear," undoing the revenge of Peter's sword. What self-forgetting love was His! The power that healed the ear could have hurled the whole band of mockers into perdition.

VII. Satanic Power. "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (vv. 52, 53). All who oppose Jesus Christ are acting as the agents of the Devil. The triumph of the wicked is short (Job 20:5). Creatures that live in the dark are usually fierce and furious. Walk in the light (John 3:19-21).

PETER'S DENIAL. Luke 22:54-62.

"To be forewarned is to be forearmed." But Peter did not seem to profit anything from the Lord's forewarning that "Satan desired to have him that he might sift him as wheat." It was more than Job got. Christ uses a fan to blow away the chaff, and cleanse the wheat; the Devil uses a sieve to save the chaff and cast out the wheat. Next to the power of Christ dying for us is the power of His

praying for us. "I have prayed for you" (v. 32; John 17:15). Let us note the steps in Peter's downfall.

I. Self Confidence. He said, "Lord, I am ready to go with You into prison and to death" (v. 33). Peter thought he was ready now, but the testing time had not yet come; he should have believed the Lord's Word, that his prayer for Him was greatly needed. Peter had not yet learned that "without Him he could do nothing" but faint and fail. "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool" (Proverbs 28:26).

II. The Fear of Man. "Peter followed afar off" (v. 54). Now was Peter's time to "go with Him into prison," but his feet were caught in that snare that is always made by the "fear of man." Acts speak louder than words. Let us beware of imitating Peter's cowardly conduct by refusing to identify ourselves with Christ's cause when others are ruthlessly treating His Word and His work. "Following afar off" is nothing but a half-hearted denial.

III. Companying with the Scornful. "Peter sat down with them" (v. 55). Through the influence of John, Peter was allowed into the open court, but he joined the scoffers and warmed himself at the enemies' fire (John 18:15-18). John doubtless followed Christ into the judgment hall. Following afar off will surely lead to mingling with the ungodly, and joining with them in their unholy mirth. After the prodigal went into the far country he was soon found joining himself to a citizen (Luke 15:15).

IV. Denial. "He denied Him, saying, I know Him not" (vv. 56-60), and that three times over, as the Lord had said. The fruit of self-confidence is Christ-denial. Christ is always being condemned when pride sits in the throne of our heart. Let us take care that we don't throw stones at Peter for doing in one day what we ourselves may be doing every day we live—refusing to confess Christ our Lord. Then came his—

V. Repentance. "He went out and wept bitterly" (v. 62). The Lord Jesus Christ, while being led from the judgment hall across the open court to the guard-room, cast such a searching, pitiful, heart-melting look on Peter that awakened his sin-drugged memory, and filled his eyes with the bitter tears of sorrow and penitence. One look of Christ is enough to make the deep sea of the past to yield up its dead. "Peter remembered." An awakened memory will be a blessing or curse, according to our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive" (1 John 1:9).

PILATE AND CHRIST. Luke 23:1-25.

Christ was accused of "perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar." A double charge, which was a double-dyed lie (Matthew 22:21). They are forever found liars who would seek a cause for condemning the Christ. Let us note—

I. Pilate's Privilege. "They led Him unto Pilate" (v. 1). No man can ever be the same after being brought face to face with the saving Son of God. It is a high and merciful honor to have Jesus brought before us, but what will be the issues of our case?

II. Pilate's Question. "Are You the King of the Jews?" (v. 3). To this straight question Jesus gives a plain and emphatic answer that Pilate might, if he cared, feel the great responsibility of his present position. "To this end have I been born, and for this cause came I into the world," said the princely "Man of Sorrows" (John 18:36). "What think you of Christ?" Are we in any doubt as to His kingly character?

III. Pilate's Confession. "I find no fault in this Man" (v. 4). The challenge which Christ threw out in the early part of His ministry still stands unanswered in its holy defiance, "Which of you convinces Me of sin?" (John 8:46). No deceit will ever be found in His mouth. There is no rock like our Rock, even enemies, like Pilate, themselves being witnesses. Infidels in every age have been compelled to make the same confession. Christ could not be an acceptable sacrifice for our sins if there had been any blemish in Him.

IV. Pilate's Evasion. "He sent Him to Herod" (vv. 5-12). He would have been glad if Herod could relieve him from giving a final decision on Jesus Christ; but no man was able to save him from this; so the Lord was brought back to him gorgeously robed in mockery! No more can we evade this great question: "What shall I do with Jesus?" He still stands before us as the "despised and rejected," waiting the decision of our hearts. No one can make this decision for us.

V. Pilate's Proposal. "I will chastise Him and release Him" (vv. 12-17). What a cowardly suggestion! He will chastise Him, as if He were guilty, to please the people, and release Him to accommodate his own conscience. Surely such conduct betrays "the contradiction of sinners!" Pilate was willing to substitute Jesus for Barabbas, but they would not have this; neither will they have it yet, for the world "loves its own." "You cannot serve God and Mammon" (Luke 16:13).

VI. Pilate's Decision. "He gave sentence that it should be as they required: and delivered Jesus to their will" (vv. 23-25). They willed His death, although "God wills not the death of any." It were better for Pilate and for us that we had never been born than give such a sentence as this. Has not God, through the offer of His Gospel, delivered up Jesus to your will? What is your sentence? Is it that you will reject Him or receive Him? (John 1:12).

CALVARY. Luke 23:24-48.

"From pain to pain, from woe to woe,
With loving hearts and footsteps slow,
To Calvary with Christ we go.
Was ever grief like His? Was ever sin like ours?"—Faber.

Who would not rather be Simon the Cyrenian, who was compelled to bear the Cross of Jesus, than the purple-robed Pilate, who, through fear, was compelled to deliver Jesus up to the will of the people? (vv. 24-26). But apart from Pilate's dastardly weakness, God has delivered up His Son to the will of the people. And every time we hear the Gospel of Christ we are in our hearts honoring Him or dishonoring Him (John 1:12). The deep and solemn thoughts of this portion may be easily focused at "the place which is called Calvary" (v. 33). It was a—

I. Place of Guilt. "There were two malefactors with Him" (v. 32). Christ was crucified between the thieves, as if He were the greater criminal. The passer-by counted the malefactors as one, two, three. Truly He was "numbered with the transgressors." Yes; He bare the sins of many.

II. Place of Compassion. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (v. 34). What a prayer from a thorn-crowned sufferer! What a revelation of the love and mercy of God, welling up through the breaking heart of Christ, His Son, from the proud, guilty sons of men! He loved His enemies, and blessed them that cursed Him (Acts 7:59).

III. Place of Derision. "The rulers derided Him,.... the soldiers mocked Him" (vv. 35-37). The fact that he did "save others" did not in any way lessen their enmity or modify their wrath, but rather intensified their diabolical rage. He could not "save Himself" because He came for the very purpose of giving Himself a ransom for many.

IV. Place of Testimony. "In Greek, Latin, and Hebrew" (v. 38) these words were written over Him, This is the King of the Jews. Although written and read in mockery and disdain, these words were absolutely true; although attributed to the irony of Pilate, they were in very truth the testimony of the Spirit of God. They had crucified their King, their Messiah, the Son of the Highest. Calvary reveals the natural enmity of the human heart against the image of God.

V. Place of Salvation. "Today shall you be with Me in paradise" (vv. 40-43). This penitent thief was the first to enter paradise through the blood of the Lamb. The sum of Christ's redemption work is found in these two little words, "with Me." This dying malefactor was reconciled to God through the death of His Son. Those who are with Him now in Spirit and in life will be with Him hereafter in transforming power (1 John 3:2).

VI. Place of Miracle. "The sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst" (vv. 44, 45). The rending of the veil and the obscuring of the sun were outstanding symbols of the goodness and the severity of God as embodied in the Cross of Christ. The darkness declares His severity against sin, the torn veil indicates a God-made way, through the sufferings of Christ, into His own presence (Hebrews 10:20).

VII. Place of Death. "He gave up the Spirit" (v. 46). He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. A death that has brought life and immortality to light; that has made peace with God, and that still makes sinful men "smite their breasts" in the beholding of it (v. 48); a death that puts our sins away, and is the death of death.

"Calvary! O Calvary! All Your agony for me!"

RESURRECTION WONDERS. Luke 24:1-27.

The soldiers made His grave with the graves of the wicked who were crucified with Him, but He was "with the rich in His death," that the Scripture might be fulfilled (Isaiah 53:9), for Joseph, a rich counselor, begged the body, and buried it in his own new tomb. Christ offered Himself a sacrifice unto God, so His body was precious to Him, and like the ashes of the burnt-offering of old, must be "carried forth into a clean place" (Leviticus 6:11). It is said that there are seven wonders in the world, but we have seven wonders in this chapter. A—

I. Wonderful Stone. "They found the stone rolled away" (v. 2). This stone, which was sealed with Pilate's seal, and had Roman soldiers set apart to watch it, yet it is rolled away (Matthew 27:27-66). The great block-stones rolled in the way of Christ and His cause by the enemies of God are easily removed when the hands of the "Angel of the Lord" are laid upon them (Matthew 28:2).

Who shall be able to stand when He appears?

II. Wonderful Grave. "They found not the body of the Lord Jesus" (v. 3). Here Jesus was buried; now the tomb is empty. There lies the linen that wrapped Him, in the same place and in the same form as when the body was within it; but He is gone. It was quite clear from the position of the clothes that no one had stolen Him away. "O grave, where is your victory?"

III. Wonderful Vision. "Behold two men stood by them in shining garments" (v. 4). In following Jesus into the tomb, they were privileged to see the glorified ones. Every place, even the dark and lonesome grave, is hallowed and illumined when Jesus has been there. The glory of the resurrection life is first seen in the grave of Jesus. To be buried with Christ is to be raised with Him in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

IV. Wonderful Message. "He is not here; He is risen" (vv. 5-8). "He is not here"—all the powers of earth and Hell have failed to keep Him. "He is risen"—all the authority of Heaven has been given Him. These angels remembered the words that Jesus had spoken, while the disciples had forgotten them (v. 6). It is easy to forget what we do not believe.

V. Wonderful Incredulity. "They believed them not" (vv. 10, 11). The Lord Jesus Himself had told them that He would be raised again on the third day (Matthew 17:23). Now the two women declare to them that the grave was empty, yet they "believed not." The truth about the resurrection of Christ is soul-resurrecting truth; men are always slow to believe it.

VI. Wonderful Conversation. "They talked together" (vv. 13-17). As they "communed, Jesus Himself drew near," for the Lord delights to hearken and hear when they that fear the Lord speak one to another (Malachi 3:16). No scientists were ever more interested in any discovery than these two men were in the report that "Jesus is risen." How could it be otherwise, when, so to speak, the whole of their capital for time and eternity was sunk in this business.

VII. Wonderful Stranger. "Are You only a Stranger?" (vv. 15-27). "Only a Stranger!" How suggestive these words must have been to Him who had been "wounded in the house of His friends," but how comforting to hear Himself spoken of as "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." Yet this "Stranger" rebuked them for their foolishness in not believing "all that the prophets had spoken;" and beginning at Moses—where the "higher critics" make shipwreck—He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. He who was the Truth could never sanction a falsehood. He delights to reveal Himself to the seeking ones. "Seek, and you shall find."