

F.B. Hole

**Comments on
the Gospel of Matthew**

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By F.B. Hole

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Chapter 1

THE WORDING OF the first verse of the New Testament directs our thoughts back to the first book of the Old, inasmuch as "generation" is the translation of the Greek word, genesis. Matthew in particular, and the whole New Testament in general, is "The book of the genesis of Jesus Christ." When we refer back to Genesis, we find that book divides into eleven sections, and all of them save the first begin with a statement about "generations." The third section commences, "This is the book of the generations of Adam" (Matt. 5:1); and the whole Old Testament unrolls for us the sad story of Adam and his race, ending with terrible appropriateness in the word, "curse." With what great relief we can turn from the generations of Adam to "the generation of Jesus Christ," for here we shall find the introduction of grace; and upon that note the New Testament ends.

Jesus is at once presented in a two-fold way. He is Son of David, and hence the royal crown that God originally bestowed on David belongs to Him. He is also Son of Abraham, hence He has the title to the land and all the promised blessing is vested in Him. Having stated this, we are given His genealogy, from Abraham, through Joseph the husband of Mary. This

would be His official genealogy, according to Jewish reckoning. The list given is remarkable for its omissions, since three kings, closely connected with the infamous Athaliah, are omitted in verse 8; and the summary as to the "fourteen generations," given in verse 17, shows that it is not an accidental omission, but that God disowns and refuses to reckon the kings that sprang more immediately from this devotee of Baal-worship.

It is remarkable also, inasmuch as the names of only four women are brought into it, and those not all such names as we might have expected. Two of the four were Gentiles, which must have been somewhat damaging to Jewish pride: both of them women of striking faith, though one of them had lived in the immorality which characterized the heathen world. Of the other we know nothing but what is good. The other two came of the stock of Israel, yet of both the record is bad, and of neither do we know anything which is definitely creditable. Indeed Bathsheba's name is not mentioned; she is merely "her ... of Urias," thus proclaiming her discredit. So again all is damaging to Jewish pride. Our Lord's genealogy added nothing to

Him. Yet it guaranteed His genuine Manhood, and that the rights vested in David and Abraham were legally His.

But if the first 17 verses assure us that Jesus was really a man, the remaining verses equally assure us that He was much more than a Man, even God Himself, present among us. By an angelic messenger Joseph, the betrothed husband of Mary is told that her coming child is the fruit of the action of the Holy Ghost, and that when born He is to bear the name of Jesus. He should save His people from their sins, therefore Saviour is to be His name. Only God is able to name in view of future accomplishments. He can do so, and how fully has this great name been justified! What a harvest of saved humanity will be garnered in days to come, all of them saved from their sins, and not merely from the judgment which their sins deserved! Only "His people" are saved thus. To know His salvation one must be enrolled amongst them by faith in Him.

Thus was fulfilled the prediction of Isaiah 7:14, where a clear indication had been given of the greatness and power of the coming Saviour. His prophetic Name, Emmanuel, indicated that He should be God manifested in the flesh — God amongst us in a far more wonderful way than ever He was manifested in

the midst of Israel in the days of Moses, far more wonderful also than the way in which He was with Adam in the days before sin entered into the world. The two names are intimately connected. To have God with us, apart from our being saved from our sins, would be impossible: His presence would only overwhelm us in judgment. To be saved from our sins, without God being brought to us might have been possible, but the story of grace would have lost its chief glory. In the coming of Jesus we have both. God has been brought to us and our sins being removed, we have been brought to Him.

Chapter 2

THE OPENING VERSES of chapter 2 throw a strong and searching light upon the conditions that prevailed in those days amongst the Jews found in Jerusalem, the descendants of those who had returned under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. The King of the Jews was born in Bethlehem and yet for weeks they knew nothing about it. That Herod the king should be in ignorance was not at all surprising, for he was no Israelite but an Idumean. But of all people the chief priests should have been apprized of this great event for which they had been professedly waiting — the birth of the Messiah. We find in Luke 2

that the event was made known from heaven, within a few hours at the most, to humble souls who feared the Lord. The Psalmist has told us that, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him" (Ps. 25:14), and this is exemplified in the shepherds and others; but the religious leaders in Jerusalem were not among these, but among "the proud" whom men called "happy." (See Malachi 3:15-16). Consequently they were as much in the dark as the wicked Herod.

But there is worse than this. It is not surprising, again we say, that Herod should be troubled when he heard the news, for here was apparently a rival claimant for his throne. We read however that "he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." So the advent of the Saviour produced not jubilation but consternation amongst the very people who professed to be waiting for Him! Evidently then something was terribly wrong, since it was as yet just the recoil of their perverted instincts. They had not seen Him; He had as yet done nothing: they just sensed that His advent would mean the spoiling of their pleasures instead of the fulfilment of their hopes.

Yet these men were well versed in their Scriptures. They were able to give a prompt and correct reply to Herod's enquiry,

quoting Micah 5:2. They had the knowledge that puffs up, and so they knew nothing as they ought to know it (see 1 Cor. 8:1-2), and they placed their knowledge at the service of the adversary. The "great red dragon" (Rev. 12:3-5) of the Roman Empire, the power of which was vested locally in Herod, was ready to devour the "Man Child," and they were ready to help him to do so. Theirs was the wrong kind of Scripture knowledge, and they serve as a beacon of warning for us.

The scripture they quoted presents the Lord to us as "Governor," who should rule. In Micah only Israel is in view, but we know that His rule will be universal; and this is the third way in which He is presented to us. In JESUS we see God come forth to save. In EMMANUEL we see God come forth to dwell. In GOVERNOR we see God come forth to rule. It was ever His thought to dwell with men, governing everything according to His pleasure, and to accomplish that He had to come forth to save.

When the Young Child was found in Bethlehem there was the pledge that all three things would come to pass, and though Jerusalem was ignorant and hostile there were Gentiles from the east drawn to His rising, and they recognized the King of the

Jews in Him. Do we realize how terribly they condemned the religious leaders in Jerusalem? The shepherds of Luke 2 knew of His birth within a few hours; these eastern astronomers within a few days, or weeks at the most; whereas several months must have elapsed before the priests and scribes had the smallest inkling of what had come to pass. First by a star and then by a dream God spoke to the wise men, but to the religionists in Jerusalem He did not speak at all, and there had been days when the high priest in their midst had been in touch with God by means of the Urim and Thummin. Now God was silent to them. Their state was as is portrayed in Malachi, and probably worse.

In Herod we see unscrupulous power allied with craft. When thwarted by the action of the wise men, he took, as he thought, no chances in his murderous onslaught on the children of Bethlehem. The fact that he fixed the limit of exemption at two years would indicate that the period between the appearing of the star and the arrival of the wise men at Jerusalem must have run into months. His ruthless and wicked action brought about a fulfilment of Jeremiah 31:15. If that verse be read with its context it will be seen that its final and complete fulfilment will

be in the last days, when God will finally cause Rachel's weeping to cease by bringing her children back from the land of the enemy. Nevertheless what took place at Bethlehem was the same kind of thing on a smaller scale.

Herod however was fighting against God, who defeated his purpose by sending His angel to Joseph in a dream for the second time. The Young Child was taken into Egypt, and thus Hosea 11:1 found a remarkable fulfilment, and Jesus began to retrace Israel's history. How easily did God frustrate Herod's wicked design, and just as easily not long after did He deal with Herod himself. Matthew does not waste words in describing his end: he simply tells us that "when Herod was dead," for the third time the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream, instructing him to return to the land for death had removed the would-be murderer.

Joseph's first intention evidently was to return to Judaea; but tidings as to Archelaus succeeding his father having reached him, fear made him hesitate. Then for the fourth time God instructed him by a dream. Thus he, Mary and the Young Child were shepherded back to Nazareth, whence he had originally come, as Luke tells us. It is instructive to see how God guided

all these early movements; partly by circumstances, such as the decree of Augustus and the tidings about Archelaus; and partly by dreams. Thus the schemes of the adversary were foiled. The "porter" held open the door into the "sheepfold" in order that the true Shepherd might enter, in spite of all that he could do. Also the scriptures were fulfilled: not only was Jesus brought out of Egypt but He became known as the Nazarene.

No Old Testament prophet predicted that He should be "a Nazarene," in so many words, but more than one said that He would be despised and an object of reproach. So in verse 23 it is "the prophets," and not one particular prophet. They had said He should be an object of contempt, which in our Lord's time was expressed in the epithet, "a Nazarene." In Darby's New Translation — large edition with full notes — there is an illuminating comment on this verse, as to the exact phrase used regarding the fulfilment, as contrasted with the earlier expression in Matt. 1:22, and Matt. 2:17; showing the accuracy with which quotations from the Old Testament are made. It is a note well worth reading.

Nazarene is the fourth name given to our Lord in this opening Gospel. He is, as we have seen, Jesus, Emmanuel, Governor;

but He is also the Nazarene. God may come amongst men to save, to dwell, to rule; but alas! He will be "despised and rejected of men."

Chapter 3

THE THIRD CHAPTER presents John the Baptist without any preliminaries as to his birth or origin. He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy; he preached in the wilderness apart from the haunts of men; in clothing and food he was apart from the customs of men; his theme was repentance, in view of the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. It was a very unique ministry. What other preacher has selected a wilderness as the geographical sphere of his ministry? Philip the evangelist went indeed to the southern desert to meet a special individual; but the power of God was so with John that the multitudes flocked to him, and were led to his baptism, confessing their sins.

In this Gospel there is frequent mention of "the kingdom of heaven," and for the first instance is here. No explanation is offered by Matthew, nor does he record any explanation as offered by John; the reason being doubtless that the coming of a day when "the God of heaven" should set up a kingdom, and

all should see that "the heavens do rule," had been predicted in the book of Daniel. Consequently the term would not be unfamiliar to his hearers or to any Jewish reader. The same prophet had a vision of the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven and taking the kingdom, and the saints possessing it with Him. Now the kingdom was at hand inasmuch as "Jesus Christ, the Son of David", was found amongst men.

When there is a genuine and powerful work of God, men do not like to be apart from it, especially if they are religious leaders: consequently we find both Pharisees and Sadducees coming to John's baptism. He met them however with prophetic insight. He unmasked them as having the characteristics of the serpent, and warned them that wrath lay before them. He knew that they would boast of being in the proper Abrahamic succession, so he knocked that prop from beneath them, showing that it would not count with God. Nothing would do but repentance, and his baptism was with a view to that; but it must be genuine and manifest itself in fruits that were suitable. James, in his Epistle, insists that faith, if it is real and vital, must express itself in suitable works. Here John calls for just the same thing in regard to repentance.

These verses in the middle of Matt. 3, give us a glimpse of what was wrong. The true Son of David and of Abraham having arrived, the kingdom was near, and no mere successional connection with Abraham would avail. Moses had given them the law: Elijah had recalled them to it, after it had been forsaken: John simply issued a blunt call to repentance, which was tantamount to saying, "On the basis of the law you are lost, and nothing remains but for you honestly to own it with humble sorrow of heart." The great mass of them were not prepared for that, to their ruin.

John also announced the coming forth of the Mighty One, whose forerunner he was. There was no comparison between them, and he confessed his sense of it by saying he was not fit to carry even the sandals of His feet. He also contrasted his own baptism with water and the baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire. The great Coming One should exercise perfect discrimination, sifting the wheat from the chaff. These He will baptize with the Holy Ghost, and those with the fire of judgment; and the issues will be eternal for the fire will be unquenchable.

These words of John must have been tremendously searching, and they will be fulfilled when the millennial age is about to be introduced. Then the Spirit will be poured upon all flesh, and not the Jew only — that is, upon all that have been redeemed. On the other hand the wicked will be banished to everlasting fire, as the end of Matt. 25 of our Gospel will show us. Meanwhile there has been an anticipatory fulfilment of the baptism of the Spirit, in the establishment of the church, as Acts 2 shows. The context here decisively reveals that "fire" is an allusion to judgment, and not to the tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost, or any similar action of blessing.

When Jesus came forth for His ministry, His first act was to come to John's baptism, and that in spite of the objection which John expressed. The objection served to bring out the principle on which the Lord was acting. He was fulfilling righteousness. He had no sins to confess, yet having taken man's place it was right that He should identify Himself with the godly, who were thus taking their true place before God. Men of God in earlier times had done the thing in principle — Ezra and Daniel, for instance — confessing as their own sins in which they had but very little share, though sinners themselves. Here was the sin-

less One, and He did it perfectly; and lest there should be any mistake, at the very moment He did it, there was the opening of the heavens upon Him, the first great manifestation of the Trinity, and the voice from heaven declaring Him to be the beloved Son, in whom the Father found all His delight. In form as a dove the Spirit descended upon the One who is to baptize others with that same Spirit.

Chapter 4

JESUS WAS NOT only taking man's place, He was more particularly taking Israel's place. Israel was called out of Egypt, then they were baptized to Moses in the cloud and sea, then they entered the wilderness. We have just seen Jesus called as God's Son out of Egypt, and now He is baptized; then as we open chapter 4 we find the Spirit, who had come upon Him, leads Him straight into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Here we find a contrast, for in the wilderness Israel tempted God and failed in everything. Jesus was Himself tempted and triumphed in everything.

Yet the temptations, wherewith the devil assailed Him, were similar to Israel's testings in the wilderness, for there is nothing

new in the tactics of the adversary. Israel was tested by hunger, and by being lifted up in connection with the things of God — seen more particularly in connection with Korah, Dathan and Abiram — and by attractions that might lead them to worship and serve another beside Jehovah, and they fell, worshipping the golden calf. Jesus met each temptation with the Word of God. On each occasion He quoted from a small section of the book of Deuteronomy, wherein Israel is reminded of their responsibilities. In those responsibilities they failed, and Jesus fulfilled them perfectly in every particular.

The devil always sows doubts of the Divine Word. Contrast Matt. 3:17 with Matt. 4:3 and 6, and note how strikingly this comes out. No sooner has God said, "This is My beloved Son," than the devil says twice over, "If Thou be the Son of God." The little word "if" is a great favourite with the devil! Jesus appropriately met him with the Word of God. That Word is indispensable to Man's spiritual life just as bread is to his natural life. And man needs every word that God has spoken, and not just a few special passages only.

Are we all finding our spiritual life in "every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God"?

The temptation of Jesus by the devil makes it plain beyond all dispute that a personal devil exists. From the days of Genesis 3, he had been accustomed to seduce men by appealing to their lusts and pride. In Jesus he met One who had neither lust nor pride, and who met his every onslaught by the Word of God; defeated consequently, he had to leave Him. His conqueror was a true Man, who had fasted forty days and forty nights, and to Him angels ministered. They had never before served their God after this wonderful sort.

The casting of John into prison, as verse 12 shows us, was the event which led the Lord to enter fully upon His public ministry. Leaving Nazareth, He took up His abode in Capernaum, and Isaiah's prophecy found its fulfilment, at all events as regards His first advent. If we turn up the passage (Isa. 9:1-7) and read it, we shall notice that both advents are in view, as is so often the case. His coming shone like a star before the prophets, but they did not as yet know that it was a double star. Galilee will yet see the great light of His glory, just as then they saw the great light of His grace. The forerunner having been silenced by imprisonment, Jesus took up and enforced His message of repentance in view of the kingdom being at hand.

John's Gospel shows us that the Lord was active in service before this time. He had disciples, and He visited Judaea when "John was not yet cast into prison" (Matt. 3:24).

This being so, the calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John was not the beginning of their acquaintance with Him. That came earlier, and is recorded in John 1. Evidently also there were times when they or other disciples went about with Him before they were definitely called to leave their secular occupations and give all their time to Him. Following Him, He would make these fishermen to be fishers of men. By diligence and study men may make themselves into good preachers, but fishers of men are only made by Him. He was supreme at this Himself, and walking in His company they would learn of Him and catch His spirit.

In the three verses which close chapter 4, Matthew sums up the early days of His ministry. His message was "the gospel of the kingdom." It must be distinguished from "the gospel of the grace of God," which is being preached today. This has the death and resurrection of Christ as its great theme, and announces forgiveness as the fruit of the expiation He made. That was the glad tidings that the kingdom predicted by the prophets

was now brought to them in Him. If they would submit to the divine authority that was vested in Him, the power of the kingdom would be active on their behalf. As proof of this He showed the power of the kingdom in the healing of men's bodies. All manner of bodily sickness and disease was removed, the pledge that He could heal every spiritual ill. This display of the power of the kingdom, coupled with the preaching of the kingdom, proved very attractive, and great crowds followed Him.

Chapter 5

THE LORD THEN began to speak to His disciples, though in the presence of the multitude, instructing them in the principles of the kingdom. First of all He showed what kind of people are going to possess the kingdom and enjoy its benefits. In the kingdoms of men today a man needs plenty of self-confidence and 'pushyness' if he is to be a success, but the opposite holds good for the kingdom of heaven. This had been already indicated in the Old Testament: Psalm 37, for instance, especially verse 11, plainly states it; yet the Lord here gives us a much enlarged view of this fact. He really sketches for us a moral picture of the godly remnant who will finally enter the kingdom.

Eight things does He mention, beginning with poverty of spirit and ending with persecution, and there is a sequence in their order. Repentance produces poverty of spirit, and there all must start. Then comes the mourning and the meekness induced by a true sight of oneself, followed by a thirst for the righteousness which is only found in God. Then, filled with that, the saint comes out in God's own character — mercy, purity, peace. But the world does not want God or His character, hence persecution closes the list.

The blessing, contemplated in verses 3-10, is to be fully realized in the kingdom of heaven, when it is established on earth. In each beatitude save the last the godly are described in an impersonal way: in verses 11 and 12 the Lord speaks personally to His disciples. The "they" of verse 10 changes to the "ye" of verse 11; and now, speaking to His disciples, reward in heaven is promised. He knew that these disciples of His were to pass on into a new and heavenly order of things, and so while reaffirming old things in a clearer light, He began to intimate some of the new things that were soon to come. The change in these two verses is striking and helps to show the character of the "Sermon on the Mount," in which the Lord summarized His

teaching, and related it to the old things given through Moses. In John 13-16, which we may call "The Sermon in the Upper Room," we find Him expanding His teaching and relating it to the full light He would give when the Holy Ghost was come.

In persecution for His sake His disciples were to be blessed, and they were to recognize this and rejoice. Naturally we shrink from persecution but history proves the truth of these words. Those who are identified with Christ fully and boldly have to suffer, but they are sustained and recompensed; whereas those, who try to avoid it by compromise, miss all the recompense, and are miserable. And further, it is when the disciple is persecuted by the world that most definitely he is "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world." Salt preserves, and light illuminates. We cannot be like healthful salt in the earth if we are of the earth. We cannot be as a light lifted up in the world if we are of the world. Now nothing more helps to keep us distinct and separate from the earth and world than persecution from the world, no matter what form it takes. Persecuted for Christ's sake, the disciple is real salty salt, and he also emits a maximum of light. Does not this word of our Lord reveal to us the secret of much of our feebleness?

Notice too that the light is supposed to shine in things practical, not merely in things theological. It is not that men recognize it in our clear or original teachings expressed in words, but rather in our acts and works. They should certainly hear our good words, but they must see our good works, if we are to be light to them. The word for "good" here does not mean exactly benevolent but rather upright or honest. Such actions find their source in the Father in heaven: they shed His light and glorify Him.

From verse 17 to the end of Matt. 5 we find the Lord giving the connection between what He taught and that which had been given through Moses. He had not come to annul or destroy what had previously been given but rather to give the fulness of it — for such is the meaning here of the word, "fulfil." He corroborated and enforced all that had been said, as verses 18 and 19 show, and not one word that God had spoken was to be broken. And moreover as verse 20 shows, He insisted that the righteousness which the law demanded had in it a fulness which far exceeds anything known or recognized by the superficial scribes and Pharisees of His day. They rendered a technical obedience in ceremonial matters and ignored the real

spirit of the law and the object which God had in view. Their righteousness did not lead to the kingdom.

Consequently He proceeded to show that there was a fulness of meaning in the law's demands that men had not suspected, referring to no less than six points as illustrating His theme. He spoke of the sixth and seventh commandments; then of the law as to divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1, then as to oaths in Leviticus 19:12; then of the law of retribution as given in Exodus 21:24 and elsewhere; and lastly of such a sanctioning of hatred towards enemies as is found in Deuteronomy 23:6.

As to the two commandments He quoted, His teaching evidently is that God has respect not only to the overt act but also to the inward disposition of the heart. What is prohibited is not merely the act of murder or adultery but the hatred and the lust of which the act is the expression. Judged by this standard, who is going to stand before the holy demands of Sinai? The "righteousness" of the scribe and Pharisee utterly collapses. Yet in both cases, having exposed this fact, He added some further instruction.

In verses 23-26, He showed two things of importance: first, no offering is acceptable to God if it be presented while there is unrighteousness manward. We cannot condone wrong towards man by professed piety towards God. Only when reconciliation has been effected can God be approached. Then, second, if the matter which causes estrangement is carried to law, the law must take its course apart from mercy. The Lord's words here doubtless have prophetic significance. The Jewish nation was about to prosecute their case against Him, turning Him into their "adverse party," and it will issue in their condemnation. They have not even yet paid the uttermost farthing.

So with the next instance: here He shows us that any sacrifice is worthwhile, if it but leads to a deliverance from the hell that lies at the end.

In the third and fourth cases (31-37) He again shows us that what was ordained through Moses did not express the full mind of God. Both divorce and swearing were permitted, and thus the standard that men had to attain was not made too severe. Both matters are here set in a fuller light, and we see that only one thing is to be permitted to dissolve the marriage bond; and then that men's word should be so unequivocal and binding,

that taking strong oaths, by this or that, is not needed. The man, who backs nearly every assertion by an oath, is a man whose simple word is not to be trusted.

Then again the law stipulated retribution of a very even kind for injury inflicted. It enjoined what we should call "tit for tat"; as also, while calling for love to one's neighbour, it permitted the hatred of an enemy. This the Lord reversed. He inculcated forbearance and the grace that gives, rather than the insistence upon one's rights; and also the love that will bless and do good to the enemy. And all this in order that His disciples may be quite distinct from the sinners of the world, and come out in the character of God Himself.

God is presented to them not as Jehovah, the Lawgiver, but as "your Father which is in heaven." That is to say, He is now presented in a new light. It is this that governs the teachings of the Lord here, for if we know Him in this new way, we discover Him to be marked by benevolence towards the unjust and the evil, and we are to be in our measure what He is. In the ministry of Jesus a new revelation of God was dawning, and it entailed a new standard of perfection. We are to come out prac-

tically as sons of our Father in heaven, for the perfection of a son is to be as the Father.

Eight times over does He say in this chapter, "I say to you," and on six of these occasions the words are preceded by the word, "But," throwing His statement into contrast with what the law had previously said. We may well ask, "Who is this that quotes the holy law of God, and then calmly says, "But I say to you" — so and so? He actually alters and enlarges the law, a thing that no prophet had ever dared to do! Does this not amount to terrible presumption, bordering on blasphemy?" Yes, indeed, and only one explanation will lift this charge from off Him. But that one explanation is true: here we have the original Lawgiver, who once spoke from Sinai. Now He has come forth in Manhood as Emmanuel. Emmanuel has gone up another mountain, and now speaks not to a nation but to His disciples. He has every right to enlarge or amend His own law.

Chapter 6

HAVING INTRODUCED His disciples to God in this new light at the end of Matt. 5, we notice that all the teaching in Matt. 6 is in reference to it. The expression "your Father," in

slightly varying terms, occurs no less than twelve times. The teaching falls into four sections: almsgiving (1-4), prayer (5-15), fasting (16-18), earthly possessions and the necessary things of life (19-34). All four things touched the practical life of the Jew at many points, and their tendency and habit was to take up the first three in a technical, perfunctory way, and to lay all the stress and pay all the attention to item number four. The Lord Jesus sets them all in the light which His earlier words had shed. In chapter 5. He had shown them a God who deals with the inward motions of the heart as much as with outward actions, and yet that God is to be known as a heavenly Father. Still we notice how He repeats, "I say to you." He does not teach as did the scribes, basing their assertions on the traditions of the ancients, but we have to take what He says, just because He says it.

If tradition rules us, we may easily get into just the position in which the Jews were found in regard to their alms-givings, their prayers and their fastings. To them it had all become a matter of outward observance, as meeting the eyes and ears of men. If we, on the other hand, lift our thoughts to the Father in heaven, who has an intimate concern as to us, all must become

real and vital, and be done for His ear and eye. Three times over the Lord says of the mere formalist, "They have their reward." Their reward is the approbation and praise of their fellows. This they have; it is all in the present, and there is nothing more to come. He, who gives or prays or fasts unknown to men but known to God, will be rewarded openly in the day to come.

As to prayer, He teaches not only secrecy but brevity, which lies at the heart of reality. A man, who asks with intense reality and earnestness, inevitably goes straight to the point with the fewest words. He cannot possibly wander in a maze of circumlocutions. Verses 9-13 give us the model prayer, exactly suitable to the disciples in their then circumstances. There are six petitions. The first three have to do with God; His name, His kingdom, His will. The second three have to do with us; our bread, our debts, our deliverance. The heavenly Father and His claims must be first, and our needs second. The blessing of men on earth depends upon His will being done on earth, and that will only come to pass when His kingdom is established.

The forgiveness spoken of in verses 14 and 15 is connected with the debts of verse 12. In the heavenly Father's holy gov-

ernment of His children the unforgiving spirit comes under His chastisement. If someone commits an offence against us and we refuse to forgive, we shall miss God's governmental forgiveness. It is not a question here of forgiveness for eternity, since those to whom the Lord was speaking were disciples, with whom that great matter was already settled.

Very searching words as to earthly possessions are next spoken. No tendency is more deep-seated with all men than that of pursuing, grasping at, and laying up treasures upon earth, though they waste under the action of natural forces as well as the action of violent men. If we really know the Father in heaven, we shall find our treasure in heaven, and there our heart will be; and we have only to have the single eye to see this, and to see all else clearly. Then too our bodies become full of light: that is, we become luminous ourselves. We shall either be dominated by God or by mammon, for we cannot serve two masters. God and mammon are too utterly opposed for that.

Serving God, who is indeed a heavenly Father, we come under His watchful and kindly care. He knows all our needs and concerns Himself about them. We are impotent; unable to add a cubit to our height, or to array ourselves like the grass of the

field. Our Father has infinite wisdom and power, and cares for the humblest creatures of His hand: we may have absolute confidence therefore in His loving care for us. Hence we are to be free from all anxious care. The men of the world are grasping at the treasure of this world which wastes so quickly, and they are full of care as to its preservation and use. We are to be resting in our Father's care and love, and therefore free of anxiety.

Now this is mainly negative. We are to be free of the anxious care which fills so many hearts; but this is in order that we may be free to seek the kingdom of God, and to seek it first. Instead of peering into tomorrow with apprehension, we are to be filling up today with the things of the kingdom and that kingdom leads us in the ways of righteousness.

This was God's pleasure for the disciples who followed our Lord during His days upon earth: it is no less His pleasure for us who follow Him now that His work is fully accomplished and He is gone into the heavens. The spirit He thus inculcated was quite foreign to the religion of the Pharisee of His day, as also it is foreign to outward and worldly religion today.

Chapter 7

THE LORD'S TEACHINGS, recorded in Matt. 6, were designed to lead His disciples into such relations with their Father in heaven, that He would fill their thoughts, whether in regard to their almsgiving, their prayers, their fastings, or their attitude to the possessions and needs of this life. Matt. 7 opens with teachings that would regulate their dealings with their brethren, and even with the ungodly.

The judging of one's brother is a very deep-seated tendency in our heart. The judging of things, or of teaching, is not forbidden, but encouraged — as we see, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 2:15; 10:15 — but the judging of persons is forbidden. The church is called upon to judge those who are of it, in certain cases, as 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 show, but, apart from this, the judging of persons is a prerogative of the Lord. If, in spite of the Lord's forbidding, we indulge in it, two penalties are sure to follow, as He indicates here. First, we ourselves shall come under judgment, and have measured to us just what we have meted to others. Second, we shall drift into hypocrisy. Directly we start judging others we become blind to our own defects. The small defect in our brother becomes magnified to us, all

unconscious that we have a big defect of a nature to impair our spiritual eyesight. The most profitable form of judgment for each of us is self-judgment.

Verse 6 has in view the ungodly, insensible of good and unclean in their tastes. Things that are holy and precious are not for them; and if foolishly we present them to them, they are despised and we may suffer their violence. It is right that we should be givers of God's holy things; but not to such.

But if we are to be givers, we must first receive, and of this verses 7-11 speak. To receive we must draw near to God — asking, seeking, knocking. A response from our Father is certain. If we ask for necessary things we shall get them, for He will not give us instead something worthless like a stone, or injurious like a serpent. We may rest assured that He will give us "good things," for His Fatherhood is of heaven. His standard therefore will not fall below that of earthly fatherhood. We may apply Isaiah 55:9 to this, and say that as the heavens are higher than the earth so are His Fatherly thoughts higher than our thoughts. We of necessity cannot come up to His standard. Hence in verse 12 the Lord did not then demand of His disciples a standard above that set by the law and the prophets.

In verses 13 and 14 the Lord evidently looked beyond His disciples to the crowd. Before them there were the alternatives of the broad way and the narrow way, of destruction and life. We cannot say that the grace of God is narrow, for it has come forth for all men; it is the way of self-judgment and repentance which is so narrow. Few find that way, and but few proclaim it. The majority of the preachers prefer to prophesy smoother things.

The warning against false prophets follows. They are to be known not by their fine words but by their fruits. Fruit is the result and crowning expression of life, and it reveals the character of the life that it consummates. The false prophet has a false life, which must reveal itself in false fruit.

But there are not only false prophets but false disciples — those who loudly profess allegiance to the Lord, but the vital link of faith is lacking. Vital faith, as the Apostle James tells us, must express itself in works. Everyone, who really comes under the lordship of Christ in faith, must of necessity be set to do the will of the Father in heaven, whom He presented. Judas Iscariot furnishes us with a terrible example of verses 22 and 23. Evidently he performed works of power along with the

other disciples, but it was proved at last that no link of real faith ever existed and he was but a worker of iniquity.

And therefore the Lord closed His words with the parable of the two houses. Both builders, the wise and the foolish, were hearers of the words of Jesus but only one was a doer of them — and that one was the wise man. The parable does not teach salvation by works, but salvation by that living faith which leads to the works. If we cast our minds back over the Sermon on the Mount we shall realize at once that nothing but genuine faith in Him could induce anyone to do the things which He taught. We shall also realize how fully His teachings verified His own word in Matt. 5:17. He has given us the fulness of the law and the prophets, while adding fresh light as to the Father in heaven; thus preparing the way for the fuller light of grace that was to dawn as the fruit of His death and resurrection. The authority with which He announced these things was what struck the people. The scribes relied upon the earlier Rabbinic teachings, while He spoke the things that He knew from and with God.

Chapter 8

AFTER THESE THREE chapters filled with His teachings, Matthew gives us two chapters occupied with His works of power. It was not enough for Him to enunciate the principles of the kingdom, He displayed the power of the kingdom in a variety of striking ways. There are five main illustrations of that power in Matt. 8, and again in Matt. 9. In each case we may say that the miracle the Lord performed in connection with human bodies, or with visible and tangible things, was a proof of how He could deal with the deeper-seated things of the soul.

The first case is that of the leper; a picture of sin in its defiling, corrupting power. The poor man was convinced of the power of Jesus, but not fully persuaded of His grace. Yet the Lord instantly delivered him by His touch and His word of power. Only five words, "I will; be thou clean," and the thing was done; a witness to the priests — if the man did as he was told — that the power of God was present amongst them.

The second case was that of the Gentile centurion and his servant; a case illustrating the impotence which is induced by sin. Here again is emphasized the power of His word. The centurion himself emphasized it, for he knew the power of an author-

itative word as exemplified in the Roman military system. The rank of a centurion was not a high one, yet those under him at once obeyed his instructions, and his faith discovered in Jesus One whose word could accomplish the miraculous. The Lord acknowledged his faith as great, and beyond anything He had found in Israel: He spoke the needed word and the servant was healed. He also prophesied that many a Gentile from a distance would enter the kingdom with the fathers of Israel while those who had considered it theirs by prescriptive right would be cast into outer darkness.

The third case is that of Peter's mother-in-law. Here His touch instantly cured her; there is no record of His having spoken a word. It might be His touch and His word, as with the leper; or His word only, as with the centurion's servant; or His touch only: the result in each case was the same — instantaneous deliverance. There was no convalescence from the results of the fever; she at once arose and served others. Sin induces a fevered state of mind and soul, but His touch dispels it.

In verses 16 and 17 we have first, a summary of His many works of power and mercy at eventide; and second, the quotation from Isaiah 53, which reveals to us the way and spirit in

which He did these things. The words quoted have been used erroneously by some as though they meant that on the cross He bore our sicknesses, and thus the believer never ought to be ill. The right application is found here. He did not relieve men without feeling their sorrows and sicknesses. He bore in His spirit the weight of the very evils that He dismissed by His power.

The incidents recorded in verses 18-22 show us that not only our deliverance but our discipleship also must be at the call of His authoritative word. A certain scribe volunteered to follow without having received His call. The Lord at once showed him what would be involved in following such a One as Himself, for He was the homeless Son of Man. But conversely, His call is sufficient. It was one who was already a disciple who wished to put an earthly duty in the first place. The call and claim of the Master must be absolutely supreme. He had disciples who owned His claim and followed Him, as verse 23 shows, and they gave Him a place to lay His head in their ship. Yet, even so, following Him led them into trouble.

This brings us to the fourth of these striking cases — the storm on the lake; typical of how the power of the devil lashes into

fury the unrestful sea of humanity. It was all nothing to Him and He peacefully slept. But at the cry of the disciples He arose and asserted His command of these mighty forces of nature. As a man commands his hound, and the obedient dog lies down at his feet, so did wind and sea lie down at the word of their Maker.

Arrived at the other side He was confronted by two men who were dominated by demonic servants of the devil. One of these was a special stronghold held by a whole legion of demons, as Mark and Luke show us; though evidently there were two, and thus a sufficient witness was borne to His power over the enemy. The demons knew Him, and also knew that they had no power to resist His word: hence they asked permission to enter the herd of unclean swine, that would never have been there had Israel been walking according to the law. As far as the record goes, Jesus spoke but one word — "Go!" In result the men were delivered and the swine destroyed.

Thus far we have considered the power of the Lord. before leaving the chapter let us notice the response on the side of men. There is a striking contrast between the "great faith" of the centurion and the "little faith" of the disciples in the storm.

Great faith was marked by two things seen in verse 8. He said, "I am not worthy," condemning himself, and thus ruling himself out of the question. He also said, "Speak the word only," in addressing the Lord. He had no opinion of himself, but he had a great opinion of Him — so great that he was prepared to accredit His word without any support from without. Some folk want to have the word of the Lord supported by feelings, or by reason, or by experience, but great faith is produced by discovering in Jesus so great a Person that His naked word is enough.

With the disciples it was just the opposite. They were thinking altogether of themselves. It was, "Save US: WE perish." When Jesus calmed the storm they were astounded, saying, "What manner of man is this?" Yes what manner indeed? Had they really known Him, they would have been surprised if He had not asserted His power. The fact was, they had big thoughts of themselves and but little thoughts of Him; and this is little faith. So they marvelled as He acted; whereas in the case of the centurion Jesus marvelled at his faith. In spite of their little faith, however, they loved and followed Him.

At the beginning of the chapter we see defective faith on the part of the leper. He clearly saw the power of Jesus, yet hardly

apprehended His willingness. At the end of the chapter we see men with no faith at all.

It did not weigh with them that demons had been dispossessed, for a spiritual deliverance meant little to them. What mattered to them was the loss of their pigs. Jesus they did not understand, but pigs they did understand! Apt figure of men of the world who have an eye for any material gain, but no heart for Christ. They evidently got nothing, but all the others did. Do not miss the delightful fact that defective faith and little faith got the blessing just as really and fully as great faith. The blessing is not according to the quality or quantity of faith, but according to His heart of grace.

Chapter 9

THE GERGESENE PEOPLE not desiring His presence, He again crossed the sea, and was at once met by further cases of human need. In Matt. 9 we are shown how He wrought deliverance for the man sick of the palsy, the diseased woman, the daughter of Jairus, the two blind men, and the dumb man possessed with a demon — again a five-fold exhibition of the power of the kingdom that had drawn near in His presence.

In the first of these cases the Lord plainly stated the connection that existed between the miracle He wrought for the body and the corresponding spiritual blessing; the one easily seen, the other unseen. In response to the faith of the men who brought the paralytic, the Lord went straight to the root of the mischief and pronounced forgiveness of sins. When this was challenged, He proved His power to forgive by His power to transform the man's bodily condition. His critics could neither forgive the sins nor cure the palsy. He could do both. The crowd saw it and glorified God.

In verses 9-17 we get the incident concerning Matthew himself. The transaction recorded in verse 9 may almost be called a miracle by any who are aware of the binding power exerted on the human mind by money. Matthew was actually seated in his tax office, engaged in the congenial task of receiving the cash, when he heard two words from the lips of Jesus — "Follow Me." The "ME" became so great in his eyes that the money was displaced, and its charm broken — a wonderful thing indeed! He arose and followed Jesus.

It was in his house that Jesus sat at meat with publicans and sinners and His disciples; so now he was disbursing money in-

stead of receiving it. The other evangelists tell us this, though Matthew, with becoming modesty, does not mention it. The whole proceeding outraged the Pharisees, but this gave occasion for the concise statement as to His mission. The Pharisees had overlooked the word of the Lord through Hosea, that He preferred the exercise of mercy to the offering of ceremonial sacrifices — a word which many a modern Pharisee overlooks — and they were ignorant of His mission to the spiritually sick, in calling sinners to repentance. Had He come to call "the righteous," the Pharisees no doubt would have come forward in crowds; only to be rejected to a man, since "the righteous" according to the Divine standard do not exist.

The question raised by John's disciples led to a declaration which supplemented this. Having called sinners to repentance He attached them to Himself as "the children of the bridechamber," and led them into a position of liberty, as contrasted with legal observances. In the coming days of His absence there would be another kind of fasting. But there could be no real mixture between that which He newly brought and the old law system. The new wine of the kingdom must be contained in new skins. If the attempt is made to restrain the expansive

grace of the kingdom within legal forms, the result is disastrous. The grace is lost and the forms are ruined.

Even while He spake these things other incidents supervened, which in some measure serve as an illustration of His words. On His way to raise the daughter of Jairus, there intervened the aggressive faith of the diseased woman. She was one of the sick ones who needed the Physician. Her action of faith held up the programme, but what was that to the One who delights in mercy and not sacrifice? Her faith was acknowledged, and she was instantly whole. Then when the programme was resumed, and the house of Jairus reached, the prescribed, usual course of affairs was brushed aside by Jesus. The bottles of Jewish custom were quickly broken by the power of His grace. He said, "Give place," and everything had indeed to give place to the power of life which He wielded: and the dead child was restored.

The cry of the two blind men (verse 27) had in it the accents of faith. They recognized Him as the promised Son of David. He recognized their faith, and challenged it. They responded and affirmed their belief in His power. Hence, in this case, He granted their prayer, according to their faith. He knew their faith

was real; and we know it to have been so, for at once their eyes were opened. Let us each ask ourselves, if my requests are to be answered according to my faith; what shall I get?

Sin has reduced man to helplessness; it has rendered him spiritually diseased and dead and blind; but it has also rendered him dumb towards God. Bound by the devil, he cannot speak. When the man, in verse 32, was brought to Jesus the demonic power which lay at the root was dealt with. The cause being reached, the effect at once disappeared. The man spoke, and the crowd marvelled. They had never before seen or heard of such deliverances as were wrought by the power of the kingdom in grace. Only the Pharisees were insensible to this; and not only insensible but wholly evil, for unable to deny the power, they wilfully evaded its force by attributing it to the devil himself.

The chapter closes with the wonderful fact that their wicked rejection of His grace did not shut up His bowels of compassion. He went on preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and showing its power in miracles of healing in all the cities and villages; and the sight of the needy multitudes only moved Him to deep compassion — the compassion of the heart of God. The crowd

had no shepherd, and there was a great harvest yet to be reaped. He prepared to send forth labourers to the work.

Chapter 10

AT THE close of the previous chapter the Lord told His disciples to pray for the sending forth of labourers. This chapter opens with His calling the twelve and commissioning them to go forth. They themselves were to be the answer to their prayer! Not infrequently this is the case. When we pray for this or that to be done in the Lord's service, often His answer to us would be in effect, "Then you are the ones to do it." Now for any commission to be effective, there must be the people selected, the power conferred, and the right procedure indicated.

This chapter is occupied with just these three things. In verses 24, we get the names of the twelve chosen disciples; and in verse 1 we read how Jesus conferred the necessary power upon them. This power was effective in two spheres, the spiritual and the physical. Unclean spirits had to obey them, and all kinds of bodily evils disappeared at their word. From verse 5 to the end of the chapter we have the record of the instructions He gave, so that they might proceed rightly on their mission.

The first item of instruction concerned the sphere of their service — neither Gentiles nor Samaritans, but the lost sheep of Israel only. This at once reveals decisively that the gospel today does not go forth under this commission. In the service of a false theory verse 6 has been wrested into meaning that they were to go to Israelites scattered amongst the nations. The word "lost" however means spiritually lost. If Jeremiah 50 be turned to, and verses 6 and 17 consulted, it will be seen that Israel is both "lost" and "scattered." They are lost because caused to go astray by their shepherds — spiritually lost. They are scattered by the action of the kings of Assyria and Babylon — geographically scattered. This distinction in the use of the two words seems to be observed through Scripture. The disciples never went outside the land while Christ was on earth, but they did preach to the spiritually lost Jews that were around them.

In verse 7 their message is summed up in seven words. It agrees exactly with that preached by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2), and by the Lord Himself (Matt. 4:17), save that here the word, "Repent," is omitted. It was a very simple message, hardly allowing of much amplification or variety. They could not preach things not yet accomplished; but the predicted King

was present in His own land, and hence the kingdom was nigh them. That they announced It was the glad tidings of the kingdom, and they were to support what they said by showing the power of the kingdom in bringing healing and deliverance gratuitously.

Moreover they were to discard all the ordinary provision of a prudent traveller, and so be manifestly dependent upon their Master for all their needs; and in entering any place they were to seek out the "worthy," that is, those who feared the Lord, and who manifested their reception of the Master by the reception of His servants. They were to render testimony against those who did not receive Him, and who consequently refused them and their words; and the responsibility of such would be far greater than that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Next He plainly warned them that they were going to meet with opposition, rejection and persecution, and they are instructed as to their attitude in the presence of these things. This occupies verses 16-39. In going forth amongst men they would be as sheep in the midst of wolves; that is, they would be as their Master in position, and they were to be like Him also in character — wise and harmless. When accused before rulers they

were to rest in God as their Father, and not concern themselves in preparing their defence, since in the hour of their need the Spirit of their Father would speak in and through them. Martyrdom in some cases would lie before them, and in all cases they would have to face hatred of a type that would override all natural affection. For those not martyred endurance to the end would mean salvation.

What "the end" signifies is shown in the next verse (23) — the coming of the Son of man. In Matt. 24:3, 6, 13, 14, we again have the Lord speaking of "the end," with a similar significance, for there it is "the end of the age." This mission then, which the Lord was inaugurating, is to extend to His second coming, and barely be completed even then. As verse 6 had indicated, the cities of Israel were the field to be covered while they were persecuted, and their endurance would be crowned by salvation at His coming. As we look back it looks as if there has been some failure in these predictions. How can we account for it?

The explanation evidently is that this testimony to the nearness of the kingdom has been suspended and will be resumed at the time of the end. The disciples are viewed as representative

men, and what is said applied to them at that moment and will apply to others who will be in a similar position at the end of the age. The kingdom, as presented at that moment in Christ in person, was rejected, and consequently the testimony was withdrawn, as we see in Matt. 16:20. It will be resumed when the outgathering of the church is completed; and barely carried to its finish when the Son of Man comes to receive and establish the kingdom, as had been predicted in Daniel 7.

Meanwhile the disciple must expect to be treated as his Master, and yet he need have no fear. He will be denounced and maligned and even killed by men; but in verses 26-33, the Lord mentions three sources of encouragement. First, light shall shine upon everything, and all the malignings of men be dispersed. The disciple's business is to let the light shine now in his testimony. Second, there is the intimate care of God, descending to the minutes' detail. Third, there is the reward of being publicly confessed by the Lord before the Father in heaven. Nothing but faith will enable any of us to appreciate and welcome the light, to rely upon the care, and to value the praise of God more than the praise of men.

Verse 28 is worthy of special note, for it very definitely teaches that the soul is not subject to death, as is the body. God can destroy both soul and body in hell; but the word for "destroy" is different from the word for "kill," and is one meaning to cause to perish, or to ruin, and has in it no thought of annihilation. The exact words, "the immortality of the soul" do not occur in Scripture, but here are words of our Lord which assert that solemn fact. The words of verse 34 may seem at first sight to clash with such statements as we have in Luke 1:79; Luke 2:14; or Acts 10:36. But there is no real discrepancy. God approached men in Christ with a message of peace, but He was rejected. At this point in Matthew's Gospel His rejection is coming into view, and hence He declares the solemn fact that the immediate effect of His approach is going to be strife and warfare. Peace on earth will be established by Him at His second advent, and this the angels foresaw and celebrated when first He came. Peace is indeed the ultimate thing, but the cross was the immediate thing; and if He was about to take up the cross then His disciples must be prepared for a sword, and for the losing of their lives for His sake. That loss however was going to mean ultimate gain.

The closing verses show that the reception of the unpopular disciples would be in effect the reception of their unpopular Master, and even of God Himself. Any service thus rendered, even so small a thing as the giving of a cup of cold water, will not fail of a reward in the day to come.

Chapter 11

THE SENDING OUT of the twelve did not mean that the Lord suspended His personal labours, as the first verse shows; and all this activity stirred up John in his prison. We can well imagine that he expected the great Personage, whom he had announced, to do something on his behalf; yet here He was, delivering all kinds of unworthy folk from their diseases and troubles, and apparently neglecting His forerunner. Tested thus, John's faith wavered a little. The Lord's answer to John took the form of further testimony to His own gracious activities, showing that He was indeed fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1; and happy was he who was not stumbled by His humiliation and the absence of the outward glory that will characterize His second advent.

Then Jesus bore witness to John. No oscillating reed nor man of luxury was he; but more than a prophet, even the messenger predicted by Malachi, who should prepare the way of the Lord. Moreover John was the "Elijah" of the first advent, and he marked the end of an epoch. The dispensation of law and prophets ran up to him, and from his day onward the kingdom of heaven was open, if there was the "violence" or vigour of faith to gain an entrance. When the kingdom arrives visibly, there will not be the same need for such vigour of faith. All this showed how great a man John was, nevertheless the least inside the kingdom would have a position greater than this great man, who prepared the way but did not live to enter himself. John's moral greatness was unsurpassed, though many of much less moral weight would be greater as to outward position.

From speaking of John, his greatness and the position he had been given as regards his ministry, the Lord passed to deal with the indifference of the people. They had listened to the forceful preaching of John, and now had heard the Lord and seen His works of power; yet neither one nor the other had really affected them.

They were like petulant children who would not be persuaded to join in the play. There had been a note of severity in John's ministry, but they showed no sign of lamenting in repentance: Jesus had come full of grace and of the joy of deliverance, yet they manifested no real signs of gladness. Instead they discovered ways of discrediting both.

The taunt they flung at John was a bare-faced lie, whilst their cry against the Lord had in it some element of truth, for He was in the highest sense "a Friend of publicans and sinners." They meant it however in the lowest possible sense; for when an adversary throws out accusations in order to discredit, he usually finds half a truth more serviceable than a downright falsehood. So long as we walk in obedience with a good conscience, we need not fear the mud which adversaries love to sling. John, amongst the greatest of prophets, and the Son of Man Himself had to endure it. Those who were the children of wisdom were not taken in by these slanders. They justified wisdom, and thereby condemned the adversaries. The same fact was stated in other words when Jesus said, "Ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep ... My sheep hear My voice" (John 10:26-27).

At this point we find the Lord accepting the fact that the cities of Galilee, where most of His mighty works had been done, had definitely refused Him. There had been rendered to them such a testimony as Tyre and Sidon, and the land of Sodom, had never had. Now, the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility, and the severer the judgment, when the privilege is despised and the responsibility broken. A sad fate lay in store for Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. Their inhabitants at that time have to face the day of judgment, and the very cities themselves have been so obliterated, that their sites have been a matter of argument until today. They had rejected "Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1), and consequently the kingdom as vested in Him.

But at that moment of crisis Jesus reposed upon the purpose of the Father and upon the perfection of His ways — the ways by which His purpose is to be reached. The people whose indifference the Lord had been deploring were just "the wise and prudent" according to worldly standards; but then there were the "babes," and to these, not those, the Father had revealed the things of all importance at that moment. This was the way that He was pleased to take, and Jesus accepted it with thanksgiv-

ing. This ever has been God's way, and is God's way today, as we see in 1 Corinthians 1:21-31. God's purpose will not fail. The kingdom as presented in Christ was about to be rejected: God will establish the kingdom in another way altogether, even while we wait for the establishment of it in manifested power and glory. There will be found those who come under the yoke of the Son, and thus they will enjoy the rest of the kingdom in their souls.

The purpose of God is that all things shall rest in the hands of the Son. To this end all things have already been delivered to Him. In the day to come we shall see Him dispose of all things in mighty, discriminating judgment: today He is dispensing the knowledge of the Father. The Son is so truly God, that there are in Him unfathomable depths, known only to the Father. The Father is beyond all human knowledge, but the Son knows Him, and has come forth as His great Revealer. It is as the Revealer of the Father that He says, "Come to Me ... and I will give you rest." He was at rest in the knowledge of the Father, of His love, His purpose, His ways; and into that rest He conducts those who come to Him.

His invitation was specially addressed to "all ye that labour and are heavy laden," that is, those who were sincerely and piously attempting to keep the law, which was as Peter said, "a yoke ... which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15: The 10). more sincere, the more heavy laden they must have been, beneath that yoke. So the Lord's words were addressed to "wisdom's children," to the "babes;" in other words, to the godly remnant in the midst of the unbelieving mass of the people. They might now exchange the burdensome yoke of the law for the light and easy yoke of Christ. They would learn of Him things that the law could never teach them.

And moreover He would teach them in a new way. He exemplified the things that He taught. Meekness and lowliness of heart is needed if the subject place is to be taken and maintained; and these things were perfectly seen in Him. He was the Son, "yet learned He obedience" and that obedience having been carried to death, He has "become the Author of eternal Salvation to all them that obey Him" (Heb. 5:8-9). In our Gospel we see the obedient One calling us into obedience to Himself, an obedience which is not burdensome and which leads into rest. "Rest for your souls" was proposed as the result of a

faithful walk in the "old paths" of the law (see Jer. 6:16), but that rest was never attained by men. The only way to reach it was that made known by the Son, who had come to reveal the Father. The Father must be known if His purpose was to be achieved.

Chapter 12

FROM THE HEIGHTS reached in the last chapter, we descend into the depths of human folly and blindness as displayed by the Pharisees. In this chapter we see Him very definitely rejected by the leaders of the Jews, and not merely by the cities of Galilee. In the first two instances the contention raged round the sabbath. The Lord defended the action of His disciples on at least four grounds (ver. 3-8).

When David, God's anointed king, was in rejection, his needs took precedence over a matter of tabernacle order, and his followers were associated with him in this. David's greater Son was now refused, so should not the needs of His disciples be met, even if it infringed their sabbath regulations? But, second, the temple had taken precedence over the sabbath, for the priests had always worked on the sabbaths; and Jesus claimed

to be greater than the temple. God was indeed in Christ in infinitely fuller measure than He ever had been in the temple. Third, there was that word about mercy in Hosea 6, to which previously He had referred; that applied in this case. And, fourth, Jesus claimed that as Son of Man He was Lord of the sabbath: in other words, the sabbath had no binding power over Him. He was its Master, and He could dispose of it as He saw fit.

In the second case the Lord answered their quibble by an appeal to their own practice. They had no compunction in setting to work on the sabbath in order to show mercy to a sheep. Who were they then to object to His showing mercy to a man on the sabbath? The Lord promptly showed that mercy; yet such was the obdurate hardness of their hearts, that His mercy only stirred within them thoughts of murder. They decided from that moment upon His death.

In the presence of this, Jesus began to withdraw the witness that they were preparing to quench in death; charging those to whom He still extended mercy that they should not make Him known. Matthew quotes the beautiful prophecy from Isaiah 42, showing how it was fulfilled in Him. Some of it has yet to be

fulfilled at His second advent, for He has not yet sent forth judgment to victory. But He did meet the bitter hatred and rejection that confronted Him at His first advent without strife or cry or the crushing of His foes. Nothing is more worthless than a bruised reed, and nothing more repulsive to the nostrils than smoking flax. The Pharisees were like both these, but He will not break and quench them till the time of judgment arrives. Meanwhile in His Name the Gentiles are learning to trust.

In Isaiah 32 the advents are not distinguished, as is so often the case in Old Testament scripture, but now we can see clearly how both are involved. At this time Jesus came as the vessel of mercy, and not to exercise judgment. Rejected by the leaders of His people, He would turn to the Gentiles and let mercy flow out to them. This is plainly intimated here.

Is not this of immense interest to us, seeing we are amongst the Gentiles who have trusted in His Name?

On the part of the Pharisees we have seen hatred rising to the point of murder; and we have seen on the part of Jesus such meekness and lowliness of heart as led Him to suspend all action in judgment and accept their evil without strife or protest.

Matthew now records the case of a man rendered both blind and dumb by a demon. Jesus gave him sight and speech by casting out the demon, and the people, greatly wondering, began to think of Him as the true Son of David. Seeing this, the Pharisees were aroused to desperate measures, and they repeated yet more boldly the blasphemous assertion that the power He wielded was Satan's. Their earlier blasphemy (see Matt. 9:34), passed unanswered, but this time the Lord accepted their challenge.

In the first place, He met them on the ground of reason. Their accusation involved an absurdity, for if Satan cast out Satan he would destroy his own kingdom. It also involved an aspersion on their own sons, who professed to cast out demons. But secondly, He gave them the true explanation: He was here in manhood acting by the Spirit of God, and thus He had bound Satan, the strong man, and now was taking from beneath his power those who had been but his "goods." This was another plain proof that the kingdom was in their very midst.

It also brought things to a very plain issue, that not to be definitely with Christ and gathering with Him, was to be against Him and scattering. This led the Lord to unmask the real nature

of their sin, which was beyond the pale of forgiveness, in spite of the fact that all manner of sin may be forgiven. In the Son of Man God was presented to them objectively: they might speak against Him, and yet be brought by the work of the Spirit to repentance, and so be forgiven. But to blaspheme the Holy Spirit, by whom alone is repentance and faith wrought in the soul, is to put oneself in a hopeless position. It is to thrust from one both repentance and faith, to bolt and bar the only door that leads into salvation.

The sad fact was that these Pharisees were utterly corrupt trees, a generation of vipers, and their evil words had been just the expression of the evil of their hearts. In verses 33-37, the Lord unmasked their hearts in this way, and declared they would be judged by their words. If men will have to render account of even idle words in the day of judgment, what will evil words such as these merit? In that day by their words they would be utterly condemned.

By their request, recorded in verse 38, the Pharisees revealed that they were morally blind and insensible as well as corrupt and evil. Ignoring, whether ignorantly or wilfully, all the signs that had been given, they asked for a sign. We noticed five

signs in chapter 8 and five in chapter 9, besides those recorded in our chapter. Being evil and adulterous they could not perceive the plainest sign, so no sign should be given but the greatest of all — His own death and resurrection, which had been typified in the remarkable history of Jonah. The generation which was refusing the Lord had been in the presence of signs, more than all others before them. Jonah and his preaching had been a sign to the Ninevites, and at an earlier date Solomon and his wisdom had been a sign to the queen of the south, and striking results had been achieved. Yet Jesus was rejected.

And yet Jesus stands infinitely above all of them. In our chapter He speaks of Himself as "greater than the temple," "greater than Jonas," "greater than Solomon." Also, it is to be observed that He pointed out how both Jonah and Solomon had been signs to Gentiles. Though servants of God in Israel, their fame went out northward to Nineveh and southward to Sheba respectively. These Gentiles had ears to hear and hearts to appreciate, yet the Pharisaic Jews surrounding our Lord were blind and bitterly opposed, to the extent of committing this unpardonable sin.

What would be the end of that unbelieving generation? The Lord tells us in verses 43-45. The evil spirit of idolatry, which had swayed them in their earlier history, had indeed departed from them. Christ, the Revealer of the true God, should have occupied the house; but Him they were rejecting. The end of this would be the return of that evil spirit with seven others worse than himself. Under Antichrist in the last days this word of our Lord will be fulfilled. The unbelieving race of Jews will worship the image of the beast, and be enslaved by Satanic powers of awful potency. When judgment falls, the apostate Jews on whom it will fall, will be worse than all that have preceded them. We believe that the same thing will be true of Gentile races also.

The chapter closes with the significant incident concerning the mother and brethren of Jesus. As a matter of fact they came in a wrong spirit, as is seen by consulting Mark 3:21 and 31. That, however, is not the point here. The Lord took occasion by their intervention to disclaim a merely natural relationship, and to show that what was going to count henceforth was relationship of a spiritual nature. In this figurative way He set aside for the time the old link formed by His having come as the Son of Ab-

raham, the Son of David, and showed that the link now to be recognized was that formed by obedience to the will of God. The Jews as a people had rejected Him, and He now disowns them. He owns His disciples as being in true relation with Him, for feeble though they were, they had begun to do the will of His Father in heaven.

Chapter 13

THIS CHAPTER OPENS with the fact that He proceeded to suit His actions to His words. He left the narrow confines of the house, and went forth to the open air and the sea — the sea being symbolic of the nations. There He began to teach the multitude from a boat, using the parabolic method. This chapter contains seven parables. We will begin by noticing the expression He used in verse 52, "things new and old," for this will help us as to the drift of the parables. Old things are mentioned, the kingdom of heaven for instance, which was predicted in Daniel, but new things predominate. We will point out four new things before looking at the parables in any detail. First, He adopted a new method of teaching — the parabolic. The new method struck the disciples, as verse 10 shows. Second, He indicated in the first parable a new method of Divine work-

ing. Instead of looking for fruit as the result of God's husbandry through law and prophets, He was going to sow the Word to produce fruit. Third, He makes known developments which give a new meaning to the term, "kingdom of heaven." Fourth, He utters new revelations, opening His mouth to utter things, "kept secret from the foundation of the world," as verse 35 says.

The first parable stands by itself, and except we understand it we shall not understand the others. The great work now was to be the sowing of the "word of the kingdom" in the hearts of men. This does not accord any special place to the Jew. In verse 19, Jesus said, "When any one hears," so that opened the door to each hearer of the word, whoever he might be. What was needed was to hear with understanding. Militating against that are the activities of the devil, the fickleness of the flesh, and the cares and riches of the world. But the word is received by some, and fruit produced in varying measures. This method of Divine working is still in vogue. It characterizes the day in which we live. Christianity is based not upon what it finds in man but upon what it produces by the power of God.

The disciples were puzzled by the change to a parable. Their enquiry elicited from the Lord the fact that He adopted this way of teaching so that the mysteries or secrets, of the kingdom of heaven might be hidden from the unbelieving mass and only revealed to those who believed. Those who unbelievably had rejected the Lord had closed their eyes to the truth. Now He spoke in parables so that they might be left in their unbelief. Thus Isaiah's prophecy was to be fulfilled in them. The same prophecy is quoted by John in his Gospel — John 12:40. It is quoted also by Paul for a third and last time in the closing chapter of Acts. It was just the working of the government of God. For believers the parables are very instructive, and, as verse 17 says, they helped to bring to the knowledge of the disciples things desired but never seen by prophets and righteous men in earlier days.

Even the disciples however needed the explanation which the Lord furnished, in order to understand the parable of the sower; and, this given to them, Jesus proceeded to utter three more parables in the ears of the multitude. Only when the crowd had been dismissed and He had retired into a house with His disciples did He furnish the explanation of the second parable. It

is evident therefore that the first four were uttered in public, and deal with the outer manifestations of the kingdom; whereas the last three were spoken privately, and deal with its inner and more hidden reality.

The first parable, as we have indicated, gives us the key to all the rest; showing us that the kingdom is to be established as the result of the sowing of "the word of the kingdom," and not as the fruit of obedience to the existing law of Moses. This fact established, all the other parables tell us what the kingdom of heaven is like, and each of these six similitudes presents features which could not have been foreseen in the light of Old Testament scripture. There the kingdom in its glory had been foreseen, but here we find it is to assume a new character, in which it will exist before the glory arrives.

The second parable, that of the wheat and tares, shows that while the kingdom exists through the sowing of good seed by the Son of Man, the devil will also be a sower and his children will be found amongst the children of the kingdom. It sets forth the fact that until the hour of judgment arrives, when the Son of Man shall purge all the evil out of His kingdom, there is going to be, in one word, mixture. In this parable, "the field is the

world" (38), be it remembered, so there is no thought here of the church being a place where the children of the wicked one must needs be tolerated. "The kingdom" indicates a sphere wider than "the church," and there is no possibility of disentangling things in the world till the Lord comes. Then by angelic service at the end of the age the evil will be consigned to the burning.

The wheat is to be gathered into the barn. In His explanation the Lord goes further, and speaks of the righteous shining forth as the sun in their Father's kingdom. By using this figure the Lord put the saints in a heavenly position, so we are not surprised when later we find the heavenly calling fully revealed. It is interesting to notice the Lord speaking in this parable of "the kingdom of heaven," "the kingdom of the Son of Man," and "the kingdom of your Father;" showing that the kingdom is one however it may be designated. It has however different departments — if we may so speak — and hence may be viewed in different ways.

The third parable, that of the mustard seed, shows that the kingdom is to be marked by development. It will grow and become imposing before men's eyes, but become a shelter for

agents of evil — for in the first parable, when explaining "the fowls," the Lord said, "then comes the wicked one;" and we know how Satan works through human agents.

The fourth parable, comprised in just one verse (33), shows that, as we might expect from what we have just seen, the kingdom will be gradually permeated by corruption. In Scripture leaven is used consistently as a figure of what is corrupting. This is the one place where some are wishful to make it mean what is good. But that is because they have a system of interpretation which demands such a meaning. The gospel, they think, is going to permeate the world with good. This sudden violation of the meaning of leaven should have warned them that their thoughts which demand it are wrong.

Here, then, the Lord is teaching us that the kingdom as viewed by man will be in such a form that it is marked by mixture, by development into an imposing institution in the earth, where agents of evil will find a home, and consequently there will be a process of permeation by the evil. He spoke as a prophet indeed, for just what He predicted has come to pass in that sphere on earth, where professedly the rule of Heaven is owned.

But in the privacy of the house the Lord added to His disciples three further parables. Here we have the kingdom from the Divine standpoint, and if our eyes are anointed we too shall see in it what God sees. First, we shall see that there is something of hidden value. The "field" here is still the world, and the Lord has bought it, with a view to securing the hidden treasure in it. This buying must be distinguished from redeeming, for evil men may go so far as "denying the Lord that bought them" (2 Peter 2:1). They were bought but not redeemed, or they would not go on to "swift destruction." The kingdom is established that the hidden treasure in the world may be secured.

Again there is the parable of the one pearl of great price. In the kingdom as it exists today, there is to be found and purchased this object, marked in the Divine eye by unique perfection. Here doubtless we have in figure that which the Lord is going to speak of in Matt. 16, as "My church." True He has bought the field, but also He has bought the pearl, and in both cases He represents Himself as selling all He has to do so. He yielded up everything to achieve His object, in the spirit of 2 Corinthians 8:9. We cannot purchase Christ by the selling of our worthless

all. It is what He has done for us. It is what He will gain through the kingdom of heaven in its present mysterious form.

Lastly it is like the drag-net gathering fish out of the sea of nations. All kinds are gathered, but we see discriminate selection exercised. There is a similarity between this and the parable of the wheat and tares, inasmuch as in both cases there is a disentanglement accomplished by angels at the end of the age. The wicked are severed from the just and cast into the furnace of fire. But there is also a distinct difference, for in the former parable the wicked are in the world as the result of Satan's sowing; whereas here "the word of the kingdom" goes out among the nations like a net, and people of all kinds profess to receive it. At the end of the age discrimination will be made; the true elect of God will be gathered in, and the evil rejected.

How important that we should ever keep before us what the kingdom is like from the Divine standpoint. It has taken on this peculiar character as a result of the rejection of the true Son of David, and His consequent absence in the heavens. In spite of the mixture and corruption which will mark it outwardly, there is to be this inward work of God which will result in His obtaining the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, and all the

good fish which the net encloses. Have we understood all these things? The disciples felt that they had; yet later when they had received the Spirit, they may have discovered how very little they had done so. We too realize doubtless how little we have done so, for the kingdom in its present form is not understood as easily as it will be when it is unveiled in public display. Things predominate which are wholly new from an Old Testament standpoint: hence we read, "things new and old," not "old and new." The emphasis lies on "new."

This chapter closes with Jesus back in His own district, and there at that time they were quite unbelieving. They did not see in Him Emmanuel, or even the Son of Abraham, the Son of David; to them He was just the son of the carpenter, with whose relations they were so very familiar. Their unbelieving familiarity caused them to stumble at Him. His power was unabated, but their unbelief imposed a restraint upon its exercise, just as the unbelief of Joash, the king of Israel, imposed a limit upon his victories (see 2 Kings 13:14-19).

Chapter 14

AT THAT TIME, says the opening verse, Herod "heard of the fame of Jesus." Just when He had no fame at Nazareth His fame reached the ears of that godless man, and as it appears, touched his hardened conscience. It is remarkable that he should have thought it was John risen from the dead, since to a later Herod we have Paul saying, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8). That which they could not believe when it had happened was conjured up by a guilty conscience.

This leads Matthew to tell us the story of John's martyrdom, which had happened not long before. John's faithful witness had stirred up the anger of Herod and the revenge of Herodias, and the Lord's forerunner died as the result of a godless oath. Herod outraged the law of God in order to preserve the credit of his own word. Such was the man that ruled many of the Jews — a chastisement surely for their abounding sin.

Now John had always faithfully pointed to Jesus, and the people acknowledged that though he did no miracle, "all things that John spake of this Man were true" (John 10:41). As the fruit of John's happy fidelity to Jesus, his disciples knew what

to do, when he was so suddenly removed. They were granted his body, so having buried it, they "went and told Jesus." John was the burning and shining lamp whereas Jesus was the light, that coming into the world, shines for all men. The lamp was extinguished, so they turned to the great light, and found consolation there.

Hearing it, Jesus departed to a desert place. Mark shows us that just at this time His disciples had returned to Him from their mission. A period of solitude and quiet was suitable at this juncture for the Master, for His disciples, and for John's sad followers; if, as is likely, they accompanied Him.

The multitudes however still went after Him, and He met their needs. As ever He was moved with compassion. The indifference of Nazareth and the wickedness of Herod produced no change in Him. Let us meditate long and deeply on the unchanging compassions of the heart of Christ. Blessed be His Name!

It was not the Lord but His disciples, who suggested that the crowds should be dismissed to fend for themselves. It was His compassion that detained them and bade His disciples give them to eat. This tested the disciples, and brought to light how

little they realized the power of their Master. They had to discover that His way was to use the tiny resources that were already in their hands, and multiply them until they were more than sufficient. The prophet indicated that Jehovah would find His rest in Zion, and that then His word would be, "I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread" (Ps. 132:15). Jehovah was now amongst His people in the person of Jesus, and though there was no rest for Him in Zion at that time, yet He proved what He could do with these five thousand men, beside women and children. He was dispensing the bounty of heaven, hence He looked up to heaven as He blessed.

At this point let us recall the situation, as presented in this Gospel. He had been definitely rejected by the nation, their leaders going so far as to commit the unpardonable sin in attributing His works of power to the devil. Consequently He had symbolically broken His links with them. This we saw in Matt. 11 and Matt. 12. Then in Matt. 13 He spoke the parables which reveal new developments as to the kingdom of heaven; and at the end of that chapter we find that the people of His own country saw nothing in Him beyond the son of the carpenter. We opened

chapter 14 to find Herod slaying His forerunner, so that His refusal on all hands could hardly be more complete. Yet before we close the chapter we see a display of two great facts: first, He is more than sufficient when in the presence of human need, whether the wants of the multitude or the weakness of the disciples. Second, He is more than supreme when confronted with powers wielded by the adversary. He not only walked Himself upon the stormy waters, but He enabled a feeble disciple to do the same.

During the night He had been in prayer upon the mountain, and the disciples had been toiling against contrary circumstances. Towards morning He drew near to them, walking upon the waves. In the earlier episode on the lake (Matt. 8) He had shown Himself able to quell the storm, since His power was above all the power of the devil. Now He shows Himself in absolute supremacy. The storm was simply nothing to Him. It was distressing to the disciples, but here was the One of whom it had been said, "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known" (Ps. 77:19). His presence brought good cheer to them even while the storm still raged; and when He joined the boat the wind ceased.

But the Lord brought with Him more than good cheer, and Peter it was who discovered it: He can conform others to Himself. It involved for Peter stepping "out of the ship," and this could only be done when he had the authoritative word, "Come," which authenticated the fact that it was the Lord Himself who drew near. Assured that it was Himself, on the strength of His word, Peter stepped forth and walked on the sea. We may see here an allegory of what was shortly to come to pass. The Jewish system, which consisted so largely of "the law of commandments contained in ordinances," (Eph. 2:15), was like a ship, quite suited to men who are "after the flesh." As the result of His coming, the disciples were to step out of that "ship" into a path of pure faith. Hence when Paul bade farewell to the Ephesian elders, he did not commend them to a code of laws nor to an institution or organization, but to "God and the word of His grace." Hence too the call to go "outside the camp" in Hebrews 13. Peter was "out of the ship," with Christ as his Object and His word as his authority. The Christian position is outside the camp with God and the word of His grace.

Yet Peter's faith was small, and, his mind turning from his Master to the violent wind, he was afraid and he began to sink. But still, he had faith, for in the emergency he at once called upon his Lord, and so was sustained, and by both together the ship was reached, when at once the wind ceased, and the land was reached, as John's Gospel shows us. Peter was quite illogical in his fears, for it is no more possible for us to walk on smooth water than on rough, but we are all like him when little faith possesses our hearts. Faith which is fully centred in Christ is strong, whilst that which is occupied with circumstances is weak.

We sometimes hear rather too much of Peter's failure, and not enough of what the power of Christ enabled him to do, though his faith was small. After all, he did not sink. He only began to sink and then, sustained by a power not his own, he reached his Lord and returned with Him to the boat. No other man has done a thing like that, and his momentary failure only made it so manifest that the power that sustained him was that of his Lord that all the rest worshipped Him as the Son of God. They got a great glimpse of His glory, and when arrived at the land of Gennesaret tribute was paid by the people to His grace as

well as His power. The diseased flocked to His presence, and their faith was not misplaced, for as many as touched Him were made perfectly whole. True Divine healing means 100 percent cure in 100 percent of the cases! A perfectly wonderful state of things!

Chapter 15

Into THIS LOVELY scene intruded scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem with their complaint and question as to the non-compliance of the disciples with the tradition of the elders as to the washing of hands. Just imagine the scene. The Son of God dispensing healing on every hand in the fulness of Divine grace, and these men, utterly blind to all that was happening, breaking in with their point of order. Blinded by legal technicalities, they could not perceive Divine grace working in power. Such a frame of mind might seem incredible did we not see the same feature displayed today by the Pharisaic mind, which still occupies itself with points of this kind, based upon tradition and common usage and not on the plain and definite word of God.

The Lord's reply to these men emphasizes the difference between "the commandment of God," and "your tradition" (v.

3). These traditions of the elders were explanations, amplifications and inferences drawn from the law by venerated teachers of old time. They dominated the minds of the Pharisees and quite beclouded the law of God; so much so that they transgressed the law to keep their tradition. The Lord charged them with this, and gave an illustration of it as regards the fifth commandment. Their tradition as regards gifts, professedly devoted to God, completely nullified that commandment. The "pious" and "orthodox" Jew of today has his mind filled with the Talmud, which is built up from these traditions, and it is like a veil, shrouding from his mind the true word of God.

Let us take care lest we fall into a similar snare. We may thankfully avail ourselves of the teachings of God's servants, but using them rightly we shall be led back to the fountain-head, even Scripture itself. It would not be difficult to turn the teachings of the best of God's servants into a kind of Talmud. Then we should have them as a sort of smoke screen, hiding from us the pure Word of God, just as the Talmud blinds the Jewish mind to the real force of the Old Testament.

This kind of thing, pushed as it was by the Pharisees to its extreme limits, stirred our Lord to a strong exposure of its evil.

They were hypocrites, and He told them so plainly. They came under Isaiah's scathing denunciation, for this type of religious wickedness is always to be found with men who have hearts far from God and yet honour Him with their lips, whilst putting their own precepts and commandments in the place of His word. All such nominal worship is empty and in vain, yet it is not difficult for a true believer to get entangled in such things today.

Having exposed the Pharisees to their faces, the Lord turned to the people to warn them as to the error which lay at the root of this hypocrisy - the assumption that defilement is imposed upon men from without, rather than generated within: that it is physical rather than spiritual. The defiling thing is what comes out of a man's mouth, expressing what is in his heart. The heart of man is the fountain-head of defilement. Solemn fact! The Pharisees of course were offended at such teaching, which cut at the root of all their ceremonial observances, but that only showed that they were no plants of God's planting. Their end was to be rooted up. They were blind themselves and misleading others who were blind also. God would deal with them in

His government, and the disciples were to leave them alone and not retaliate.

But what the Lord had just said sounded strange even to the disciples; so Peter asked for an explanation, treating it as a parable. This called forth a rebuke — though a gentle one — from the Lord. The fact was that none, not even the best of them, saw much beyond the letter of the law with its offerings and ceremonial regulations, and hence they had very little sense of its convicting power. They were concerned as to what went into their mouths, in order that they might be ceremonially clean. The law, if spiritually understood, concerns itself with the state of the heart, as the Lord had showed in His sermon on the mount. The evil things of verse 19 proceed out of the heart, and it is significant that evil thoughts head the list, for that is where they all begin. Thus the Lord exposed the evil which is in the heart of man.

He proceeded, in the case of the woman of Canaan, to reveal the goodness which is in the heart of God. Divine grace was ready to flow out freely without respect of persons, so that Gentile as well as Jew might receive it; one thing only was needful on the part of the recipient — honesty of heart. Now

the woman addressed Jesus as the Son of David in presenting her plea for mercy. She came as though she were one of the people of Israel, thinking perhaps that by so doing she stood a better chance of being heard. There was a measure of insincerity in this, and hence "He answered her not a word."

But though there was insincerity there was also such earnest persistence of faith that the disciples intervened because of her cries, and this led to the Lord's words in verse 24, which cast some light on her mistake. She now presented her plea simply on the ground of her need, saying, "Lord help me;" and this led to yet more searching words from the Lord. His mission was to the house of Israel, who were spiritually lost, yet after all they were in the place of children, whereas the Gentiles were in the place of the dogs, unclean and outside the realm of God's dealings. Here was a test indeed! Would she throw away the last shred of pretence and humbly take her true place?

She did so in very striking fashion. Her reply, in verse 27, was saying in effect, "I am indeed but a Gentile, yet amongst men there is a sufficient surplus for the dogs to feed, and I am sure the heart of God is not more straitened than the heart of man." In this reply Jesus instantly detected great faith, and acknow-

ledged it, giving her all her desire. Thus for the second time did He discover great faith and point it out. In both cases — the centurion in Matt. 8, and here — it was a Gentile that displayed it; and in both cases it was allied with the condemnation of self. "I am not worthy," said the centurion: "I am but a dog," in effect said the woman here. It is ever thus: high thoughts of self go with little faith, and low thoughts of self with great faith. Let us search and see if the explanation of the smallness of our faith lies just here.

The heart of God was indeed larger than the woman imagined. She, though a dog, obtained a large crumb from the table; but presently the whole feast would be sent to the dogs, for this is the force of Paul's announcement in Acts 28:28. Still, much had to transpire before that announcement could be made, and in our Gospel we see the beginnings of the wonderful transition. In the remainder of our chapter we see further striking manifestations of the heart of God. The mercy that blessed a Gentile woman was equally at the disposal of the afflicted multitudes of Israel. The multitude had but to bring their needy ones and "cast them down at Jesus' feet" for them to be healed in such a

way that their minds were directed to the God of Israel, and they glorified Him.

This display of power, exercised in Divine mercy, was so attractive that the multitudes long outstayed their available food supplies, and in their need Jesus again manifested the compassion of the heart of God. There was a recurrence of the situation recorded in only the previous chapter, and yet apparently the disciples had no expectation that the Lord would act just as He had done before. In them we can see our own lack of faith exemplified. It is comparatively easy to remember how the Lord has acted in days that are past; it is another thing to count on His acting today, in the assurance that He is ever the same. Still, lack of faith on our side is no insuperable barrier to action on His side. He again took their small resources and multiplied them into more than a sufficiency. Again there was food for all, and an overplus. Such is the compassion of the heart of God.

Chapter 16

THE PHARISEES NOW renewed their attack, combining with their ancient foes, the Sadducees, for this purpose. The "sign from heaven" was merely a catch, being just the kind of thing

that the Sadducees, with their materialistic notions, would never accept. In reply the Lord pointed out that they were quite good judges of material things seen in the face of the sky, but quite blind to the "signs of the times," which need spiritual discernment for their apprehension. Being "wicked and adulterous" they had no spiritual perception, and hence such signs as God gives were no use to them. As He had said before (Matt. 12:39), there remained "the sign of the Prophet Jonas," namely, His own death and resurrection. With that word He left them. When that great sign took place they used all their craft and their money in an effort to nullify it; as we see in the last chapter of this Gospel.

From these men the Lord turned to His disciples with words of warning. They were to beware of their "leaven." This warning the disciples took in a material sense at first, their misunderstanding being helped on by their omission to take bread. Yet they should not have had any thought on that score in the light of the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand. At last they understood that by "leaven" the Lord meant "doctrine." It is evident therefore that though the true disciple could

never be either Pharisee or Sadducee, he may be leavened by their doctrines — by either or by both.

The leaven of the Pharisee was that type of religious hypocrisy that lays all the stress on things outward and ceremonial. The leaven of the Sadducee was pride of intellect which elevates human reason into the place of sole judge, and waves aside God's revelation and faith. How much Christendom is leavened by both these things is sadly apparent today. Ritualism is rampant on the one hand, and rationalism, or "modernism," on the other, and not infrequently both are blended and the rationalistic ritualist is the product. The Lord's warning against them is supplemented by the Apostle Paul in Colossians 2. In verse 8 of that chapter we find his warning against rationalism, and in verses 16, 18, 20-22, against ritualism in various forms, and we are shown how these things divert us from Christ and prevent us from "holding the Head."

It is significant that in our chapter the Lord's warning against both comes just before the record of His visit to Caesarea Philippi, and of the question He raised with His disciples there. In this place He was at the extreme northward limit of the land, and as far away from the haunts of these men as possible. Who

was He? That was the supreme question. The answers given by the people were various and confused, and they were not sufficiently interested to make sober enquiry. But appealing more directly to His disciples Peter was able, as taught of God, to give a clear reply, which brought to light the Rock on which the church was to be built. Colossians 2 show us how destructive is the leaven, both of the Pharisee and the Sadducee, upon the church's position and faith. In Matthew 16 we see how the Lord warned His disciples against both, before making the first announcement of the church that He was going to build.

Simon Peter was a blessed man. From God Himself in heaven, whom Jesus spoke of as "My Father," there had reached him a revelation which never could have come to him from man. His eyes had been opened to see in Jesus the Christ. That was His official position as God's Anointed One. But who was this Anointed One? Peter discerned that He was "the Son of the living God." This was truly a striking confession. God is the living God, infinitely above the power of death. Jesus is the Son in the eternal Godhead, equally above all the power of death. This thing had evidently come to Peter as in a flash by Divine revelation. He was not yet established in the full understanding

of it, as we see half a dozen verses lower down. Yet he saw it was so, and he confessed it.

Do we confess this too? And do we really understand its significance? If we do, we have indeed found an impregnable Rock, and like Peter we are blessed indeed.

In His word to Peter, recorded in verse 18, the Lord confirmed to him the name that He had given him at their first meeting, as recorded in John 1:42, and also disclosed something more of its significance. The meaning of "Peter" is "stone," but what is its significance? This — that it connected him with the church which Christ, the Son of the living God, was about to build. Thus in Christ Himself lay the "Rock," on which the church is founded. Peter was no rock. Indeed he seems to have been the most impulsive and easily moved of the disciples — see Galatians 2:11-13. He was only a stone, and there is no excuse for the error of confounding him and the Rock, for in His use of words the Lord signalized the distinction, saying, "Thou art Petros, and upon this petra I will build My church."

The building of the church was still in the future, for the Rock was not fully disclosed until the Son of the living God had

proved His triumph through death and resurrection, and gone up on high. Then began Christ's ecclesia, or, "called-out company;" and here was found one of the stones that was then to be built up upon the Rock. In his First Epistle Peter shows us that this is not something confined exclusively to himself, for all who come to the Living Stone are living stones to be built also on that foundation.

In this great pronouncement the Lord spoke of His church as being His own handiwork, against which all adverse wisdom and power could not prevail. What is done in the power of Divine life nothing can touch. Other scriptures speak of the church as the community professing allegiance to Christ, brought into being through the labours of those who take the place of servants of God. On that community failure was stamped from the outset, and it merges into the kingdom of heaven, of which we learned so much in Matt. 13, and which the Lord mentions in verse 19 of our chapter. The keys of that kingdom were given to Peter — not the keys of the church.

All who profess allegiance to the King are in the kingdom of heaven, and Peter was given a special administrative place in connection with that. We see him in the act of "loosing" as re-

gards Jews in Acts 2:37-40, and as regards Gentiles in Acts 10:44-48; and in the act of "binding" in Acts 8:20-23. And in these cases clearly his acts were ratified in heaven. But Simon the sorcerer, though he had been baptized as a professed subject of the kingdom, had never been built by the Lord into His church.

The kingdom of heaven had been revealed in Old Testament scripture, though its present mysterious form had not. On the other hand nothing had been said as to the church, and this word of Jesus was a preliminary disclosure of it. Having made the announcement He at once withdrew the testimony which His disciples had been giving as to His being the Christ, come on earth to confirm the promises made to the fathers (Rom. 15:8). His rejection was certain and His death impending. Only thus would there be laid the proper basis for the fulfilment of the promises to Israel, or the blessing of Gentiles so that they might glorify God for His mercy in bringing them into the church. Hence from this point Jesus turned the minds of His disciples to His death and resurrection — the grand climax of His earthly story. Christ in resurrection glory, rather than Christ in earthly glory, was the goal before them.

Here Peter displays his frailty and un-rock-like character, and comes under rebuke. It is striking how in these few verses we see him Divinely illuminated, then administratively privileged and then speaking in a way which reminded our Lord of Satan and fallen men. Such was Peter, and we are no better than he. His mind and the minds of the other disciples were set upon blessings to be realized upon earth. The Lord knew this and proceeded to tell them how all would be altered for them by His death: they too would have death borne in upon them and lose their lives in this world.

This saying of our Lord (verse 25) occurs no less than six times in the four Gospels, allowing for slight variations in the wording: twice in this Gospel, twice in Luke, and once in both Mark and John. The six occurrences cover, we believe, four different occasions. So it was evidently a saying often upon the lips of Jesus; and this testifies to its great importance. It cuts across the grain with every one of us, and yet it puts in a nutshell a great principle of spiritual life which persists all through the period of His rejection and absence from the world. Only when He comes again will saints enjoy life on earth in any full and

proper sense. To go in for gaining the world now is to lose the soul.

Having shown His disciples what lay before Himself, and before them in the more immediate future, He went on to speak of His coming in glory. He will then take the kingdom from His Father and the time of reward will have arrived, and some of them were to have the privilege of seeing the kingdom in miniature as a sample of what was coming. This was an expression of His thoughtful grace towards them, lest they should be utterly discouraged by what He had just been telling them.

Chapter 17

THE TRANSFIGURATION, WITH which this chapter opens, furnished a view of the kingdom, inasmuch as Jesus Himself, shining as the sun, was the central figure, and with Him in heavenly conditions were Moses and Elias, whilst three disciples in earthly conditions had a share in it. The "bright cloud" which overshadowed them was evidently the reappearance of that which once dwelt on the tabernacle, and out of it spoke the voice of God the Father, declaring Jesus to be the Son, the beloved Object and delight of His heart. Peter had been speaking

in his impetuous way, showing that he had as yet no adequate sense of the exclusive and supreme glory of his Master. Not Peter but Christ is the One to whom we are to listen. Our ears are to be filled with His voice, and our eyes with His presence, so that, like the disciples when the vision faded, we too see "no man, save Jesus only."

Though Peter at the moment had but small understanding of what it all signified he apprehended it later when the Spirit was given, as we see when we turn to his Second Epistle. He realized then that it was the confirmation of the prophetic word as to "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," for they were "eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16-19). Not until the Son of Man was risen from the dead, and consequently the Holy Ghost was given, would the full significance of the transfiguration be understood. Hence the Lord's charge to the three disciples recorded in verse 9 of our chapter. The vision did however awaken questions in the minds of the disciples as to the prophecy concerning the coming of Elias; and the Lord's answer showed that as regards His first coming, that prophecy had found its fulfilment in John the Baptist who had been slain, and He took the opportunity of again predicting His own death.

On the top of the high mountain the disciples had been in the place of heavenly peace and communion; they descended with Jesus to the foot where all was distress and failure — distress on the part of the afflicted boy and his father; failure to meet the situation on the part of the disciples. The advent of Jesus altered everything in a moment, just as His approaching advent in glory will completely retrieve the situation which will then exist, meeting not only the power of the devil in the world but also all the failures of His saints.

The situation retrieved, the disciples invited the Lord to explain their failure, and thus they stood before His judgment seat, as we all shall in the day of His advent. His explanation of their failure in a general way was, "Because of your unbelief," but He added that the demon involved in this case was of a special "kind" which could only be dealt with if there was "prayer and fasting." As is so often the case with our failures the reason was not simple but compound. Three things were involved. First, absence of faith — little or no confidence in God. Second, absence of prayer — dependence upon God. Third, absence of fasting — separation to God, even from things quite right in themselves under ordinary circumstances. In these words we

believe the Lord exposed the roots of all our failures in seeking to serve Him. We are defective in one or another or all of these three things. Let us enquire, searching our hearts and lives, and see if it be not so.

For the third time while in Galilee Jesus forewarned His disciples as to His death, adding the fact of His resurrection. Matthew's comment is, "They were exceeding sorry," which shows that they were more impressed by the tidings of His death than His resurrection. That is something which lies outside man's natural experience and they failed to apprehend it. The incident which closes this chapter shows that Peter only thought of his Master as a good Jew, who paid all His dues, and was anxious that all others should see Him in this light. When he would have spoken of it, Jesus anticipated him with a question which showed that such as Peter were children of the kingdom, and hence in due course they would be free from this tribute for the service of the temple. Still the moment had not quite come for this, and no occasion of stumbling was to be given, so by a remarkable miracle the Lord provided the exact sum needed for two payments, and in wonderful grace He associated Peter with Himself. The coin was to be handed over "for Me and thee."

This was surely a token of the way in which saints as children of the kingdom were presently to be associated with Himself.

Chapter 18

THE DISCIPLES' QUESTION, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" showed that the kingdom was filling their thoughts just at that moment. The answer made it abundantly clear that the only way of entrance into the kingdom was by becoming small, not great. As the result of conversion a person humbles himself and becomes like a little child. Apart from this one is not in the kingdom at all. Then as we enter, so we progress; consequently the humblest is the greatest in the kingdom. The disciples needed to have their ideas on this matter revolutionized, and so all too frequently do we. It is evident that here the Lord speaks of the kingdom not as the sphere of profession out of which evil will have to be cast, as in chapter 13, but as a sphere marked by vital reality.

To answer the question Jesus had called a little child and set him in the midst as an object lesson. He proceeds to show that one such child, if presented in His name, becomes a person of great importance. To receive him is equivalent to receiving the

Lord Himself. In verses 2-5 the "little child" is in question; in verse 6 it is "one of these little ones which believe in Me." To offend one of these merits the severest judgment, and this leads the Lord to set His disciples in the light of eternal things. There is such a thing as "everlasting fire," and any sacrifice is better than incurring that.

Down to verse 14 we are still occupied with the little child. They are not to be despised for three reasons. First, they are the continual objects of angelic ministry, and are represented before the face of the Father in heaven. Second, they are objects of the Saviour's saving grace. Third, the Father's will is toward them in blessing; He does not desire that one should perish. Sweet words of comfort these for those who have lost their little ones in early life, giving ample assurance of their blessing. The comparison of verse 11 with Luke 19:10 is instructive. There a grown-up man was in question, who had had plenty of time to go astray; so the word "seek" is found. Here, where the little child is in question, it is omitted. The tendency to go astray is there in each, as verses 12 and 13 indicate, but the wandering is not put to account in the same way till years of responsibility are reached.

Verses 1-14, then, deal with the "little child" and the kingdom. verses 15-20 with the "brother" and the church. In chapter 16:18-19, we had the church and the kingdom, and both re-appear here. If it be a question of the little child our tendency is to ignore and despise him. If our brother be in question there is a sad tendency for disagreements and occasions of trespass to occur, and these are now contemplated in the Lord's teaching. We have definite instructions as to the procedure to be followed, the ignoring of which has produced untold mischief. If a brother has injured me, my first step is to see him alone, and point out his wrongdoing. If I do this in the right spirit, I shall very likely gain him and get things rectified. Alternately, of course, I may find that my thoughts needed rectifying, for things were not as they seemed.

But he may not hear me, and then I am to approach him again with one or two brethren as witnesses, so that his wrong may be brought home to him in a more definite and impartial way. Only if he still remain obdurate is the church to be informed so that the voice of all may be heard by him. If he go so far as to disregard the voice of the church, then I am to treat him as one with whom all fellowship is impossible.

It will be noticed that the Lord does not go on to say what the church should do; doubtless because trespasses are of many kinds and varying degrees of gravity, so that no instruction would apply to all cases. Verse 18 does however imply that there would be cases where the church would have to "bind" the wrongdoer, and again others where their action would have to be in the nature of "loosing." Here we find that what had previously been said to Peter alone is now said to the church. To carry this out rightly would mean much dependence on God and prayer to God. Moreover even in the earliest days and under most favourable circumstances it would hardly ever be possible to get the whole church together in one place. Hence in verses 19 and 20 the Lord brings things down to the smallest possible plurality, showing that the potency of prayer and of church action does not depend upon numbers but upon His Name. In the case of the little child and the kingdom the important point was "in My Name." In the case of the brother and the church again "in [or, to] My Name" is the decisive thing. The whole weight of authority lies there.

Verse 20 is sometimes quoted as though it described a certain basis of fellowship, true at all times for those in the fellowship.

But the Lord spoke not of being gathered simply, but of being "gathered together;" that is, He spoke of an actual meeting. His Name is of such value that, if only two or three are gathered together to it, He is there in the midst, and this gives power to their requests and authority to their acts. He is spiritually present, not visibly: a wonderful and gracious provision this for days when the church cannot be got together as a whole, owing to its broken and divided state. We may be very thankful for it, but let us beware how we use it.

There has been such a tendency to make this gathering together to His Name just a matter of a certain church position, eliminating from it all thought of moral condition. Then we may be tempted to argue this or that must be ratified in heaven, or granted by heaven, because we acted or asked in His Name. We should be much wiser if we trod more softly, and when we saw no signs of heaven either ratifying or granting, we humbled ourselves and searched our hearts and ways to discover wherein we had missed a true gathering together in His Name; whether all the time we really had ourselves before us, and our moral state was wrong.

In verse 21, we find Peter raising the other side of the matter. What about the offended rather than the offending party? The reply of Jesus came to this — the spirit of forgiveness towards my brother is to be practically unlimited.

Thereupon He spoke the parable as to the king and his servants, with which the chapter closes. The general bearing of this parable is very plain; the only point we notice is that it refers to God's governmental dealings with those who take the place of being His servants, as is made plain when we reach verse 35, which gives the Lord's own application of it. There is entirely another basis for eternal forgiveness, but governmental forgiveness does very often hinge upon the believer manifesting a forgiving spirit. If we treat our brethren ill, we shall find ourselves sooner or later in the hands of the "tormentors" and have a sorrowful time. And if any of us are witnesses of one brother ill-treating another we shall be wise if, instead of taking the law into our own hands and attacking the wrongdoer, we imitate the servants of the parable and tell our Lord all that was done, leaving Him to deal with the offender in His holy government.

Chapter 19

JESUS NOW APPROACHED Judaea again and the Pharisees returned to the attack. They raised a question regarding marriage and divorce, hoping to entrap Him. This they utterly failed to do for they were pitting themselves against Divine wisdom. A complete answer lay in referring them to what God had ordained at the beginning. Man was not to undo what God had done. This raised in their minds a question as to why divorce had been permitted in the law given through Moses. The answer was that it had been permitted because of the hardness of men's hearts. God knew that well, and hence He did not set the standard too high. The law set forth God's minimum requirement for life in this world. Hence to fail only once at any time was to incur the sentence of death. Only one thing can dissolve the tie according to God, and that is the virtual breaking of the bond by either of the parties.

It is only when we come to Christ that we get the full thoughts of God — God's maximum in every respect.

The Lord's teaching as to divorce was new and surprising even to His disciples, and prompted their remark recorded in verse 10. This in its turn led Him to declare that marriage is the nor-

mal thing for man, and the unmarried state the exceptional, as is also inferred by Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7:7. If "it is given" to a man, then "it is good not to marry," but normally, "Marriage is honourable in all" (Heb. 13:4).

Following this, the Lord gave to children their true place. The disciples manifested the spirit of the world when they treated them as of no importance, so much so that the bringing of them was an intrusion. Thus they showed that they had not as yet learned the lesson that He taught in the verses that open Matt. 18. The Lord on the contrary laid His hands on them in blessing and uttered the memorable words, "Forbid them not, to come to Me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Next comes the case of the rich young man who claimed to have kept the law, as regards the commandments relating to one's duty towards one's neighbour. The Lord did not deny his claim, so apparently he had been blameless as far as outward observance was concerned. He was much mistaken however in thinking that by doing some good thing he could have eternal life. Coming on that ground, Jesus at once tested him, and under the test he utterly failed. "What lack I yet?" was his question, and the answer was designed to show him that he lacked

the faith which discerned the glory of Jesus, and which consequently would have moved him to give up everything in order to follow Him. He approached Jesus as "Good Master," and the Lord would not accept the epithet "good," unless it were given Him as the fruit of acknowledging His Deity. "There is none good but one — God," so that if Jesus was not God He was not good. If the young man had recognized the Deity of the One who said to him, "Follow Me," his "great possessions" would have been as nothing to him, and he would gladly have followed Jesus. Have we each so recognized the glory of Jesus as to be lifted clean out of the love of mere earthly things?

The Lord now pointed out to His disciples how tenacious a hold earthly riches have on the human heart. The rich enter the kingdom of God with great difficulty. Among the Jews wealth was regarded as a sign of God's favour; hence this saying also overturned the thoughts of the disciples and greatly astonished them. They felt that nobody could be saved if the rich had such difficulty. This led to an even stronger statement. Salvation is a thing not merely difficult or improbable to man, but impossible. Only if the power of God be brought in, is it possible.

We may summarize verses 10-26 by saying that the Lord shed His light upon marriage, children and possessions: three things that occupy so much of our lives in this world, and in each case the light He shed overturned the thoughts which previously the disciples had entertained — see, verses 10, 13, 25.

Peter seized upon the Lord's words, desiring a definite pronouncement as to what reward was offered to those who like himself had followed the Lord. The reply made it plain that there is to come "the regeneration;" that is, a wholly new order of things, when the Son of Man should be no longer rejected but be seated on the throne of His glory, and that then the disciples should also be enthroned and vested with powers of administration over the twelve tribes of Israel. In that age the saints are going to judge the world, and here is indicated the place of special prominence reserved for the Apostles. It is also indicated that all who have given up earthly relationships and joys for His Name will receive a hundredfold together with everlasting life. The life which the rich young man desired, and missed by not following Christ, shall be theirs.

The last verse of the chapter adds a word of warning. Many who are first in this world will be last there, and vice versa; for God's thoughts are not as ours.

Chapter 20

THIS CHAPTER OPENS with the parable of the householder and his labourers, which in verse 16 brings us back with fresh conviction to just that point. The parable also has direct reference to Peter's question, which asked for a definite promise of reward, since it contrasts the difference of treatment meted out by the householder between those who served him as the result of a bargain, and those who did so without any bargain, but with simple trust that he would give them "whatsoever is right." We can all well understand the feelings of those earliest workers, and the complaint they lodged of unfair treatment since they had borne the burden and heat of the day. What workman is there who would not be inclined to reason just as they did? But the "goodman of the house" placed great value on that confidence in the rightness of his mind and faith in his word, which characterized the later comers. He had a right to do what he willed with his own money, and so highly did he rate faith that he gave to the last just what he did to the first.

And in distributing the money he began with the last. Thus the last were first and the first last.

Here then is a lesson that we all take a long time to learn. The Lord will not undervalue work, but He will value even more highly the simple faith in Himself — His rightness, His wisdom, His word — which will go on serving Him, even though late in the day, without much thought as to reward, or any attempt at a bargain. The faith and love which would move any to serve Him thus is sweeter to Him than the actual work they may be able to accomplish. We shall profit if we read, mark, learn and inwardly digest this parable.

Jesus was now on His way to Jerusalem for the last time, and He once more pressed upon His disciples His approaching death and resurrection. As far as the record of this Gospel is concerned, this is the fourth time He did so since His great prediction as to building His Church, in Matt. 16. Here there is a wealth of detail in few words. He predicts His betrayal by Judas, His condemnation by the Sanhedrim, His being delivered by them to Pilate and his soldiers, the mocking, the scourging, the crucifixion, and finally His resurrection — all in the compass of two verses.

Yet the minds of the disciples were still filled with anticipation of the speedy establishment of the kingdom; so much so that James and John were brought by their mother with a request for places of prominence in it. Jesus answered by a question which indicated that honour in the coming kingdom will be proportionate to the measure in which one may have been identified with Him in His sufferings and rejection. At the same time He indicated that rewards in the kingdom were to be given according to the Father's award. The Son of Man Himself is going to receive the kingdom from the hands of the Father, as had been indicated in Psalm 8, and Daniel 7, so the saints too will receive their place in the kingdom at the Father's hand. The recollection of this will help us to understand the Lord saying of reward, it "is not mine to give."

This is the only case, as far as we remember, where a parent came to the Lord with a request for a child and met with a refusal. But then here the mother was asking for a prominent place as a reward: in all the other cases the request was for blessing from His hands. That was never denied. There was evidently a spirit of competition amongst the disciples, for the ten felt that the two had stolen a march on them and were in-

dignant. This led to one more beautiful lesson as to the humility that befits the kingdom. Even today we are very slow to recognize that the principles that prevail in the Divine kingdom are the opposite of those that prevail in the kingdoms of men. In the world greatness is expressed in dominion and authority: the great one is in a position to lord it over his fellows. Amongst the saints greatness expresses itself in ministry and service. The word for minister in verse 26 is "deacon?" and that for servant in verse 27 is "bondman;" the word which Paul uses for Timothy and himself in the opening verse of the Epistle to the Philippians. Paul was pre-eminently a bondman of Jesus Christ, and he will not be found small when measured by the standard prevailing in the kingdom of heaven.

On the other hand there were in Paul's day men who aimed at dominion and authority by bringing believers into bondage, by devouring them, taking from them, exalting themselves and smiting others on the face. But such were false apostles and deceitful workers — see 2 Corinthians 11:13-20. There are people about in our day who assert their dominion in the same fashion, and we do well to beware of them. The Lord sets Himself before us as the Son of Man who came not to be served but to

serve, though to be served was His right. Daniel 7:9-14 shows this in a twofold way, for Jesus may be identified with the "Ancient of Days" as well as the Son of Man. As Ancient of Days "thousand thousands ministered to Him" before He descended amongst us. As Son of Man "all people, nations, and languages" shall "serve Him." Yet between came the time of His humiliation when He devoted Himself to service; which went to the extreme point of giving His life a ransom for many. Thus for the fifth time since chapter 16 the Lord set His death before the minds of His disciples; and this time He spoke of its redeeming virtue. Thank God! that we are amongst "the many."

The closing scenes of the Gospel begin with the incident concerning the two blind men as He departed from Jericho. Both Mark and Luke mention only one of them, whose name was Bartimaeus, but evidently there actually were two. The same feature is seen in the accounts of the casting out of the legion of demons, for at the end of Matthew 8 tells us of two men, where Mark and Luke mention one only. In both cases there were two witnesses of the power and grace of Jesus, and Matthew mentions it since it would be specially impressive to Jewish readers, accustomed to the stipulation of their law as to the

validity of the witness of two, whilst one only might be disregarded.

The Son of David was now for the last time approaching His capital city. These men had sufficient faith to recognize Him and they received from Him the physical eyesight that they desired. With opened eyes they became His followers. This was symbolic surely of the spiritual need of the masses of Israel. If only their eyes had been really open they would have seen their

Messiah in Jesus in the day of their visitation. The situation today is similar. People often complain of want of light. What they really want is the spiritual eyesight — that is, faith — which would enable them to see the light, that has shone so brightly in Him.

Chapter 21

THIS CHAPTER OPENS with the Lord presenting Himself to Jerusalem according to the prophecy of Zechariah. The Lord had spoken through the prophet, and now some five centuries later the ass and her colt were standing ready exactly at the right time, under the charge of someone who would immedi-

ately respond to the need of the Lord. Once more the Lord was plainly authenticated before them as their Messiah and King. He had been born of the Virgin in Bethlehem, brought out of Egypt, and had risen as the great Light in Galilee, as the prophets had said. Now, when the sixty-nine weeks of Daniel 9 were completed, as King He entered His city. Alas! the people overlooked the fact that He was to be meek, and the salvation He was to bring must be compatible with that, and not based upon victorious power. Consequently they stumbled at that stumbling-stone.

Yet for a brief moment it looked as if they might receive Him. The example of the disciples was infectious, and the multitude did Him honour, saluting Him as the Son of David, and as the One who was to come in the name of the Lord. But the reality of their faith was soon tested, for entering the city the question was raised, "Who is this?" The answer of the multitude displayed no real faith at all. They said, "This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee." Quite true, of course, as far as it went; but it went no further than what was obvious even to those who had no faith. A good many prophets had entered before this, and Jerusalem had slain them.

Jesus had just presented Himself to them as King, so, having arrived in the city, He went straight to the temple, the very centre of their religion, and asserted His kingly power in cleansing it. He had done this at the very beginning of His ministry, as recorded in John 2; He did it again at the end. The trafficking and money-changing in the temple had doubtless sprung out of the kindly arrangements of the law, which Deuteronomy 14:24-26 records. Ungodly men had taken advantage of this provision to turn the temple precincts into a den of thieves. God intended His temple to be the house where men drew near to Him with their requests. Its custodians had turned it into a place where men were swindled, and so the name of God was maligned. To defile or corrupt the temple of God is a sin of tremendous gravity. 1 Corinthians 3:17 shows this, in its application to God's present temple.

Having driven out these evil men, Jesus dispensed mercy to the very people they would have kept outside. The blind and lame were forbidden to approach in Leviticus 21:18, and 2 Samuel 5:6-8 records David's sentence against them: he said, they "shall not come into the house." The great Son of David had now arrived in Zion, and He reverses David's action. The kind

of folk that were "hated of David's soul" were loved and blessed that day. The sordid money-changers had misrepresented the God whose house it was, and caused men to blaspheme His name: in healing the needy, Jesus rightly represented the very heart of God, and in result there was praise. Even the children were found crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" They had caught up the cry from the older folk.

The religious leaders themselves witnessed His wonderful works of power and grace, and to their sore displeasure they heard the children's cry. Jesus vindicated them in their simplicity, quoting the verse from Psalm 8 as finding a fulfilment in them. The Psalm says, "ordained strength," whereas He gave an application of it in saying, "perfected praise;" but in either case the thought is that God accomplishes what He desires, and receives the praise He looks for, through small and weak things. Thus it is made manifest that the strength and the praise is of and from Himself. Thus it was here. When the leaders were not only silent but opposed, God took care to have suitable praise through the lips of the babes.

For the moment however the city and temple were in the custody of these unbelieving men; so He left them and it, and went

out to Bethany for the night — the place where was found at least one household that believed in Him and loved Him. Returning next morning He uttered His sentence against the fig tree that bore nothing but leaves. All outward show but no fruit; and on that tree no fruit was to grow for ever. It was utterly condemned. Immediately it withered away! The occurrence was so obviously miraculous that it compelled the attention and the comment of the disciples.

The Lord's reply turned their thoughts from the fig tree to "this mountain." The fig tree was symbolic of Israel, more particularly that part of the nation which had returned from the captivity and were now in the land. Judged nationally there was nothing in them for God and they were condemned; and since they were picked samples of the human race the fruitless tree set forth the fact that Adam's race, as men in the flesh, is condemned and there will never be found in them any fruit for God. Jerusalem and its temple crowned "this mountain," which symbolized, we believe, the whole Jewish system. If they had faith they might anticipate what God was going to do in removing the mountain so that it might be submerged in the sea of the nations. The Epistle to the Hebrews shows how the Jewish sys-

tem was set aside, and "this mountain" was finally cast into the sea when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70.

What is needed is faith. Hebrews emphasizes this, for in that Epistle there occurs the great chapter on faith. Israel's system was after all but a shadow of good things to come and not the very image of the things. It needed faith to discern this and many who believed in Christ had not got clear of the shadows even when Hebrews was written. The man of faith it is who penetrates to the realities which Christ has introduced, and such may pray in the confidence of receiving what they ask.

The religious leaders felt that the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem and His wonderful actions were a challenge to their authority, so they determined to act aggressively and challenge His. By doing this they started a controversy, the record of which continues to the end of chapter 22. It produced three striking parables from the lips of the Lord, followed by three crafty questions from Pharisees and Herodians, from Sadducees, and from a lawyer, respectively; and then crowned by the Lord's own great question which reduced all His adversaries to silence.

In demanding that He produce His authority, the chief priests assumed that they had competency to assess its value when produced. The Lord's answer was virtually this, that if they would prove their competency by pronouncing on the far lesser question of John's authority. He would then submit His authority to their scrutiny. This at once plunged them into difficulty. If they endorsed John's baptism as coming from heaven, they condemned themselves for they had not believed him. If they rejected it as merely of men, they would lose popularity with the people who held him to be a prophet. That popularity was very dear to them, for "they loved the praise of men" (John 12:43). They would not say John's baptism was valid, and they dared not say it was invalid, so they took the ground of ignorance, saying, "We cannot tell." Thus they destroyed their own competency to adjudicate and lost any possible ground of protest when Jesus refused to reveal His authority. The power of God that He wielded gave Him ample authority apart from anything else. But they had refused it and attributed it to the energy of the devil, as we saw earlier in the Gospel.

The Lord now took the initiative with His parables. As we consider them we shall see that the first concerns their response as

under the law; the second their response as tested by the presence of the Son upon earth; the third is prophetic and looks on to the response which would be accorded to the Gospel. The Divine order is observed — the Law, the Messiah, the Gospel.

Jesus opened the first with the words, "What think ye?" since He submitted the short parable to their judgment and allowed them to condemn themselves. The parable as to two sons in Luke 15 is somewhat lengthy, whereas here we have a parable of two sons which is very short, yet in both the same two classes are portrayed — the religious leaders on the one hand, the publicans and sinners on the other. Here however we find their responsibility under the law, whereas in Luke 15 it is their reception according to the grace of the Gospel.

In several Old Testament passages the figure of a vineyard sets forth Israel under the law; so the words, "Go work today in My vineyard," most aptly express Jehovah's command. These words are often quoted as though they urged Christians to serve their Lord in the Gospel, but that is not their meaning, if read in their context. The figure which would apply to us is that of labour in "the harvest" and not "the vineyard," as we see in Matt. 9:38, John 4:35-38, and elsewhere. The great word under the

law was, "This Do," for it set men to work; but by the works of the law no flesh has been justified.

This fact may be seen in the parable, for neither of the two sons was marked by full obedience. One made fair profession in words but totally disobeyed. The other flagrantly refused at first, but then was brought to repentance, and obedience as the fruit of that. Just so the chief priests and elders were deceiving themselves by their religious profession, while publicans and harlots repented and entered the kingdom. In verse 32 the Lord definitely connects the matter with John's ministry. He came at the close of the age of law, calling those who had failed under it to repentance. Thus the Lord Himself connected the parable with law and not the Gospel.

The parable of the householder and his vineyard follows. It is still the vineyard, we notice; and "the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel" (Isa. 5:7). Now we have not only their failure under the law but their ill-treatment of all the prophets by whom God had addressed their consciences, and then finally the mission of the Son, who came as the supreme test. The "husbandmen" of the parable evidently represent the responsible leaders of Israel, who now not merely repeated

their failure to produce any fruit for the benefit of the "householder," but crowned their wickedness by slaying the Son. They desired the whole inheritance for themselves. Thus the Lord summed up the indictment against Israel under these three heads: no fruit for God; ill-treatment of His servants the prophets; the rejection and murder of the Son.

Having propounded the parable He again said, in effect, "What think ye?" — submitting to their judgment what fate the husbandmen deserved. His opponents, though so acute as to things concerning their own interests, were obtuse and very blind to everything of a spiritual nature. Hence they entirely failed to discern the drift of the parable, and gave an answer which foretold the righteous doom which would come upon their own heads. They would find themselves in two words, dispossessed and destroyed.

The Lord accepted as correct the verdict they had passed upon themselves, quoting Psalm 118:22-23, in corroboration. He was the stone which they, the builders, were rejecting. He in no way fitted into the building which they designed and they refused Him. A day is coming when He will be brought forth to be the foundation and set the lines of the building that God has in

view; and this wonderful event will involve the destruction of wicked men and their false building.

In verse 43 and the beginning of verse 44 we get the present effects of His rejection. He becomes a stone of stumbling to the leaders of Israel and the mass of the nation, and in consequence they are broken as a people. This finally came to pass when Jerusalem was destroyed. God's kingdom had been established in their midst through Moses, and now this was definitely taken from them, and it was to be given in another form to a "nation" that would produce its proper fruits. The prophets of old had denounced the sin of the people, and announced that God would raise up another nation to supplant them, as we see in such scriptures as Deuteronomy 32:21; Isaiah 55:5; Isaiah 65:1; Isaiah 66:8. That nation will be "born at once" at the beginning of the millennial age; that is, they will be born again, and so have the nature that delights in the will of God, and enables them to bring forth fruit. We Christians anticipate this, as we see in 1 Peter 2:9. Redeemed and born again, we have been called out of darkness into God's marvellous light, and so are enabled as "an holy nation" to show forth the virtues of the One

who has called us. This surely is bringing forth fruit which gratifies Him.

The latter part of verse 44 refers to what will happen to the unbelieving at the beginning of the millennium. The Lord's words look like a reference to Daniel 2:34-35, and set forth the pulverizing effect of the Second Advent upon men, whether Jew or Gentile. So the teaching of these two verses comprises the national breaking of Israel as a consequence of their rejection of Christ, the substitution for them of a new "nation", and the final destruction of all adversaries when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed in flaming fire.

Having heard these things it dawned upon the darkened minds of the chief priests and Pharisees that He was speaking of them, and that unwittingly they had been condemning themselves. What a shock it must have given them! In their defeat they thought of murder, and were only restrained for the moment by fear of popular opinion. In verse 26 we saw fear of the people putting its restraint upon their tongues. In verse 46 it lays a restraining hand upon their actions.

Chapter 22

BUT THE LORD calmly pursued what He had to say to them, so in the opening of this chapter we have the parable of the marriage of the king's son, which predicts the Gospel day which was about to dawn. There is no question, "What think ye?" about this parable, for it travels beyond men's thoughts altogether. It is also distinguished from the other two parables by beginning, "The kingdom of heaven is like," or, more literally, "has become like." Men come under Heaven's jurisdiction by the reception of the Gospel invitation, when the breakdown is complete as figured in the other parables. We are now again going to hear something new, just as we did in chapter 13.

In this parable the king does not demand anything from anybody. He gives instead of demanding. He too has a "Son" in whose honour He makes a marriage feast, sending forth His servants to call men in. How aptly the call sets forth the Gospel message: "I have prepared ... all things are ready: come to the marriage." Prepared through the sacrifice of Christ. Ready, since His is a finished work. Hence it is not now "Go, work," but "Come."

In the first place the invitation went to "them that were bidden," a number of specially privileged folk. We see the fulfilment of this in the early chapters of Acts. For a short time the Gospel went out only to the Jew, but the mass of them made light of it, occupied with worldly gain, while some actively opposed, persecuting and slaying some of the early messengers, as seen in the case of Stephen. This first stage ended with the destruction of Jerusalem, as foretold in verse 7.

Then the invitation is widened out as we see in verses 9 and 10. In the parable of Luke 14 we find one servant, representing doubtless the Holy Spirit; here many servants are in question, representing the human instruments that the Spirit may use. They go into the highways, bidding all, as many as they meet, whether bad or good. The Spirit can "compel" men to come in, as in Luke 14: the servants are instructed to invite any and all they run up against. Not all will respond, but by this means the feast will have its full complement of guests. The Gospel preacher has not to embarrass himself with questions as to God's electing grace. He has simply to pass on the word to all he meets; gathering in all who respond, for God will touch the hearts of men.

The second part of the parable, verses 11-14, shows that, as always when human service is referred to, what is unreal may enter and remain for a time. By not accepting the wedding garment the man had declined to honour the king's son. When the king came in he was detected and consigned to his true place in outer darkness. The Divine presence will unmask all that is unreal and disentangle everything. We saw this in Matt. 13, and shall see it again in Matt. 25.

That the Pharisees were now getting desperate is seen in the fact that they were driven to an alliance with the Herodians, whom they abominated. Their question as to the tribute was cleverly framed so as to bring Him into disrepute with either Caesar or the populace. They began with what they intended to be flattery, but which was a sober statement of truth. He was true. He did teach the way of God in truth. He was wholly above regarding the person of men. Asking for the tribute money, He showed them that it was evidently Caesar's, for it had his image upon it. If Caesar's it must be rendered to him; but then He set them in the presence of God. Were they rendering to God the things that were His? This great answer not only amazed them but also so smote their consciences that they went

away. Jesus had stated a great principle of action applicable to all of us so long as we are under the jurisdiction of any kind of Caesar. We must render to Caesar all his rights, but the things that are God's are far higher and wider than all that is his.

The question propounded by the Sadducees was cleverly designed with the twofold object of embarrassing Jesus and of ridiculing belief in resurrection, which to their minds only meant a restoration to life under ordinary conditions in this world. Doubtless they felt sure that in result Jesus would be discomfited and themselves confirmed in their unbelief. But the Lord's reply showed that resurrection introduces into another world where different conditions prevail, and He quoted Exodus 3:6, as showing that in the days of Moses the Patriarchs were living in that other world, though not yet raised from the dead. The fact that their spirits were there guaranteed that eventually they would be there in risen bodies.

In those days the priests were mainly of the Sadducee persuasion, and the Lord did not spare them in the directness of His rebuke. "Ye do err," was His plain word, and He indicated the source of their error; they knew neither the Scriptures, that they professed to expound, nor the power of the God, whom they

professed to serve. This twofold error underlies all modern religious unbelief. First, the Scriptures are frequently misquoted and always misunderstood. Second, in their minds God is so stripped of His power and glory that endless difficulties are created. Let His power be admitted and difficulties cease to exist.

The Lord's answer astonished all who heard it. Evidently it was quite new to them, even to the Pharisees, who had never been able to silence the Sadducees like this. Hearing it, the Pharisees came together, and one of them put to the Lord his question about the law, raising a point that they had doubtless often discussed amongst themselves. He was thinking of the ten Commandments in Exodus 20, but the Lord turned him to Deuteronomy 6:5, and added Leviticus 19:18. The demand of the law is summed up in one word — love. First, love to God; second, love to one's neighbour. When Paul tells us, "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10), he is only stating in other words what Jesus said here (verse 40).

The three parables had brought them face to face with the grace of the Gospel; the three questions had been so answered as to impress upon them love, as the supreme demand of the law. To

that love they were strangers. Yet being still gathered together Jesus propounded to them His great question, "What think ye of Christ? whose Son is He?" They knew He was to be the Son of David, but why David should call him his Lord, in Psalm 110, they did not know. The only possible solution of that problem has been given in the first chapter of our Gospel. "Jesus Christ, the Son of David" is "Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." If faith once seizes that, the whole position is as clear as sunlight. If that be refused, as with these poor Pharisees, all is gloom. They were in darkness. Not a word could they answer, and their discomfiture was so complete that they dared not question Him more.

However though they were done with Him, the Lord had not finished with them. The time had now come to unmask these hypocrites in the presence of the multitudes, who were under their influence.

Chapter 23

THIS CHAPTER RECORDS his burning words. In a few days the multitude, influenced by these men, would be shouting for His death. Their responsibility and guilt was greatly increased

by this warning the Lord gave them as to the true character of their leaders.

He began by according to them the place they claimed as the exponents of the law of Moses. Therefore the people were to keep and do the law as they heard it from their lips. Yet they were to carefully avoid taking them as examples. Their lives contradicted the law they proclaimed. They legislated for others without the smallest conscience as to their own obedience. This the Lord stated in verse 4, and it is a very common offence with professional religionists, who love directing other people while having an easy time themselves.

Then, in verses 5-12, He exposed their love of notice and pre-eminence. All was for the eye of men. At feasts — the social circle — in synagogues — the religious circle — in markets — the business circle — they wanted the chief place as Rabbis and Masters. The disciple of Christ is to be the exact opposite of all this, so let us take it deeply to heart. The abasement of such men is only a matter of time. They were supposed to be signposts into the kingdom but really they were obstructions. They did not enter themselves and hindered others.

Moreover, they used their position to rob the poor and defenceless widow, covering up this enormity with the parade of long prayers, consequently they should receive severer judgment. Long prayers may impress the crowd, but they did not impress the Lord! Let us remember this and avoid them ourselves. We venture to affirm that no one marked by deep desire and really conscious of the presence of God, can wander about in a maze of words. As Ecclesiastes 5:2 indicates, his words must be few.

Great zeal for the making of proselytes is characteristic of the Pharisaic mind, and the Lord's words in verse 15 expose a remarkable feature of mere proselytism. It reproduces with added emphasis the character of the proselytizers in those who are proselytized. The Pharisees were children of hell, and their converts were the same in a twofold way. This is why there is always a tendency for evil men and seducers to wax worse and worse, until all is ripe for judgment.

In verses 16-22, the Lord condemns their fanciful teachings. The distinctions they draw between the temple and the gold of the temple, between the altar and the gift upon it, might make the unthinking regard them with awe as possessing very superior minds; in reality their distinctions were purely imaginary

and only a proof of their own blindness and folly. So with other matters; much punctiliousness over small things; much negligence as to great things — whether positively, as to what they observed, as in verse 23, or negatively, as to what they refused, as in verse 24. Blind they were indeed, and that type of blindness is all too common today.

Verses 25-28, expose another pernicious characteristic; they only concerned themselves about external cleanliness, so as to appear well in the eyes of men. They had no concern for the inside which was open to the eye of God. They were most careful as to possible defilement acquired by contact from without; yet most careless as to defilement which they themselves generated from within. In result they became centres of defilement, and far from acquiring it from others they diffused it to others. This is a most subtle evil, from any suspicion of which we may well pray to be preserved.

Lastly, verses 29-33, the Lord charged them with being the murderers of God's prophets. They built tombs for the earlier prophets, since the sting of their words was no longer felt, but they were truly the children of those that had killed them; and, true to the principle of verse 15, they would prove themselves

twofold more the children of murder; filling up the sins of their fathers, and ending up without a doubt in the damnation of hell.

This passage furnishes us with the most terrible denunciation from the lips of Jesus, of which we have any record. He never said such things to any poor publican or sinner. These hot words were reserved for religious hypocrites. He was full of grace and truth. Grace with truth He extended to the confessed sinners. The searchlight of truth, without mention of grace, was reserved for the hypocrites.

So it came to pass that the blood of a long line of martyrs was going to lie at the door of that generation; and now for the last time Jerusalem was having the opportunity of trusting under the wings of Jehovah, who was amongst them in the person of Jesus. Often He would have thus sheltered them as the Psalms bear witness, and often would Jesus have gathered them during His sojourn amongst them; but they would not. Consequently the beautiful house in Jerusalem, once owned as Jehovah's was now disowned. It was just their house and desolate; and He who would have filled it was going from them, to be unseen till they should say, "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord." They will not say this, as Psalm 118 shows, until that

day arrives "which the Lord has made," when "the stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner."

Chapter 24

ALL THAT WE have been reading, from Matt. 21:23, had taken place in the temple precincts. Now, Matt. 24:1, Jesus departed, and the disciples desired to call His attention to some of its splendid buildings, only to draw from Him the prediction that it was to be razed to its foundations. This started their enquiries as to the time of the fulfilment of His saying, which they connected with the end of the age. The first words of His reply show that His predictions are to forewarn and forearm us, and not merely to minister to our curiosity, or even our thirst for accurate knowledge. We are to take heed to ourselves.

False Christs are foretold together with wars and rumours, but these things do not indicate the end. There are to be famines, pestilences, earthquakes, as well as wars, but these are only the beginning of sorrows. Coupled with these things there shall be the persecution and martyrdom of disciples, the apostasy of some who have professed discipleship, the rising up of false prophets, the abounding of iniquity, and backsliding in heart of

many professors. In an hour like that the real ones will be marked by endurance to the end when salvation will reach them. Moreover, all the time God will maintain His own witness among all the nations, and when this is completed the end shall come.

Three times in these verses does the Lord speak of "the end," and in each case He refers to the end of the age, as to which the disciples had enquired. To His true disciples, marked by endurance, the end will bring salvation. He emphasizes this first, before saying that it will bring judgment for His foes. Let it be noted that it is "this Gospel of the kingdom" which must be fully preached before the end comes; that is, the Gospel which the Lord Himself had preached — see Matt. 4:23; Matt. 9:35 — announcing the kingdom as at their doors. The Gospel which we preach today — see, 1 Corinthians 15:1-14 — could not in the nature of things be declared before Christ had died.

At the time of the end the abomination of desolation, spoken of in Daniel 12:11, is to be found in the holy place, and Jerusalem is in question, as verse 16 shows. Evidently there again will be a temple with its holy place at the time of the end, to be desecrated by this supremely abominable idolatry. At this time will

be fulfilled the prophecy of Matt. 12:43-45: the evil spirit of idolatry will enter into the people with seven-fold force, and the mass of them will accept this abomination standing in the holy place — most probably "the image of the beast," spoken of in Revelation 13:14-15. Because of this crowning iniquity desolation will fall upon them in the government of God. Now the setting up of this abomination is to be the signal to the godly that the predicted great tribulation is begun, and that their safety lies in flight from Jerusalem and Judaea, where the furnace of affliction will be at its hottest. The Lord was speaking to His disciples, who at that moment were just godly Israelites surrounding their Messiah on earth, though presently they were to be built into the foundation of the church that was to be. Hence at that moment they represented, not the church, but the godly remnant of Israel, still carefully observing the law of the sabbath (verse 20), and many of them located in Judaea. Instant flight was to be their course. This agrees with what is set forth symbolically in Revelation 12:6.

The great tribulation is wholly unprecedented and never to be equalled, let alone surpassed. This the Lord states in verse 21; and the reason of it is, that as the book of Revelation shows, it

will be a time of infliction of wrath from heaven — the out-pouring of the vials of judgment. It will not be merely a case of men afflicting men, or a nation scourging other nations, as we see so strikingly today, but of God scourging the nations as He settles His accounts with them. Wrath from God is "revealed from heaven" (Rom. 1:18), though not yet executed, and as far as the nations are concerned it will fall at this time. Nations as such are only found in this world; they do not exist beyond the grave, though the men composing them do.

There will be elect souls on earth during the tribulation and for their sake it will be cut short, as verse 22 tells us: as it says in Romans 9:28. the Lord will make "a short work ... upon the earth," and this in order that a remnant may be saved. Today God is dispensing mercy through the Gospel, and He has made a very lengthy work of it, extending to nineteen centuries: when He dispenses wrath He will make swift work, cutting it short in righteousness. A brief three and a half years will cover it, as other scriptures show. Thus the goodness of God will be manifested both in mercy and in wrath.

At that time the devil will know very well that the coming of Christ is about to take place; hence he will aim at confusing the

issue by raising up imposters and endowing them with supernatural powers, hoping to deceive the elect who are looking for Him. Verse 24 plainly indicates that not all miraculous signs are of God. There are two kinds — the Divine and the devilish. In the Divine kind there is a manifestation of the Divine character in grace and power; the devilish kind may often be more flashy and startling and attractive to unconverted men. People today, who have an itching desire for the miraculous should have great care lest they be deceived.

The coming of the true Christ of God will be marked by the greatest possible publicity, like the lightning. No one will need to penetrate to a remote desert or a secret chamber in order to see Him. Just as the vultures are found wherever the carcass is, so will He fall in judgment wherever men are found rotting in the putridity and pestilence of sin.

The tribulation will be followed by the breaking up and the overturning of existing powers both in heaven and on earth, and then the Son of Man will be manifested in His glory. Twice previously the Lord had spoken of "the sign of the prophet Jonas" (Matt. 12:39-40; Matt. 16:4) which was the Son of Man three days in the grave. Here, we have the sign of the Son of

Man in heaven — The sign that at last God is about to assert His rights in this rebellious earth, and enforce them by the Man of His purpose and choice. Two great signs are these! Who shall say which of them is-greater? Both are equally great in their season, and command our worshipful adoration.

Having appeared in His glory, He will gather together His elect, those for whose sake the tribulation days have been shortened. This gathering will be accomplished by angelic ministration and signalized by the great sound of a trumpet; it will be the fulfilment of the feast of trumpets (Lev. 23, 24, 25), just as the Passover has been fulfilled in the death of Christ, and Pentecost in the gift of the Spirit and formation of the church. This gathering of the elect is in view of millennial blessedness; there is no mention of any rapture to heaven, or even of resurrection, for it is the gathering together of living people on earth. In chapter 16 the Lord had revealed that He was going to build His church, but its heavenly calling and destiny had not been revealed, so the church must not be read into verse 31.

With verse 32 we commence a series of parables and parabolic sayings. The fig tree is a parable of the Jew; and when we see a reviving of national life with that people we are to know that

summer time is at hand, but until all things are fulfilled and that moment comes "this generation" shall not pass away. The Lord has spoken a number of times of this generation — see Matt. 11:16; Matt. 12:39, 45; Matt. 16:4. It is a very ancient and persistent generation, for Moses denounced it in Deuteronomy 32:5 and 20 — "children in whom is no faith." The unbelieving generation will meet its doom when Jesus comes, but not before. They will go, and the words of Christ will abide.

The exact time of His advent is a secret known only to the Father, who has reserved all times and seasons under His own authority (see Acts 1:7); and because this is so it will come as a complete surprise to the heedless world. It will be just as in the days of Noah; men engrossed in their pleasures till the judgment falls upon them. Then an eternal separation for both men and women will take place. Zephaniah 3:11-13, will be fulfilled; the transgressors will be taken away in judgment; the afflicted and poor people who trust in the name of the Lord will be left for millennial blessings, and these are "the remnant of Israel."

Arrived at verse 42, we again see how the Lord brought these prophetic realities to bear upon the conduct of His disciples.

Since they did not know the hour, they were to be marked by watchfulness and faithful service. The servant to whom rule is entrusted must fulfil his responsibility. Doing so, he will be blessed and rewarded. On the other hand it is possible for men to take the place of servants and yet be evil. Such will ignore their responsibilities and maltreat their fellow-servants, saying in their hearts, "My Lord delays His coming." That is always the thought of the world. They listen to the prophecy and then say, "The vision that he sees is for many days to come, and he prophesies of the times that are far off" (Ezek. 12:27). The true servant maintains himself in readiness for his Lord's approach and diligently cares for His interests while he waits.

Verses 50-51 show that the "evil servant" contemplated is not a man grievously failing and yet true at bottom, but a man who is entirely false. His Lord will judge him and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites because he is a hypocrite. He is banished under judgment to his own company. When the hypocrite is unmasked and judged there is weeping and gnashing of teeth indeed.

Chapter 25

THE PARABLE OF the ten virgins opens this chapter. This world presents a very tangled scene in every direction. The coming of the Lord is going to produce a thorough disentanglement. We have already seen this in the parables of the wheat and the tares, and that of the net cast into the sea, in Matt. 13, and again in the verses we have just considered at the close of Matt. 24. The same great fact meets us again in this fresh similitude of the kingdom of heaven. The Lord had already mentioned the church in an anticipatory way, but He does not here say, "Then shall the church be likened ... " but, "the kingdom of heaven," which is wider than the church, though including it. Hence the "ten virgins" do not represent the church distinctively, though it is included within their scope.

Hence we are surely right in applying the parable to saints of the present moment — to ourselves. The virgins "went forth" to meet the bridegroom, and we have been called out of the world to wait for the Lord. There did supervene a period of forgetfulness and slumber in the church's history. A stirring cry as to the Bridegroom's coming has been sounded forth, a cry which has said, "Go ye out to meet Him;" that is, revert to your original

position as a called out people. So long as there was slumber there was little or no discernible difference between the true and the false, but directly they awoke and reverted to their original place the difference became manifest, and those who had no oil were revealed. The oil represents the Holy Spirit, and "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:9).

This parable has been pressed into service to support the idea that only devoted, wide-awake believers will meet the Lord when He comes, and that believers of lesser merit will be penalized. We believe this to be a mistake. The point all through this passage is the way in which the coming of the Lord will make complete separation between those who really are His and those who are not. In this parable we see the separation made between real and spurious in the sphere of profession, and the seal of the Spirit is only possessed by those truly Christ's. The shutting of the door sealed the rejection of the false. The foolish do not represent backsliders who once knew the Lord and were known of Him. The word is not "I once knew you, but now disown you," but rather, "I know you not."

Now the Lord knows those who are His, but these were strangers to Him.

In verse 13 the Lord applies this parable to His disciples, and to us. We know not the time of the coming of the Son of Man, and we are to watch. Thus again and again does He bring His prophetic teaching to bear upon our characters and behaviour. He does not give us light as to what is coming just to inform our minds and satisfy our desires for us. So having exhorted us to watchfulness He proceeds to show in the rest of this chapter how His coming is going to affect us as servants, and indeed how it will affect the world. The disentanglement it is to produce will be complete.

The parable of the servants and the talents is brought in to reinforce the exhortation to watch, given in verse 13; and it shows how the coming of the Son of Man will test all who take the place of being His servants, and lead to the casting out of all that is unreal. It is a thought calculated to sober us all, that during the time of His absence the Lord has committed His "goods" to His people. His interests have been placed in our hands, and we cannot avoid the point of the parable by saying, "I have no special gift and therefore it does not apply to me."

The master delivered his goods to his servants, "every man" of them, and he had the discrimination which enabled him to appraise the capacity of each, and so he apportioned to each "according to his several ability." We may distinguish therefore between the gifts that may be bestowed upon us and the abilities that we may possess, always remembering that the Lord adjusts the relation between the two things. Our abilities would cover our natural powers as well as our spiritual, and if these are not very large five talents, or even two, might be only a burden to us. If that be so, the Lord knows it and He only gives us one. We might connect this with the gifts spoken of in Romans 12:6-15, which are of such a character as to cover all the people of God. Whether the gift bestowed be large or small, the great thing is to use it with diligence.

Equal diligence was shown by the servants who received the five talents and the two. Each succeeded in doubling that which was entrusted to him, and when their Lord returned they both shared equally in his approbation and reward. Again in this parable, be it noted, the contrast does not lie between the more or less faithfulness and diligence, which may mark true servants, but between servants who were true, though their measure of

ability differed, and the one that was no true servant at all. He that had received the one talent hid it in the earth instead of using it in his master's interest; and this he did because he had no real knowledge of his lord. He claimed to know that he was a hard man, exacting more than his due, one to be afraid of. His lord took him up on the ground of the knowledge that he claimed to have, and showed that his plea only aggravated his guilt, for had he been a hard man the more reason there would have been for diligent use of the talent entrusted.

In reality the lord was anything but a hard man as witnessed by his treatment of the servants who were good and faithful. The fact of the matter was that this servant had no true knowledge of his lord, no true link with him. In result he lost all that had been entrusted to him, and he was ejected into outer darkness to weeping and gnashing of teeth, as was the false servant portrayed at the end of the previous chapter. In the similar parable recorded in Luke 19, the distinction is drawn between the different servants with their degrees of zeal and faithfulness, and they are rewarded accordingly. The servant with one pound suffers loss but he is not ejected into outer darkness. It is worthy of note that in both cases the failure is seen with the man who

is entrusted with the least. If we probe our own hearts, we shall recognize that when we are only capable of small things our tendency is to do nothing. The Lord will assuredly honour the servant who though of small ability, does the small things with zeal and fidelity.

The closing paragraph of this chapter (verses 31-46) is not introduced as a parable. The parables began with verse 32 of Matt. 24, and now that they are completed, verse 31 picks up the thread of the prophetic recital from 24:31. When He comes, the Son of Man will not only gather together His elect, but He will summon the nations before Him, so that there may be a complete disentanglement right through the earth of the good and the evil. All the nations are to be assembled before Him, and the scene is one that takes place on the earth. In the final assize, when earth and heaven are fled away, predicted in Revelation 20, no nations appear: it is just "the dead, small and great," for in death all national distinctions disappear.

Other scriptures inform us as to the warrior judgments to be executed by Christ in person, when at Armageddon the mighty armies of the various kings of the earth will be destroyed. These judgments however will still leave multitudes of non-

combatants, and all these must pass before the scrutiny of the Son of Man, for only He can discriminate and disentangle with unerring wisdom. He will do this as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats; and the issues depending on His judgment will be eternal, just as they will be in the judgment of the great white throne. Also here, as there, men will be judged according to their works.

The true state of every heart is known to God altogether apart from works; yet when public judgment is instituted it is always according to works, since they indicate plainly and infallibly what that state is, and thus the rightness of the Divine judgments is manifest to all beholders. These messengers, whom the King owns as "My brethren," had gone forth as His representatives, and the treatment they received had varied according to the view taken of the Son of Man whom they represented. Those who believed in Him identified themselves with His messengers, and ministered to them in their rejection and afflictions: those who did not believe in Him paid them no attention at all. Those who had faith declared it by their works. Those who had no faith equally declared it by their works.

Take note of the fact that the King does not charge the condemned ones with persecuting and imprisoning His servants, but only with ignoring them — treating them with neglect. It fits in with the great question of Hebrews 2, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" In that day it will be seen that if men treat Christ with neglect, by neglecting His servants, they came under eternal condemnation.

Who are "these My brethren"? If we consider the whole prophetic discourse, of which this is the concluding part, the answer is not difficult. In the opening of His discourse the Lord addressed His disciples personally and told them how they would be hated, afflicted and betrayed, but that the end would only come when "this gospel of the kingdom" should have been preached for a witness to all nations, and that those who endured to the end should be saved. He spoke as though the disciples before Him would be there at the end because He viewed them in a representative capacity. The "brethren" at the end of the discourse are the disciples of the last days, who were represented by the disciples of the first days, to whom the Lord was speaking. Now though these were a little later baptised by the Spirit into the one body, which is the church, as recorded in

Acts 2, they were at that moment simply a remnant of Israel who had discovered the Messiah in Jesus, and attached themselves to Him. They represented a similar remnant of Israel who in the last days will have their eyes opened and pick up the broken thread of "this gospel of the kingdom" — broken when Christ was rejected on earth, and picked up and renewed just before He returns to earth to reign.

In the closing paragraph of Matt. 25 the end is come. The Son of Man is King, the disciples who endured to the end are saved, the nations are judged, the disentanglement of the good and the evil is complete, the result of the judgment is eternal. Three times the word eternal occurs. The punishment of the wicked and the fire into which they go are eternal: the life into which the righteous pass is eternal. The antithesis to life is not cessation of existence, as it would be if life merely signified existence as the result of the vital spark remaining in us: it is punishment, because eternal life signifies the whole realm of blessed and eternal verities in which the righteous will move for ever. The point here is not that the life is in them, but that they pass into it. On that happy note the Lord's prophetic discourse ended.

Chapter 26

THIS CHAPTER BRINGS US back to the history of the last few days of the Lord's life on earth. The opening verses give us a peep into the palace of the high priest, and we find it to be full of craft and counsels of murder. In verses 6-13, we turn from this most atrocious wickedness in high places to behold an action of love and devotion in a humble home, where some of the godly remnant dwelt. From John 12 we gather that the woman was Mary of Bethany. She evidently anointed both His head and His feet, but Matthew, emphasizing His kingly character, mentions that His head was anointed, as befits a king: John emphasizing His Deity, tells us that His feet were anointed, though a great servant like John the Baptist was not worthy to unbind His sandals.

The disciples were entirely out of sympathy with this act of devotion, regarding it as mere waste. Their complaint was instigated by Judas Iscariot, as John's Gospel shows us, yet it revealed them as thinking first of money and then of the poor, while ignorant and mystified as to His approaching death. The woman thought neither of money nor of the poor. Christ filled her vision, and He knew how to interpret her action. Very prob-

ably she acted more from instinct than from intelligence; but she was conscious that death now threatened the Object of her affection and worship, and the Lord accepted what she did as for His burial. Not only did He approve but He ordained that her devoted act should be held in continual remembrance wherever the gospel is preached. And so it has been.

The woman's devotion stands in the strongest possible contrast with the hatred of the religious leaders, related in the preceding paragraph, and the treachery of Judas, related in the paragraph that follows. Violence reached its climax in the leaders — they would slay Him at once without scruple. Corruption reached its climax in Judas, who having companied with Jesus for three years was desirous of making the paltry profit of thirty pieces of silver by His betrayal. A bond-slave in Israel was estimated as being worth thirty shekels of silver, as Exodus 21:32 shows.

Then again, if the second paragraph of our chapter (verses 6-13) shows us the devotion of a disciple to her Lord, the fourth paragraph (verse 17 and onwards) shows us the solicitude of the Lord for His disciples, and how He counted on their remembrance of Him during the approaching time of His absence.

The passover was eaten in the place of the Lord's choosing, and as it proceeded He identified the traitor and warned him of his doom. The going of the Son of Man by betrayal into death had been predicted in the Holy Writings, but this did not in any degree lessen the gravity of the traitor's act. The fact that God is omniscient and can foretell men's acts does not relieve them of responsibility for what they do. By his act Judas revealed his true self. Jesus was about to reveal Himself fully by His death.

As the Passover meal drew to its close Jesus instituted His supper as the memorial of His body given and His blood shed for us for the remission of sins. In the wording of verses 26-29 there is nothing that definitely states that the institution is to be observed until He comes again: for that we have to turn to 1 Corinthians 11. The fact is inferred in verse 29, for the cup speaks of blessing and joy, and of that the Lord will drink in a new way when the kingdom comes: meanwhile the cup is for us and not for Him. Today He is marked by patience: in the day of the kingdom He will enter into blessing and joy in an altogether new way. Meanwhile we have the memorial of His death, for in it His body and blood are presented to us not conjointly as though He were a living Man on earth, but separ-

ately: this bread, His body, and that cup, His blood, poured forth; thus symbolizing His death.

On their way to the Mount of Olives Jesus foretold how His death would mean their scattering, as the Scripture had said, but He pointed them to His resurrection and appointed a meeting place in Galilee, where He would regather them. Peter, however, filled with self-confidence, resisted the warning to his own undoing, and also to his missing the fact and import of the resurrection. All the disciples were marked by the same thing, though not to the same degree.

They were very soon put to the test in Gethsemane. There Jesus entered in spirit into the sorrow of the death that was before Him, but wholly in communion with His Father. His very perfection caused Him to shrink from all that was involved in suffering and death as the judgment of God, yet He accepted that cup from the Father's hand. Further, it was a tribute to the perfection of His manhood that He should desire sympathy from the chosen disciples, but the prophetic word was fulfilled — "I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none" (Ps. 69:20). Peter and the others, who were so sure that they never would deny Him, could not watch

with Him one hour. Their flesh was too weak, but as yet they knew it not. Neither did they know that the treachery of Judas was coming to fruition, and the crisis was upon them.

Yet so it was, and in the rest of this chapter we see the amazing contrast between the Christ of God and all others who in any way came into contact with Him. All display their own peculiar deformities: His is the one serene figure in the centre of the picture.

First there comes Judas, the traitor; masking his treachery with such hypocrisy that nineteen centuries after the event "the traitor's kiss" remains a proverbial expression of disgust. In the language of Psalm 41:9, here was "Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of My bread," and he had "lifted up his heel against Me." Hence Jesus addressed him as "Friend," but asked him the searching question, "wherefore art thou come?" He had come to betray his Master so that he might gain thirty paltry pieces of silver.

The sickening hypocrisy of the false disciple is followed by the fleshly zeal of a true one, whom we know to be Peter from John's Gospel. The self-confident man sleeps when he should

be awake, and he smites when he should be quiet, and when his action would have been to his Master's discredit, had it not been disallowed. A time is coming when "the saints" will be "joyful in glory," when "the high praises of God" will be "in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance" (Ps. 149:5-7); but that is at the time of the second Advent and not the first. Peter's action was entirely out of place and inviting a sword-stroke upon himself. It was also entirely out of harmony with his Master's attitude, who had irresistible might at His disposal and yet suffered Himself to be led as a lamb to the slaughter, as the Scripture had indicated.

When God would blot out from under heaven the cities of the plain He sent but two angels to deliver the blow. If twelve legions had been launched at the rebellious world what would have happened? The prayer that would have launched them was not uttered, and Peter's blow, that was struck as much for himself as for his Master, was simply ridiculous. When we are content to suffer as Christians we are spiritually victorious; when we take the sword we lose the spiritual battle and ultimately perish by the sword. One of the main reasons why the Reformation of four centuries ago was so badly arrested and

defaced was that its chief promoters flew to the sword in its defence, and thereby turned it into a national and political movement rather than a spiritual one.

Next we see the Lord calmly dealing with the rough mob who, led by Judas, had come to arrest Him. He showed them the unsuitability and even folly of their doings. Yet in the presence of this mob the fortitude of all the disciples collapsed, and they forsook their Master and fled. Such are even the best of men!

The mob deliver Him to the leaders of Israel, and these men who claimed to represent God, had thrown away any pretence of seeking righteousness. We are not told that they were misled into accepting false evidence, nor that they were tempted into receiving it because it was thrust upon them. No, it says, they "sought false witness against Jesus, to put Him to death." They SOUGHT it. Has there ever, we wonder, been another trial upon this earth where the judges started by hunting for liars, that they might condemn the accused? Thus it was here; and in the presence of it Jesus held His peace. Judgment being utterly divorced from righteousness, He met them with a dignity that was Divine, and He only spoke to affirm His Christhood, His Sonship, and to affirm His coming glory as the Son of Man.

On this they condemned Him, but the high priest broke the law by rending his clothes as he condemned Him, thereby only condemning himself. This was the signal for a pandemonium of insults, in the midst of which stood the serene figure of our Saviour and our Lord. The calm brightness of His presence helps us to see the dark degradation in which they were sunk.

Lastly, in this chapter, Peter reaps what he had sown by his self-confidence. We read of his following afar off in verse 58, now we find him amongst the enemies of his Lord and unable to stand. He proves himself to be weak just where he had appeared to be strong, inasmuch as impetuosity is not the same thing as courage. Fleshly energy had impelled him into a position where he never ought to have been, and he fell. We cannot throw stones at him. Rather let us pray that if we find ourselves in a similar case we may be granted repentance similar to that recorded in the last verse — a repentance that started directly the fall had been consummated.

Chapter 27

THE CLOSING SCENES of the Lord's life are told by Matthew in a way that emphasizes the excessive guilt of the leaders

of Israel. This feature has been noticeable all through, and we specially see it in Matt. 23. The opening verses of this chapter show us that though His official condemnation had to come from Pilate, yet the animus that hounded Him to His death was found with them.

The sequence of the story is broken by a parenthetical paragraph giving us the miserable end of Judas. It looks as if he had expected the Lord to evade His adversaries and pass from their midst as He had done aforetime, but now seeing Him condemned and submitting to their hands he was filled with remorse and horror at what he had done. His was not the genuine "repentance to salvation not to be repented of," for that goes hand in hand with faith. Now faith was what he lacked, for had he possessed it he would have turned to his Master as did Peter, who also had grievously failed. His eyes were opened to his sin and he confessed it, while also confessing the innocence of Jesus, yet he flung himself out of life and into a suicide's grave. The very man who was instrumental in handing the Saviour over to His foes had to confess His innocence. God so ordained it; and this is very striking.

The very name, Judas, has become a byword for iniquity, but Annas and Caiaphas were worse than he. Verse 4 shows this. Judas betrayed innocent blood and they condemned it. He at least had some feeling of remorse for what he had done — sufficient to drive him to self-destruction. They had no feeling whatever. What was innocent blood to them? They had no compunction in shedding it, nor had they any fear of the God who requites evil. They were prepared to "murder the innocent," saying in their hearts, "Thou wilt not require it" (Ps. 10:8, 13). Had they the smallest fear of God they would never have said, "His blood be on us, and on our children," as recorded in our chapter.

Judas never profited by his thirty pieces of silver. Seduced and ultimately possessed by the devil, he threw away everything for nothing. That is always the end of the story when silly little men attempt to drive a bargain with the giant spirit of evil. The silver was now again in the hands of the priests and became the occasion for them to crown their other sins with supreme hypocrisy. With legal scrupulosity they could not put it in the treasury because it was the price of blood. But who made it such? Why, they themselves! So they fulfilled the scripture by buying

the potter's field. Their act became public, and thus the field acquired its name. The irony of Divine governmental judgment can be discerned in the name, for that land has been a field of blood and a burial place for strangers ever since that day; and will be yet in larger measure, and until the day when at last the Redeemer shall come to Zion.

The religious authorities had now handed Jesus over to the civil governor, and verses 11-26 relate what transpired before him. When examined by Pilate before the multitude Jesus only uttered two words, "Thou sayest," the equivalent of one English word, "Yes," He confessed that He indeed was the King of the Jews, which was the specific charge laid at His door in the presence of the Roman power. The three Synoptic Gospels agree on this point. John records other questions raised by Pilate and answered by the Lord in the comparative privacy of the judgment hall, and three times he records Pilate going out from thence to the people. As far as the public examination was concerned Jesus "answered nothing," for there was really nothing to answer; as Pilate very soon perceived, though he marvelled greatly. He was well versed in the subtle ways of the Jews and his acute legal mind soon discerned that envy was at the bot-

tom of the prosecution. On the other hand he feared the people and wished to stand well with them.

Hence Pilate had a strangely disturbed mind. To condemn Jesus he must violate his judicial sense as well as his wife's dream and intuition. He was evidently agitated as the subterfuge failed, by which he hoped to extricate himself from the dilemma. The accusing multitude was agitated by the cunning priests and elders. The only serene figure in the terrible scene is that of the Prisoner Himself. We see Pilate virtually abdicating as to his judicial function in the case and throwing the responsibility on the people. He did not really absolve himself of course, but it did lead to the people putting themselves under full responsibility for the blood of their Messiah. In verse 25 we find the explanation of the sorrows that fell upon the people, and that have continued to dog the footsteps of their children to this day. They have yet to face the great tribulation before the account is settled according to the government of God.

Barabbas was released and Jesus condemned to be crucified, and next (verses 27-37) we see Jesus in the hands of the Roman soldiers. Here we see vulgar mockery, brutality, and at last the

act of crucifixion. To complete His humiliation they numbered Him amongst the transgressors by placing a thief on either hand. There was no justice, no mercy, no ordinary compassion whether He was in the hands of the religious, the civil or the military authorities. Jew and Gentile alike condemned themselves in condemning Him.

Verses 39-44 show us how all classes united in reviling Him as He was dying on the cross. Deep-dyed criminals have had to listen to stern words when they have been condemned to death, but we have not heard of even the most atrocious and depraved being mocked in their death agonies. Yet this is what happened when He who was the embodiment of all perfection, Divine as well as human, was on the cross. There was no difference, save in the type of language used. "They that passed by" were the ordinary folk on business bent. "The chief priests ... with the scribes and elders" were the upper classes. "The thieves also ... cast the same in His teeth." They represented the lowest, the criminal class; but they only followed the fashion in their crude and vulgar way. He was the Son of God and the King of Israel: He could have displayed His might then as easily as He will display it in judgment very shortly. Then He was displaying Di-

vine love by remaining where men had put Him with wicked hands, and bearing the judgment of sin Himself.

Matthew does not develop this in a doctrinal way, but he does pass on to record the solemn three hours of darkness, about the end of which time the holy Sufferer uttered with a loud voice the cry that had been written by the Spirit of prophecy in the opening words of Psalm 22, a thousand years before. The answer to the cry is supplied in the third verse of the Psalm, "Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." A holy God can only dwell in the praises of sinful people if atonement be wrought by the bearing of sin's judgment. The forsaking was the inevitable result of the One who knew no sin being made sin for us. The onlookers knew nothing of this: indeed they did not seem able to distinguish between God and Elijah.

After this there was, as verse 50 records, a last loud cry, and then the yielding up of His spirit. The actual words of that last cry are given us partly in John and partly in Luke. It was loud, showing that His strength was not impaired, and so the yielding up of His spirit was His own deliberate act. His death was su-

pernatural and it was at once followed by supernatural signs, indicating its significance and power.

The first of these acts of God touched the veil of the temple, which typified His flesh, as Hebrews 10 tells us. Under the law "the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest" (Heb. 9:8); but now it is made manifest, for the death of Christ is the basis of our approach to God. The second act touched the material creation, for the earth quaked, the rocks were rent, and graves opened. The third touched the bodies of sleeping saints, and after His arising they arose and appeared to many in Jerusalem. A threefold witness was thus rendered in most striking manner. The first concerned the presence of God, but it took place in the type of the veil, which was seen by the eyes of the priests alone. The second in the realm of nature must have been felt by everybody. The third, doubtless, was for the eyes of true saints alone. In addition to these signs the sun had previously been darkened. There was ample witness to the wonder of that hour, yet we do not read of any being impressed save the centurion on duty and those with him. In his heart was wrought the conviction that here was the Son of God — the very thing that His own people denied, and still deny.

As is often the case, when the men fail in courage and devotion the women supply the lack. The disciples had disappeared but many women lingered round the scene though standing afar off. One man, however came forward and had the courage to identify himself with the dead Christ, begging His body from Pilate, and he an unexpected one. He was a disciple of Jesus but hitherto a secret one, as we are told in John's Gospel. Here was the rich man with the new tomb, who so acted that Isaiah 53:9 was fulfilled. We know of nothing that Joseph of Arimathaea did save this one thing. God never fails to have a servant of His will who shall fulfil His Word. Joseph was born into the world to fulfil that one brief prophetic statement and so, though men would have appointed His grave with the wicked, He was with the rich in His death.

The women who were witnesses of His death and His burial were marked by devotion but not by intelligence. It was His bitter enemies who remembered that He had predicted that He would rise from the dead. Their hatred sharpened their memories and their wits, and led to their deputation to Pilate with a request for special precautions to be taken. His achievements in life they repudiated, regarding them as the first error. They

dreaded lest His resurrection should be established, realizing that it would have far more potent effects. It would to their minds be the last error and worse than the first. It would inevitably vindicate Him and condemn them, as they saw very well.

As with Joseph so with these men Pilate was in an acquiescent mood. Their request was granted: the watch of soldiers was set, but it does seem as if there was a touch of irony in his words, "Make it as sure as ye can." They did all they could, and in result accomplished nothing save putting the fact of His resurrection beyond all reasonable doubt when once He was risen, and their elaborate arrangements were all brushed aside. God turned their wisdom into folly and made their scheme serve His own purpose and overthrow their own.

Chapter 28

VERSE 1 of this chapter tells us that the two Marys who had watched His burial were back at the sepulchre immediately the sabbath day had ended. They came "as it was the dusk of the next day after the sabbath" (New Trans.). The day according to Jewish reckoning ended at sunset, and their devotion was such that directly the sabbath was over they were on the move and

visited the grave. It is not easy to piece together the details given us by the four Evangelists to form a connected narrative, but it would appear that the two Marys made this special visit and then returned at daybreak with Salome and possibly others, bearing spices for embalming. Mark and Luke tell us about this, and we should judge that verse 5 of our chapter refers to this second occasion, so that what is recorded in verses 2-4, took place between the two visits. Be that as it may, it is clear that by sunrise on the first day of the week Christ was risen.

An earthquake signalized His death, and a great earthquake, though apparently a very local one, for it was connected with the descent of the angel of the Lord, heralded His resurrection. The authorities of earth had sealed the tomb but a vastly higher authority broke the seal and flung back the stone door. At his presence the guards trembled and were smitten into death-like unconsciousness. The sealed tomb was the challenge of daring men. God accepted their challenge, broke their power, and reduced their representatives to nothingness. The Lord Jesus had been raised by the power of God, and the tomb was opened that men might see that without a doubt He was not there. The angel not only rolled back the stone but sat upon it, placing him-

self as a seal upon it in its new position, that no one might roll it back until an ample number of witnesses had seen the empty tomb.

Matthew tells us of one angel sitting on the stone. Mark tells us of one sitting on the right side, but inside the tomb. Luke and John both speak of two angels. Yet they all show us that though the women feared in the presence of the angels they were not smitten as were the soldiers. They were seeking the crucified Jesus, so "Fear not ye," was the word for them. His resurrection was announced and they were invited to see the spot where His body had lain, and where, as we gather from John's account, the linen wrappings lay all in their place and undisturbed, but out of which the sacred body had gone. One had only to see the place where He lay to be convinced that the body had not been abstracted or stolen. A supernatural act had taken place; and they were to go as messengers to the disciples, telling them to meet Him in Galilee.

Though filled with the conflicting emotions of fear and joy, the women received the angel's word with faith and consequently they set out in obedience. The obedience of faith was quickly rewarded by an appearance of the risen Lord Himself, and this

brought them to His feet as worshippers, and sent them on their way as messengers of the Lord and not merely of the angel. On the occasion of the last supper the Lord had appointed Galilee as the meeting place, and He confirmed it to them.

The parenthetical paragraph, verses 11-15, furnishes us with a striking contrast. We pass from the bright scene of resurrection with joy, faith, worship and testimony, to the dense darkness of unbelief with hatred, plotting, bribery and corruption, resulting in a lie of so flagrant a kind that its falsity was carried on its face. If they were asleep how could they know what had transpired? Money and the love of it lay at the root of this particular evil. The soldiers were bribed, and we should suppose that the persuading of the governor would be achieved in the same way. Anything to stop the truth as to the resurrection coming out! They realized how it would wreck their cause while establishing His, and the devil, who moved them, realized it far more keenly than they did. They only gave thirty silver coins to Judas to encompass His death, but they gave large money to the soldiers, endeavouring to suppress the fact of His resurrection.

The Gospel closes with the disciples meeting their risen Lord in Galilee, and with the commission He gave them there. No mention is made of the various appearances in Jerusalem or the ascension from Bethany. While pointing forward to the establishment of the church, this Gospel has in the main traced for us the transition from the presentation of the kingdom as connected with the Messiah upon earth as foretold by the prophets, to the kingdom of heaven in its present form: that is, in a mysterious form while the King is hidden in the heavens. Jerusalem was the place where they were to receive the Spirit and be baptized into the body, the church, not many days hence: Galilee was the district where was found the great majority of the godly remnant of Israel who, receiving Him, entered the kingdom whilst the mass of the people missed it.

So the Lord resumed links in resurrection with that remnant, the eleven disciples being the most prominent members of it; and though we do not hear of His being caught up into heaven yet He commissions them as though He were speaking from heaven, for all power was His, in heaven as much as on earth. The time had not yet come to reveal fully the Christian enterprise of gathering out of the nations a people for His name: the

terms here are more general. They were to go and make disciples and baptize them, and this is a commission which can be taken up by the believing remnant of Israel after the church is gone. As Israel were baptized to Moses their leader, so the disciple is to be baptized to the risen Christ as coming under His authority, and the baptism is to be in the name of God as He has been fully revealed. It is not plural but singular — not names but name — for though revealed in three Persons, the Godhead is one.

The closing word is, "I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age," so that in this closing word we have "all" no less than four times. Our exalted Lord wields all power in both spheres, so that nothing is beyond His reach. If anything adverse happens to His servants it must be by His permission. All nations are to be the scope of their service, and not in the midst of Israel only as heretofore. Those baptized from the nations are to be taught to observe all the Lord's commands and instructions, for the servants are to be marked by obedience, and to bring those that they reach into obedience also. Then all the days to the finish they can count on the support and spiritual presence of their Master.

Such is the commission with which the Gospel ends. As we travel on into the Acts and pass through the Epistles we find coming to light developments which furnish us with the full gospel commission of today yet we do not lose the light and benefit of what the Lord says here. We still go to all nations, baptizing in the Name. We still have to teach all the Lord's word. All power is still His. His presence will be with us all the days till the end of the age, no matter what may betide.