

# Simon Peter - 2 His Questions etc.

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Section 2 of 5 (chapters 9-12) of:

## **Simon Peter — His Life and Letters.**

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### **Contents**

Simon Peter — His Life and Letters. ....	1
Chapter 9 — His Questions. ....	2
Luke 12, Matthew 18, 19, etc. ....	2
RESPONSIBILITY AND RECOMPENSE. ....	2
HOW TO FORGIVE. ....	4
DEVOTEDNESS AND REWARD. ....	6
PRAYER AND FORGIVENESS. ....	8
WATCHING AND WORKING. ....	9
INTIMACY AND ITS RESULTS. ....	10
SELF-CONFIDENCE AND ITS END. ....	11
CHAPTER 10 — SIFTED AS WHEAT. ....	12
Luke 22: 31-34, 54-62. ....	12
CHAPTER 11 — RESTORATION, AND A NEW COMMISSION. ....	19
John 20, 21. ....	19
CHAPTER 12 — PENTECOST, AND HIS FIRST SERMON. ....	27
Acts 1, 2. ....	27

## Chapter 9 — His Questions.

### Luke 12, Matthew 18, 19, etc.

In nothing is simplicity more evidenced than in a question. The number of questions which Peter put to the Lord, and which are recorded by the Holy Ghost, is very noticeable and instructive. He was evidently an exceedingly simple man. This the character of his queries evince, while, at the same time, they show what an observant listener he was to the discourses of his blessed Master, and how his mind pondered on the heavenly ministry he was daily getting. That this ministry was beyond his then comprehension seems often apparent; but the abrupt way in which he propounded some question which was exercising his mind, and which had always a distinct connection with the subject of the Lord's foregoing instruction, betoken an activity, as well as a reflective condition of mind, which the impulsive character of the man scarcely prepares us for. Of these queries many are related, and to them we owe much valuable instruction from the lips of the Lord. We will look at them in the order of their occurrence, so far as I can gather their sequence from the Gospel narratives.

#### RESPONSIBILITY AND RECOMPENSE.

QUESTION 1. — "Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this *parable* unto us, or even to all?" (Luke 12: 41). We may here well inquire, What is a parable? In Scripture it is often "a thing darkly or figuratively expressed" (*Imp. Dict.*). Thus, "I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp" (Ps. 49: 4); "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old" (Ps. 78: 2), said the sweet Psalmist of Israel, and from his language we gather that a "parable" and a "dark saying" were synonymous. That Peter regarded the lovely instructions of Luke 12 as a "dark saying" is pretty clear from his question, but how he could regard such plain and simple ministry as having anything of the nature of a parable about it is difficult to see, save on the ground that the Holy Ghost had not yet come down, and did not indwell the disciples. Let us glance at the chapter, and profit by the so-called parable, the beauty of which is very great.

Luke always groups his facts to form a moral picture. Neither chronological nor dispensational truth is his special point. Matthew gives us the latter, and Mark evidently is the chronological Evangelist. In Luke 11 Christ has been definitively rejected by the nation of Israel. Luke 12 therefore supposes His absence from earth, and His disciples set in the place of testimony on it in the power of the Holy Ghost (to come when He went on high), and the world in opposition to them. The snares and the resources of His own, during His absence, and the attitude they should occupy till His return, are the main points of the passage. 1st, Hypocrisy — want of reality — is avoided by the light of God.

All will be revealed (Luke 12: 1-3). 2nd, The fear of man is cast out by a greater fear, — the fear of God, while the heart is filled with the sense of His protection, — the hairs of their head being actually counted (Luke 12: 4-7). 3rd, Faithfulness to Christ would be acknowledged (Luke 12: 8-11). 4th, The Holy Ghost would help them as to what to say if arraigned before synagogues (Luke 12: 11, 12). What motives and encouragements are here given! — God's light, God's care, Christ's reward, and the Holy Ghost's power!

The Lord then, as rejected, refuses to be a judge; and, from the circumstance brought before Him, bids His own "beware of covetousness." Here He really speaks a parable concerning the rich man. Alas! what became of his soul? The remedy for the disease that afflicted him — covetousness — is being "rich toward God" (Luke 12: 13-21). The great practical principles that are to mark His own are then unfolded. They are not to think of tomorrow, but to trust in God, "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things" is a lovely word indeed. If God's kingdom were sought, all else would be added. Precious instruction for our anxious hearts (Luke 12: 22-31). Thus fear, covetousness, and care, three terrible foxes that spoil the grapes in God's vintage, are disposed of: the fear of man, by the fear of God — covetousness, by being rich toward God; and care, by the care of God. Thus does the blessed Lord set the heart free from earth, to enter into what is heavenly, and be occupied with Himself, while waiting for His return.

But there is more than this: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Our hearts might fear lest we had not a crust for tomorrow; His heart shows itself by giving us the kingdom. The knowledge of this lifts the saint up. He becomes practically a pilgrim, and a stranger. He can part with things here, for he has a treasure in heaven; and "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12: 33, 34). The world's motto is "Slave, and gather." The Lord's injunction to His own is "Sell, and give." What a difference! But this the saint never will do until he has a treasure in heaven — even Jesus Himself. Do I hear you say? "I am trying to make Him my treasure." You will never manage it that way; but when you learn that He has a treasure on earth, and that you are that treasure, then, without an effort, you will make Him your treasure. "We love him because he first loved us." Moth, rust, and thieves sooner or later sweep away all we set our hearts on here. How good to have "a treasure in the heavens that faileth not"!

Notice that here three things influence the heart — the Father giving the kingdom, the prized treasure in heaven, and the expectation of the Lord's return. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves *like unto men* that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord, when he cometh, shall find *watching*: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. . . . *Be ye therefore ready also*: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not" (Luke 12: 35-40). Until the Lord comes they were to *wait* and *watch*, the lamps burning, and all ready; the whole position expressive of expectation, while devoted service marked the waiting hours. When He returned, He would bring them into the Father's house, gird Himself, make them sit down to meat, and serve them. This, I take it, alludes to His ever remaining in manhood, in which He has already served us in love. Love it was that led to His incarnation, and to His death; and when He has His own in glory, He will yet serve them, for He will never cease to love. Love delights to serve; selfishness likes to be served. How great the contrast between Jesus and us oftentimes!

Now the teaching of this chapter seems plain enough, though confessedly it be difficult always to walk up to it; but evidently Peter was dubious as to its application, and so says, "Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?" The Lord's answer is plain enough, as He says, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his

lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath," etc. (Luke 12: 42-48). Responsibility is the point here, connected with profession. All who profess the name of the Lord are clearly comprehended here. Whether true or false is not the question, although the issue to the false is sad in the extreme.

Two things are to mark Christ's disciples, — 1. They are to wait and watch for Him; 2. They are to serve Him till He return. "Occupy till I come" is the Master's word, and the loving labourer's motto. The true-hearted watcher, that waits with girded loins for His return, labours patiently till He arrive, and then finds his reward and rest in being with His Lord, is feasted by Him, — joy and happiness being ministered to him by the Lord Himself, — while his faithfulness in service gets its recompense by his being set over what belongs to His Lord. If there be professed servants, without reality, the end of such is detailed to Peter (vers. 45-48) in a way that I doubt not left its mark upon his soul, a mark that reappears clearly in his Epistles — especially the second — as we shall see in a future chapter. God requires of men according to their advantages. If this be so who will be so guilty as those who, while professing to be the servants of the Lord, neither do His will, nor wait His return? All Christ's professed servants would do well to carefully heed the Lord's reply to our apostle's earliest recorded query.

#### HOW TO FORGIVE.

QUESTION 2. — "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times. Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven" (Matt. 18: 21, 22). This query flowed very naturally out of what precedes it in the chapter, which contains principles of immense importance for the child of God. Matthew 18 supposes Christ to be absent, having been rejected, as Matthew 16 foretold, and the glory of Matthew 17 not yet come. It connects itself with chapter 16, in which, it will be remembered, two subjects are treated of by the Lord, — the Church, a new thing which He was about to build; and the kingdom of heaven, a well-known subject, the keys of which He promises to give to Peter. These two subjects the Lord again speaks of in chapter 18, unfolding the spirit which is to mark His followers, as suitable to His kingdom, and then the place which the church was to occupy on earth, in discipline, and in prayer.

The meekness of a little child, unable to assert its rights in a world that ignores it, — the spirit of humility and dependence, — alone befitted the kingdom (Matt. 18: 1-4). Carefulness not to offend these little ones is enjoined, combined with the most stringent severity as to self. To be a stumbling-block, or a snare, to one of the little ones that believed in Christ, was to ensure terrible judgment. Tender care for the weakest, and severe self-judgment, was to be the rule of the kingdom. If this existed, no stumbling-block would offend the least, and no snare entangle the disciple (Matt. 18: 5-9). Further, the Father thought of these little ones. They were the objects of His favour. He did not despise them, but admitted them to His presence, lowly as they were; and His Son — the Son of man — had "come to save that which was lost" (Matt. 18: 10-14). Moreover, if offence arose, if a brother trespassed; the fullest grace in forgiveness was to obtain. This is the spirit of the kingdom; it is the spirit of grace. On the one hand, the disciples were to be like little children in dependence and humility; and on the other, they were to imitate the Father, to be thus morally like Him, and thus to be truly children of the kingdom.

Christ having gone on high, the Church was to represent Him, and really to occupy His place on earth. Did a brother offend, the disciple was to gain his brother. Human pride would wait for him to humble himself; divine love goes after the evil-doer. This is just what God has done. When ruined, and far from God, what met our case? Did God wait till we did right? No! He sent His Son after the lost one. This is the principle on which the child of God is to act. God has so acted, and His children must follow Him. You belong to God, you are His child? Yes. What will you do if your brother wrongs you? Go after him, and set him right. It is love in activity. Love ever seeks the good even of the one who has gone wrong. Love is bent on gaining the erring brother.

It therefore goes quickly after him. "If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." Observe, it is not the *offender*, the *trespasser*, that is before the mind of the one who thus walks in Christ's steps. It is *thy brother*.

If he hearkened, the matter would be buried in the heart of the one who had been offended. Should he despise this grace, two or three witnesses were to go, to endeavour to reach his conscience. If all this were unavailing, the matter was to be told to the Church; and should he refuse to hear the Church, "let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." This is not the public discipline of the assembly, but the spirit in which Christians are to walk (Matt. 18: 15-18). Heaven would ratify that which the assembly bound on earth; and further, if two or three agreed on earth to ask anything, the Father would hear and answer, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," says the Lord (Matt. 18: 19, 20). What could be more solemn, and withal more sweet and encouraging? Whether for discipline, or prayers, the Lord lays down the immense principle, that if only two or three be really gathered unto His Name, He is in the midst of them. Whether therefore for decisions or prayers, they were as Christ on the earth, for Christ Himself was there with them.

The immensity of the truths thus unfolded evidently penetrated Peter's soul as he heard them, and the desire to clearly know the extent of the responsibility of acting in grace, where a brother was in question, led to his query, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" The largest idea of grace that Peter had was "till seven times." That certainly was beyond the day of law, — which demanded righteousness, and knew naught of forgiveness, — and may be beyond the practical state of many of our souls, but it will not do for Christ. Peter's question was this: Suppose my brother sins against me, over and over again, how often am I to forgive him? The Lord's answer was: "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven." Under the reign of law forgiveness was unknown, it was "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"; but in the kingdom of heaven, and under the rule of a rejected, a heavenly Christ, forgiveness takes its character from Him, and is to be unlimited. The Lord insists that practically there is to be no limit to it. It is to flow out constantly. It is the reflection of God's own ways with man.

It must be remembered that this is a question of sin *against us*, not against the Lord. The Church cannot forgive any sin against the Lord until He has forgiven it, and He only forgives on the confession of sin. But, as believers, we are to forgive each other unlimitedly. "Till seventy times seven" is to be the Christian's motto in this respect. This is really divine. God will not be outdone in forgiveness; but even a man on earth — a saint, of course — is called on to forgive

after this heavenly pattern. May we all learn so to walk. If we only did so walk, what joy would fill our own souls, and what happy assemblies of saints would be everywhere found. Alas! we are very few of us up even to Peter's "seven times." We think we do well if we forgive once or twice; anything beyond that could not reasonably be expected of us. Peter's question, however, reveals an altogether different line of conduct to be the command of our Lord. May we each one heed it.

### **DEVOTEDNESS AND REWARD.**

QUESTION 3. — "Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matt. 19: 27). Peter is painfully natural here, and his query robbed his devotedness of its value, for it showed that he valued it, and that he had not really counted all things but loss for Christ. Such is the flesh. It appears in one form in the young ruler, in another in Peter. The ruler had inquired, "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (Matt. 19: 16). He had not learned that he was "lost," so would fain "do" to gain life. The Lord takes him up on his own ground, saying, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 19: 17-19). The Lord quotes the second table of the law. "The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" What ignorance of himself, and of his own need! He really lacked every thing worth having, and what he possessed on earth was the greatest hindrance to his getting God's richest blessing. "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me" (Matt. 19: 21). The test of his reality was presented to him. Did he prize more, eternal life, or his possessions? "When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." These he loved better than Jesus. Alas! for man, the advantages of the flesh are absolute hindrances to the Spirit. Jesus knew his heart, and all his surroundings, and put His finger on the covetousness that really governed him, and was fed by the riches he possessed.

Riches are a hindrance when God's kingdom is in question. This the Lord distinctly declares, saying, "Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly (that is with difficulty) enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19: 23, 24). It is beyond nature either for a camel to go through a needle's eye, or a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. "When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?" (Matt. 19: 25). The Lord's answer is absolutely perfect: "Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19: 26). As far as man was concerned it was impossible; a profoundly solemn truth as regards his condition. If it be a question of man doing anything to get into the kingdom, riches are only a hindrance, for he would like to take them with him, as well as anything else that makes something of himself. All that is of man, however, is only an impediment to his reaching the kingdom, — nay more, it makes it impossible, as far as he himself is concerned. With God, however, all things are possible, and it is only by the actings of His grace that man does reach the kingdom.

Another has well said of men: "They cannot overcome the desires of the flesh. Morally, and as to his will and his affections, these desires are the man. One cannot make a negro white, or take his spots from the leopard: that which they exhibit is in their nature. But to God, blessed be His name! all things are possible." His hand is not limited, and, no matter what the difficulties, He can and does work. Hence we find a rich Zaccheus blessed, and a rich Joseph claiming the body of Jesus. Again, in His sovereign love, He called some from Herod's house, and converted some in Caesar's palace; while the surrendered lands of a Barnabas showed what grace could do in his case, as well as in the devoted life of a Saul of Tarsus.

It was these instructions with regard to riches that gave rise to Peter's question, "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" (Matt. 19: 27.) What is to be the portion of those who have renounced all for Thee, Lord? He had heard how hard it was for the rich to be saved, and thought he might now ask what they were to get who had become poor, that they might follow Jesus. The Lord's answer to Peter is tantamount to this, — You have done very well by following Me. He says, "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And *every one* that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first" (vers. 28-30).

Sorrowful as it was, and manifesting as it did how the carnal mind may mix itself with the life of grace in the believer's history, Peter's question leads to instruction of a most blessed and cheering nature. Every one who has renounced anything for Jesus' sake will assuredly receive a hundredfold here, and inherit everlasting life, but, further, each will have his own place in the kingdom. The twelve apostles will have the first place in the administration of the earthly kingdom, when, under the reign of the Son of Man, there shall be an entirely new state of things, here called the regeneration. Each will have a reward answering to what the pathway has been for Christ here. The doctrine of reward is very clearly taught in the New Testament, not indeed as a *motive*, — that Christ Himself alone can be, — but as an encouragement. Reward, in Scripture, is always an encouragement to those who having from higher motives entered into God's way, are suffering shame and persecution therefor. It is the call of Christ that leads the soul out. He had called Peter and his fellow-disciples, and therefore says, "Ye which have followed me . . . shall sit," etc. They had found their motive in Himself — and they would find their reward according to their devotedness.

We must never confound the doctrine of grace with that of reward. Grace pardons our sins; and gives us a place in heaven; our ways practically will determine our place in Christ's kingdom. The doctrine of grace must never be used to deny that of rewards, but Christ Himself must always be the *motive* for the daily, hourly walk of the saint. Nevertheless we shall receive of the Lord according to that which we have done, whether good or bad (*see* 2 Cor. 5: 10). It is, however, good always to bear in mind the Lord's word, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first." This Peter needed to hear as he brings his devotedness under the Lord's eye. It was indeed a plain hint to Peter to be careful. May we each profit by the lesson which his all too fleshly remark brought forth.

## PRAYER AND FORGIVENESS.

QUESTION 4. — "And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he (Jesus) was hungry: and seeing a fig tree afar off, having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves: for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it . . . . And in the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, calling to remembrance, said unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away!" (Mark 11: 12-14, 21, 22). Now this remark of Peter's, although not put in the form of a question, would appear to have much of an interrogative character about it. This we gather from the Lord's reply. While Simon only said, "Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away!" the Lord interpreted His servant's remark to mean, "Lord, what is the lesson we are to learn from this remarkable judicial dealing?" The Lord's reply is most instructive, both from a dispensational, and a moral point of view.

"And Jesus, answering, saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily, I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that these things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark 11: 22-26).

The dispensational lesson is plain. Israel, as a nation, was represented by the fig tree. The curse about to fall on the nation is exhibited in this remarkable figure. Israel was the fig tree of Jehovah; covered with leaves, but bringing forth no fruit, it cumbered the ground. The fig tree, condemned of the Lord, immediately withered away. So was it to be with the nation. Possessed of every advantage which man in the flesh could enjoy, this unhappy nation, spite of all the divine Husbandman's care and culture, brought forth no fruit for Him.

Of Israel it is written, "To whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen!" (Rom. 9: 4, 5). Spite of all these privileges, they bore no fruit to God, though the leaves — all the outward forms of religion — were abundantly manifest. But man in the flesh — man under the old covenant — in responsibility to bring forth fruit, never has yielded, and never can yield fruit. The ultimate evidence of this was the rejection of Jesus, and, in refusing Him, Israel signed their own death-warrant. The fig tree, then, is Israel as they were, man in the flesh, cultivated by God to the very uttermost, but all in vain. No fruit was apparent. Man's history is really over.

Some have found a difficulty in this passage from the expression, "for the time of figs was not yet," and therefore said, "How could the Lord expect to find them at such a time?" The inference drawn is that His judgment of the tree savours of injustice. Far be the thought! If the nature of the fig tree in its native soil is borne in mind, this difficulty at once disappears. A peculiarity of the fig tree is that it bears two crops of ripe fruit during the year, and, while one

crop is ripening, another is just developing. Thus, no matter what time of year the eye rested on it, there should always have been some fruit; whether *ripe* or not, is not the question. It had *no* fruit. "Nothing but leaves" was its state. Hence the ground of its judgment.

The Lord's word to His disciples regarding the mountain being removed, and being cast into the sea, — although it be a great general principle for faith, — I doubt not refers to that which, would happen to Israel through their ministry. Israel was the great hindrance to the Gospel going out. It was the mountain of obstruction. Faith would remove it. As a fact, looked at corporately as a nation on earth, it was to disappear, and be lost in the sea of nations — the Gentiles, — among whom it now is lost.

But there is more than this dispensational prediction in the Lord's reply, viz., the moral point, which we should carefully note. He assures His disciples that whatever they asked in faith should be accomplished, but that to ensure this they must walk and act in grace, if they would enjoy this privilege. If praying for a thing to be done, there must be forgiveness "if ye have ought against any." Now, I doubt not that the reason why we so frequently do not get replies to our prayers, is that our hearts are not really right before God in this respect. Some old grudge is kept up, instead of being for ever dismissed. To enjoy grace, and to utilise the privilege of prayer, we must constantly act in grace towards all men. This was quite an unlooked-for outcome of Peter's remark on the withered fig tree. The Lord grant us grace to heed this new lesson.

#### **WATCHING AND WORKING.**

QUESTION 5. — "And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled" (Mark 13: 1-4). In the question which this passage records, it is observable that Peter is associated with others. His name heads the list, and there is little doubt, from the peculiarly prominent place he has, as a questioner in the Gospel narratives, that he was again the spokesman on this occasion. Be that as it may, the occasion was momentous, and to the query here put the Lord gives an immensely full reply, embracing a view of the early and later history of the Jews, the calling and the character of the Church, and finally the blessing and judgment of the Gentiles. The detail of this is more fully given in Matt. 24 - 25, than in the passage above quoted from Mark, wherein Peter's name occurs. Matthew gives the development of the dispensation, and the ways of God with respect to the kingdom. Mark, on the other hand, — true to the character of his gospel, — takes up the service of the apostles in the circumstances that would surround them. This service the disciples would accomplish in the midst of Israel. They were to render a testimony against all persecuting authorities, and preach the Gospel among all nations before the end came. They were really to take the Lord's place as a witness here amongst Israel, and as preachers to render a distinct testimony, not only to that nation, but to all nations, and then He would return in power and glory.

Of the hour and day of that coming no one knew, hence the special injunction given is, "Take ye heed, watch and pray for ye know not when the time is" (ver. 33). This command is

followed by specific instructions to the servants, which are of general application, and of immense moral value to every one who loves the Lord. Let us quote them. "For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and *to every man his work*, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, WATCH" (Mark 13: 33-37).

Two salient points are to be observed. While *watching* is the attitude of the servant, *working* is his characteristic. How sweet to notice that the Lord has given "to every man his work." There is room for all, place for all, and work for all, that love Him. No two have the same work, nor can another really do that which is allotted to each. Therefore to know one's work, and then to stick to it, is of prime importance. Were we each to get really hold of this divinely important principle, how it would foster the work of the Lord! What a cure would it be for the little petty jealousies that, alas! often spring up amongst the Lord's servants, and hinder His work. It is a happy moment in the soul's history when it can say: "I have my little bit of work from the Lord to do; I can do no one else's little bit, and no one can do mine." Coupled with the diligence and responsibility of service, how sweetly is here intertwined the call on the affections to "watch." Blessed Master, help us all to *watch unremittingly* for Thy coming; and, till Thou comest back, to *work unweariedly* in Thy harvest field!

#### INTIMACY AND ITS RESULTS.

QUESTION 6. — "When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, That one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter then beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon" (John 13: 21-26).

We have here reached the close of the Lord's earthly pathway, when the question that revealed the traitor is put. The last supper, with all its attendant ministry of love, was in course, when the Lord's evident distress of spirit touched Peter to the quick. "One of you shall betray me," was surely enough to arouse every genuine heart; and, persuaded by the truth of His words, all the disciples looked one upon another, with the sincerity of innocence, save in one case. Nor is this all, for we read in another gospel that each, including even Judas, said, "Lord, is it I?" (Matt. 26: 22-25). The Lord, although knowing who it was, evidently was slow in indicating the guilty one; and Peter, always ardent, thereupon beckoned to John "that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake."

Now we may well inquire, Why did not Peter put this question himself direct to the Lord? The answer seems pretty clear. John was near the Lord, Peter was not. He lacked that which John had, a concentration of spirit, and constant occupation of heart with Jesus, that kept him near His beloved Person. John did not place himself near the Lord in order to get this communication; but he received it, because at the moment when such nearness was a necessity, to get the secrets of

the Lord's mind, he was, according to the habit of his heart, near Jesus. He ever speaks of himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Counting on that love liking to have him near, he had laid his head on the bosom of Jesus, was conscious of the heavings of that breast, in a moment of such sorrow to the Lord, and therefore, was just where he could receive the Lord's communication. The love which Jesus bore to him formed John's heart, and moulded his life. It gave him beautiful constancy of affection for the Lord, and childlike confidingness in His delight to have His loved disciple near Himself. It was no other motive that put him so near the Lord, a nearness that others might have had, but did not take. Being thus near, he could receive communications from Jesus, but it was not in order to receive them that he placed himself close to Him. He was near the Lord because he loved to be near Him, and was assured that Jesus delighted in having Him near.

This place of nearness we too may know, where the heart enjoys the affections of the precious Saviour, and where He can communicate to us what is in His heart. If we would have these communications, we must be near Him too. Nearness to Christ is the secret of all spiritual progress and power. It is after this sort, thank God, that we may yet learn to know Christ. The more we know His love to us, the more shall we delight in getting and keeping near to Him.

That Peter knew that the Lord loved him there can be no manner of doubt, and that Peter also loved the Lord is certain, but there was as yet, however, too much of Peter for intimacy, such as this scene unfolds. Later on, when he became a broken and self-emptied vessel, God might and did use him in service most blessedly; but to learn intimacy with Jesus, one naturally turns to John — and finds it — rather than to Peter.

### **SELF-CONFIDENCE AND ITS END.**

QUESTION 7. "Therefore, when he (Judas) was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come, so now I say unto you. . . . Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice" (John 13: 31-38).

The scene of this question is the same as the last — the supper table. Judas, detected, receives the sop, and the covetousness which governed his heart gained the day. Satan using this to his destruction, hardens his heart against all feelings of common humanity, and of man towards the man of his acquaintance, against every amiable sentiment of nature. Nearness to Jesus, if unaccompanied by faith, and if the heart be not influenced by His presence, only hardens in a terrible manner. Satan enters into that heart to yet further harden it, leads him to do the basest act conceivable, — to betray an intimate companion while covering him with kisses, — and finally abandons him to despair in the presence of God.

Morally all was over when Judas went out, and in the Lord's heart all the import of this unspeakably solemn moment is present to His spirit. "Now is the Son of man glorified," He declares. His soul views all that lay before Him on God's side, — not on that of His own wounded affection. He rises to the thoughts of God as regards the issue of Judas's perfidy. The base act of the latter was to be the means of introducing a crisis — the cross — which stands alone in the history of eternity, and on which all blessing from God to man depends, alike from the moment of man's fall to the introduction of a new heaven and a new earth. Holiness and love are both demonstrated and reconciled in the cross, — the holiness that must judge sin, and the love that can save the sinner. God having been there glorified by the Son of Man, straightway glorifies Him at His own right hand. But though the end of the path was glory, the pathway was through the cross, — no one could there follow Him. Who but He could pass through death, the power of Satan, the forsaking of God, as being made sin, the judgment of God, the billows of His wrath, the grave, and yet finally beyond all these pass into glory? Peter, not comprehending the unfathomable purport of His Lord's words, says, "Lord, whither goest thou?" The Lord answers, "Whither I go thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards." Implying, as it did, his own martyrdom, this should have sufficed him; but, ever ardent, as well as self-confident, he continues to query, saying, "Why cannot I follow thee now?" and without waiting for the Lord's reply, insists, "I will lay down my life for thy sake." Every one will see the gravity of the Lord's reply to Peter. It was an absolute statement as to the impossibility of his, or any one's following Him then. It should have sufficed Peter to be thus told of the Lord that he could not follow Him, but ever full of himself, though really attached to the Lord too, he is betrayed by his natural fervour into the asseveration of devotedness which the Lord can only read as being the energy of flesh, and not the power of the Spirit. To have heard that he could not then follow should have sufficed him, instead of prompting to bold declarations of devotedness. Boasting is always easy, but ever sad work. The Lord rebukes him by sadly announcing his fall. What a lesson to us all to walk softly!

## **CHAPTER 10 — SIFTED AS WHEAT.**

### **Luke 22: 31-34, 54-62.**

THE contrast in Simon's history between Luke 22 and Matthew 17 is exceedingly striking. Our apostle in Matthew 17 was on the mount of transfiguration, where he was in the presence of all the brightness of the glory of the Son of Man, and where his heart, always impulsive, was really desirous of doing his Master honour, for, in spite of what we read in Luke 22, Peter loved his Master dearly.

Here we have something very different, but it is a scene that is of the deepest moment for us, perhaps of deeper moment than that which took place in Matthew 17, for we shall never, in our earthly pathway, behold the Lord, as Peter beheld Him that day on, the mount, but we shall all have the temptation, some day or other, to do as Peter did in Luke 22, that is, to deny the Lord.

There are many things very interesting in the history of Peter between Matthew 17 and Luke 22 which we have glanced at with profit, but we come now to the moment in this man's

history, when, forgetful of the Lord, full of himself, and tripped up of Satan, he drops into a course which every upright mind must reprehend.

Scripture gives us these sorrowful details for our profit, and herein lies the difference between Scripture and every other book. As a rule biographers tell us only the good, the sweet, the attractive side of a character. They think they should draw the veil of charity over the defects, and shortcomings of the one whose memoir they are writing, and this often has a very depressing effect on a young person, who, reading the life of a godly man, gets up from it and says, "I must give it all up, for I can never be like him." But Scripture invariably gives us the dark side, as well as the bright; and what does this bring out? Only the grace of the Lord, who can take a saint out of the slough into which he has fallen, and make him a more useful vessel than ever before; for this fall breaks the neck of Peter's self-confidence, and he learns not only what he is, and what he can do, but he also learns, as never before, what his Master is.

If there could have been an occasion when the Lord needed the loyalty of those who loved Him, this was the moment. The Passover day had come, and the Lord knew He was going to die. Judas, six days before, had sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver, the price of the meanest slave. Judas, alas! loved money, and lost his soul for ever, and many a man today does the same, puts money before Christ. Do not you, I beseech you, my dear friend, follow Judas' example, and share his fate for ever.

It is an intensely solemn fact that every man or woman, who is not in the company of Christ, is in the clutch of the god of this world, and sooner or later, must learn the power of the evil one. In this scripture the Lord would teach us that even a saint, away from Christ, is in the power of Satan. Up till this moment the Lord had flung His sheltering wing over His disciples, but now He says to them, as it were, You must shift for yourselves, I am going away (Luke 22: 35-38); and to those who come to take Him in the garden He says, "This is your hour and the power of darkness" (Luke 22: 35).

Judas, doubtless, before the Passover, had his feet washed, when the others had theirs (John 13), and at the supper he received the sop from the Lord, and then he passed out to consummate his wretched work of betrayal. Thereon the Lord turns to Peter, and addresses these words to the disciple whom He knew would deny Him, but whom He loved; and further, knew that in spite of everything, that disciple loved Him devotedly.

"Simon, Simon," the Lord says, "behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted (restored), strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22: 31, 32). Simon got his warning here; if he had only taken heed to it, what a different sequel would have been recorded! If he had only been chaff, and not really "wheat," Satan would not have wanted to sift him: it was because he was the real wheat that Satan desired to get him in his power. Satan does not tempt an unconverted person, he tempts a child of God, but he governs and controls entirely the unconverted — drives them before him at his will. Man talks about being a free agent, but there is no such thing as being a free agent. Man does not see that he is in the power of Satan while still unconverted. Man is blind, and does not see his danger. A blind man sees nothing of his circumstances, he

may be on the edge of a precipice and be quite unmoved, because he does not know his danger. Such is the condition of the unawakened, and unsaved reader.

The episode in Peter's history now before us, is that of a child of God, and shows what depths he can fall into through self-confidence.

First observe that the Lord warns him. Then note two other most touching things, the Lord's prayer *for* him before he fell, and the Lord's look *at* him after. "Satan hath desired to have you," is divinely met, in grace, by "but I have prayed for thee." The Lord made use of Satan to break the self-confidence which was the cause of Peter's fall, but the Lord's controlling hand was upon the enemy, even so, and he was allowed to go so far and no farther; and I believe that when the day of Pentecost came, and Peter, restored, and happy in his Master's love, was the means of three thousand souls coming to Christ, and being saved, the devil was heartily sorry that he had not left him alone in the high priest's hall. But for that bitter experience he would never have been enough broken down, humbled, and self-emptied, for the Lord to use him in that marvellous manner.

See what follows the Lord's warning. Peter answers, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death." Think of that! No sooner has the Lord said, "Satan hath desired to have you," than Peter says, "I am ready." You get the secret of Peter's fall in these words. Had Peter been right, instead of saying, "I am ready," he would have prayed, "Lord, do Thou keep me; Lord, do Thou help me; Lord, do not let me fall under Satan's power," but he was self-confident, and self-confidence is, I believe, the cause of all our failure, whereas self-distrust is the secret of our getting on with the Lord.

If Peter had learnt not to trust himself, but to cling to his Master, and keep near his Master, what we are looking at here could never have happened.

After this solemn warning we have the lovely teaching, from the Lord's lips, which we find recorded in John 14 to John 16. Then the wonderful prayer of John 17 fell on Peter's ears. The Lord thereafter went over the brook Cedron, with His disciples, and then, taking with Him the favoured three, Peter, James, and John, who had been with Him when He raised Jairus' daughter, and were with Him in the holy mount, and had there seen His glory, He went apart to pray.

When in the garden, we read, He "began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy, and saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. And He went forward a little, and fell on the ground and prayed." When He comes to the disciples He finds them sleeping. Think of it! The Master praying, and the servants sleeping. The Master is agonising before God, showing the perfection of human dependence, in that moment of unparalleled sorrow, while the servant is sleeping. Such is human nature. Peter slept in the presence of the glory of the Lord, on the Mount of Transfiguration, and he is sleeping now in the presence of His sorrow. Well can we understand His rebukeful query, "Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour? Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation" (Mark 14: 37, 38).

Then He adds, "The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak." That is exquisite grace. He sees these three disciples sound asleep, at the very moment when He might have expected them to be watchful with Him in His sorrow, though they could not share it. He longed to have those He loved with Him. But His plaint on the cross was, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness" (Ps. 88: 18). Sadly therefore does He say to Peter, "Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?" And then He tenderly adds, "The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak." The day of the Holy Ghost had not yet arrived when they would be strengthened to suffer for Him under every circumstance.

The Lord having gone away and prayed for the third time, Judas, the betrayer, comes again on the scene, and with him a band of officers and men, with swords and staves. Peter now takes up a sword, and cuts off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant. Then they surround the Lord and take Him, while His last act, ere they bind His blessed hands, is to touch the wounded ear of the servant and heal it. Then they bound Him, and led Him away, and "all the disciples forsook him and fled," though all had said they would never deny Him, and Peter had vowed, but a little before, "I am ready to go with thee both into prison and to death." Ah, how little Peter knew of himself! When the Lord, in perfect human dependence, was with God in prayer, His poor disciple was sleeping, when he should have been watching and praying; then afterwards he was fighting, when he should have been quiet; and now he is running away when, if ever there was a moment that he should have stuck to his Master, this was the moment, but "they all forsook him and fled." Afterward we see Peter following "afar off," and then again we see him in the high priest's hall, where there was a fire, and he warms himself by it.

Peter and John both follow Jesus, but John, known to the high priest, went in with Jesus. Then he sees Peter at the door, and speaks to the maid that kept the door, and thus gets Peter in, and I cannot but believe that when John and Peter were again inside, John made straight for his Master, to get as near to Him as possible. May the Lord keep us near Him too! To be near Him is the only place of safety for the soul that knows Him. I believe, had Peter been near Him that day, he would never have fallen.

First we read that Peter "followed afar off," and then when he got inside the high priest's hall, where the servants and officers, who had taken Jesus, had kindled "a fire of coals," Peter sat down among them, as though one of themselves, and warmed himself with the servants.

What steps we see in Peter's downward course, leading to his denial Of the Lord he loved! First, declaring he was ready to die for Him, although the Lord had just told him that Satan was desiring to have him, and that He was praying for him; next, sleeping when he should have been watching; then fighting when he should have been quiet; then following afar off when he should have been near; and now sitting down, side by side, with the enemies of Christ, and warming himself! With such a prelude one can only expect what followed.

I believe the little maid to whom Peter first denied the Lord questioned him at the door as he came in, and then followed him up to the fire and questioned him again, and that then Peter went and sat down at the fire among them all as though he were not interested in what was going on. There he was, among the enemies of the Lord, far away from Jesus. No wonder Satan was too strong for him; and if we, who are the Lord's now, will go among worldlings, and seek to

warm ourselves at the world's fire, we can only expect to be tripped up by Satan too. A fearful position, indeed, was it for Peter to be sitting at the fire among those who had just taken his Master prisoner, and, having bound Him, were plotting for His death. Well did the old Scotchwoman say, "He had nae business there among the flunkies." No, he had no business among the servants of those who were going to murder his Master.

The various accounts given by the four Evangelists, of this sad scene in Peter's history, have presented a difficulty to some minds, that will disappear if we bear in mind the well-known form of an Eastern house. Those of any importance, such as the high-priest's palace was sure to be, were usually built in the form of a quadrangle, having an interior open court. Access to the house was had by a porch or arched passage from the front, closed, as regards the street, by a heavy, folding door or gate, containing in it a wicket for foot passengers, and kept by a porter. This entrance to the court would appear to be what Mark (Mark 14: 68) calls "the porch." The interior court was usually open to the sky, and here it was that they "made a fire of coals; for it was cold" (John 18: 18). In Luke we read that they "kindled a fire in the midst of the hall" (Luke 22: 55). The word here rendered "hall" is *aule*, signifying an open court, or courtyard. As regards the house most of its ground-floor rooms opened directly into the court. Some of these rooms were large, and formed a place of audience, quite open to the court. It was therefore most probably in a chamber of this sort, open behind to the court, that Jesus stood before the high-priest, and thus we can easily see that, when He "turned, He could see Peter in the court among the servants, — the crowing of the cock possibly reminding Him of His servant's fall.

The order of the incidents which led up to Peter's threefold denial of the Lord would seem to be as follows. His first denial took place in connection with his admission by the damsel to the court through the wicket-gate. John tells us (John 18: 15-17) that the damsel who kept the door was the first to challenge him; Matthew (Matt. 27: 69, 70) says she came to him as he "sat without in the palace" — while both Mark (Mark 14: 66-68) and Luke (Luke 22: 54-57) inform us that the first denial took place as he sat by the fire. There is no inconsistency in these statements, the facts, I conclude, being that the damsel began to assail him at the door, and followed him to the fire-place, where others would join in her banter.

The second denial, as recorded by John (John 18: 25), took place as Peter stood and warmed himself, when it is evident he was set upon by more than one at a time, for the statement is, "They said therefore unto him." Matthew (Matt. 27: 71, 72) leads us to judge that after the first denial Simon had moved away from the fire, and gone to the porch, where "another" saw him, and said, "This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth." Mark says (Mark 14: 68-70) that after the first denial he went out into the porch, and there a maid — probably the same as first attacked him — says, "This is one of them." In Luke we merely read that "another saw him," etc. (Luke 22: 58). What would appear to have been the case was, that the apostle was assailed by quite a number of different foes, who followed him about the court. The replies he made to the various attacks are substantially the same in each case, though the form varies, and in one case, as Matthew informs us, was accompanied by an oath.

As regards the third denial, Matthew (Matt. 26: 73-75) indicates that many had a hand in the assault on the already bewildered Simon, and pressed home their charge of his association with Jesus, by alluding to his Galilean accent. Mark (Mark 14: 70) follows Matthew's account,

and Luke (Luke 22: 59, 60) practically does the same, naming, however, but one assailant. John (John 18: 25-27) mentions the crowd as attacking Peter, and adds the fact of his recognition by one of the high-priest's servants, who was a kinsman to Malchus, whose ear Peter had cut off in the garden. His fleshly action there it was that aided in his detection at this moment. But, again, if several assailants are borne in mind, all here too is easy to be understood.

A careful review of all the scriptures leads one to think that Peter's denials of the Lord were not merely on three occasions, and to three separate persons. On the contrary, it would appear that on the latter two occasions he was generally set upon by a number of persons, who all questioned him as to his association with Jesus. To the company of servants gathered in the high-priest's palace that night he was regarded as a good object of attack. Doubtless they enjoyed the joke, which Satan helped them to carry out, that thus really God's work might be done in this self-confident man's soul. Bearing all these circumstances in mind, we can the better understand the nature of the temptation before which poor Peter fell. Nothing could be more exasperating than to be baited and taunted by a set of unfeeling priestly servitors, who mingled their own coarseness with the venom and hatred of their masters against Jesus, and any who should confess Him. These were indeed powerful foes to be in conflict with, but it was Peter's own previous condition that really made him their victim. John, who kept near to Jesus, escaped scatheless.

In truth Peter had fallen before he got into the high-priest's palace. Self-confidence was his ruin. The Holy Ghost has been careful to record his sayings at the Supper Table. The Lord had warned His disciples, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night" (Matt. 26: 31). What does Peter say? "Though all shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. . . . Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" (Matt. 26: 33-35). Again, "But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise" (Mark 14: 31). Again, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death" (Luke 22: 33). More, "I will lay down my life for thy sake" (John 13: 37). Boastful words indeed were these, and doubtless when he said them he felt them, for manifestly Peter was no hypocrite; but his self-confidence flung him off his guard, and took him away from Christ. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" had no place in his mind, and so, failing to pray to be kept out of temptation, though bidden of the Lord to do so, he slept when he should have been gathering strength, and fell an easy prey to the enemy's stratagems, in the moment of temptation, when he should have humbly, yet boldly, confessed his Lord.

So will it be with any of us, if self-confidence, or a spirit of boastfulness be found in our hearts. The day that a saint falls is the day that he ceases to *fear* to fall. So long as the fear is in the heart the feet will be kept of God.

No doubt much banter went on, as they asked him, again, and again, if he were not one of His disciples, and at last Peter denied with oaths and cursings that he had ever known the Lord. Poor Peter! Old habits are easily revived. Fishermen and sailors, notoriously, are great swearers, and what had probably been Simon's style of language by the Sea of Galilee, before the Lord called him, comes out again now.

When, for the third time, Peter has denied his Master, whom at bottom he really loved, the cock crows again. The cock had already crowed once, and Peter should have remembered the

word that Jesus had said to him, and been warned by it. I ask you, my Christian reader, Is the cock crowing for you today? that is, Is the Word of the Lord speaking home to you today about something? Oh, if so, give heed to it, get nearer to Jesus; may God draw you nearer to His blessed Son, that you may not go on, as Peter did, to still greater lengths. Peter heeded not the first crowing of the cock, but went on to deny Him again, with oaths and cursings; and then I think I see that man, as the cock crowed a second time, and he pulled himself up to remember that he had done the very thing his Master had said he would do.

Peter loved his Master in spite of everything, and now, as the cock crew, and he called to mind what Jesus had said, he turned toward Him, and "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter." What did that look say? Was it a look of anger, or withering scorn?

Did it say, as it were, Contemptible miscreant, can you deny Me at such a moment? No, no, I believe it was a look of unutterable, albeit wounded, love. That look said, Peter, do you not know Me? I know you, Peter, and I love you, notwithstanding your denial of Me. It was a look, I believe, of tender changeless love; and more, I believe Peter lived on that look for the next three days, till he met his Master again in resurrection, and communion was restored.

Peter went out then, and "wept bitterly." Repentance did its proper work in his soul, as he saw his folly and sin in the light of his Lord's love. Here is the difference between repentance and remorse. Repentance is the judgment of my sin that I have in the light of love, and grace known. Remorse is produced by viewing the sin in the light only of its probable results. Repentance begets hope, remorse leads only to despair. Repentance leads the soul back to God, remorse drives it to deeper sin, and further into Satan's hands. This is all illustrated in the consequent pathway of Peter and Judas. Judas, who did not know what grace was, went out and, in remorse over his consummate wickedness, hanged himself; Peter, who did know what grace was, and who knew better than ever then how deeply the Lord loved him, went out and wept bitterly. The last thing Peter had done was to deny his Master, and the next thing his Master did was to die for Peter; and if He had not died for Peter, he never could have been restored nor saved.

Are you saying, my reader, But I do not know if He died for me? Listen, He died for sinners! Are you a sinner? Then you may look back and see how, when betrayed by a false friend, and denied by a true one, and forsaken by all, — yea, at last, forsaken by God also, — He died for sinners; and if you know that you are a sinner, and you want Him, you may know also that He died for you.

Peter must have been very wretched as he wept that day, and learned later on that those that stood by smote Jesus, and derided Him, and sent Him bound from one high priest to another, and then on to Pilate. Before him they clamour for His blood, and Pilate, reluctantly enough, but afraid of Caesar, finally sends Him forth to die.

What were the feelings that filled Peter's heart, as he learned of, or saw the death of his blessed Master, Scripture is silent regarding, but they can well be imagined. Of one thing we may be certain, that the Lord's look, and the Lord's words, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not," must have in some measure comforted his heart, amid the pitiless siftings it went

through at Satan's hands, and under the writhings and ploughings of a conscience that upbraided him with ingratitude, unfaithfulness, and cowardice. Amid all the bitterness of these days, that look, and these words kept him from despair, and from following Judas. Repentance was doing its holy work in Peter's soul; remorse had already destroyed Judas.

The moral lessons for each of us from this sad episode in Peter's history are many and plain. It should teach us to walk softly, prayerfully, and ever keep near to the Lord. It shows us too, as in many other instances in Scripture, that the very trait that distinguishes a servant of Christ is just that in which he is liable to break down. Now Peter was eminently courageous, and devoted to the Lord. He betrays cowardice. The real strength of a chain is that of its weakest link. What we would think our strongest point is in reality our point of weakness, and it is just that which Satan will attack. Moses, the meekest man on earth, lost his temper under slight provocation. Abraham, noted for faith, fails signally therein. Elijah, a truly bold man, flies from a woman. Job, remarkable for patience, breaks down therein. John, the man of love, would have fire come down from heaven on the Samaritans. Paul, the living expositor of Christianity, dropped back for a moment into Judaism.

There was but one perfect Servant. He was lovely in everything, and equable in all things: as dependent, as devoted; as loving, as holy; as faithful, as tender. Precious Saviour, Master, and Friend, teach us all more simply to cleave to Thee, and thus be more like Thee!

Without doubt the place of prominence that Peter had in the Lord's service carried dangers therewith. He was a marked man by the enemy. The devil delights to pick off, or trip up the leaders in the ranks of the Lord's army. A place of prominence therefore is a special place of danger. The way Satan attacked the Lord Himself, may well make us watchful, in the assurance that he will not leave us alone. No security whatever is assured by success in the Lord's work, and, if the Lord is using you in His service, depend upon it that Satan's sifting is determined of him. The only path of safety therefore is found in keeping as near to the Lord as we can, and as far away as possible from all that savours of the world, and from the heat that is generated at its "fire of coals." To be "hail fellow, well met" with the servants of the devil, is to ensure being tripped up by their master. Sure am I that Peter gave all the servants of the high priest, and the warmth to be got in their company, a wide berth, from that day forth.

## **CHAPTER 11 — RESTORATION, AND A NEW COMMISSION.**

### **John 20, 21.**

NO part of the Gospel narrative is perhaps more fraught with interest than the resurrection scenes, and the lessons they involve. The death of the Lord Jesus is the basis and groundwork of all blessing, but His resurrection is the evidence of His perfect victory over death, Satan, and the power of the grave. The testimony to His resurrection is very complete. He was seen certainly on not less than ten separate occasions after He rose from the dead; and, with singular grace on His part, we find that amongst the earliest to meet Him was the erring, and deeply penitent Peter.

The circumstances connected with the earliest of the Lord's appearances are of thrilling interest, as they show how, above all things, He values the constancy of affection that misses Him from the scene, and cannot, so to speak, do without Him. This is specially manifest in the case of Mary Magdalene, to whom He first appeared. The next to see Him were the Galilean women, her companions; and then, next, clearly Peter was sought of the Lord. Next to the devoted heart that beats true to Him, and pines for His presence, and which He will always visit first, is the dejected and sorrowful backslider, whom, in His tender grace, He ever seeks to restore to a sense of His favour.

The Lord of glory was crucified between two thieves, and died, praying for His murderers, and atoning for their sins. Then His body was taken down by hands that loved Him, and they buried Him in a new tomb. The whole Sabbath-day He lay in the grave. But the resurrection morning comes, and Peter and John, told by Mary Magdalene that the Lord had been taken out of the sepulchre, run both together to the sepulchre, and Peter is outrun by John. I know some tell us that Peter was an older man than John, but I do not believe that was the reason that John came first to the sepulchre. I believe the remembrance of his denial of his Lord was what made Peter's footsteps slack then. A bad conscience and an unhappy heart ever tell on the Christian's pace.

It would appear that Mary Magdalene, accompanied by her friends, had gone out very early to the sepulchre. Finding it empty, she had fled to the city, and told Peter and John. As her less ardent sisters hang about the sepulchre, and finally enter it, they hear from the angel who yet guarded it, — "Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples *and Peter* that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you" (Mark 16: 6, 7).

Obedying these instructions, they depart, and at this juncture Peter and John, closely followed by the weeping Mary, arrive on the scene.

Reaching the sepulchre the two disciples find it empty, for an angel had come down and rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre. To let the Lord out? Far be the thought! Not so, but to let you and me look in, and see an empty tomb, and know that we have a risen, a victorious, a triumphant Saviour, who has taken the sting from death, and robbed the grave of its victory.

John did not at first go into the sepulchre, he only looked in; but Peter went right into it — as a Jew defiling himself — in his desire to know the full truth. He found everything in perfect order. There had been no haste. The napkin that had been about the Lord's head was wrapped together in a place by itself. Furthermore, "he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass" (Luke 24: 12).

Neither Peter nor John are held to the spot by the same attachment to the Lord as marked Mary, who had been the object of such a special deliverance on the Lord's part. Out of her He had cast "seven demons" (Mark 16: 9), and personal love for her deliverer was her characteristic. The two disciples, on the other hand, "saw and believed," and then "went away Again, unto their own home." They saw, and thus, resting on visible proof, they believed, but their affections are

not manifestly engaged. Satisfied that Jesus was risen, they go away to "*their own home.*" They had one, without Jesus; Mary really had none, save the spot where last she had seen her Saviour; and therefore, when the others had gone, she "stood without at the sepulchre weeping." She could not do without her Saviour, and the way in which He now reveals Himself to her has a touching beauty that cannot be equalled.

Blinded by her love to the fact of the resurrection, which Peter and John seem to have believed, and led by affection rather than intelligence, she thought of Him as still dead, and only loved Him the more deeply because she had Him not. Accosted by angels, she turns her back on them. Most of us would have had a good look at them, — as they are not often seen, — but she is supremely indifferent. Jesus alone entranced her soul. When He inquires of her why she wept, she, supposing Him to be the gardener, thinks that He must surely know the object she desired, as she says, "Sir, if thou have borne *him* hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." She fancies every one will be thinking of her Lord, so only speaks of Him as "Him" — giving no name. This is the acme of love! Then the Lord in one word, "Mary!" reveals Himself to her. The sheep knows the Shepherd's voice, and says, "Rabboni! my Master" (John 20: 16).

We can little wonder that the Lord Jesus, first of all, showed Himself to this devoted heart. He enjoyed and prized her love, we may rest assured.

The next whom He saw were clearly Mary's companions, the Galilean women, who were on their way to Jerusalem carrying the angelic message to the disciples, and to Peter. He met them with "All hail! And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Matt. 28: 9, 10).

The third to meet the Lord on this first day of the week was Peter, without doubt. Much as he may have desired to meet his wounded Lord, far deeper was the desire in His tender loving heart to have all put right in the conscience and heart of His failing, and, assuredly, sorrowing servant.

If any doubts still lingered in Peter's mind as to the fact of the Lord being risen, they were shortly after fully dissipated by the touching message which the "young man" gave the Galilean women to carry to him. The Lord Himself, one feels assured, knowing His servant's sorrow, inspired the heavenly communication: "Go your way, tell his disciples, *and Peter*, that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you" (Mark 16: 7).

In Luke 24 we read that two were going to Emmaus that same day, and "Jesus himself drew near and went with them," as they talked about Him. Arrived at home, for I take it they were man and wife, they constrained Him to come into their house, and He then made Himself known to them "in the breaking of bread." Although shortly before it was "toward even, and the day far spent," so that they judged it too late for their wondrous companion and teacher to go farther that night, it was not now too late for them to return at once all the way they had come, right back to Jerusalem — some eight miles — to tell the disciples the wonderful news they had to impart. Like bees that have done a good day's gathering, they return to the hive to share the

spoil. They "found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them," and had their joy confirmed, as they were met by the news, "The Lord is risen indeed, and *hath appeared to Simon*." What passed that day between Simon and the Lord I know not. God has flung a veil over this interview in resurrection, between an erring servant, and a Master incomparable in grace. This I know, that confidence between Peter and the Lord was perfectly restored as the result of this meeting.

Do you ask me, How do you know? Because, in John 21, to which we will now turn, when the seven disciples had gone fishing, instead of simply waiting for Jesus, and, after a night of fruitless toil, saw Him in the morning standing on the shore, as soon as Peter knew it was the Lord he was in a very great hurry to get to Him. He could not even wait till the boat got to the shore, but cast himself into the sea, the quicker to get to Him; and he would not have been in such a hurry to get near the Lord again, if he had not been fully restored to Him in his conscience, with the full sense of perfect forgiveness. Luke 24: 34 records what I should call his *private* restoration. John 21 gives us his public restoration, but I would not give much for the public restoration of any one to privilege, either in service, or at the Lord's table, if there had not been full private restoration to the Lord Himself first. Communion and intimacy with the Lord are of the greatest importance for the saint. Nothing can make up for their lack.

The advocacy of Christ had been all-prevailing in Peter's case. "I have prayed for thee" found its answer in deep contrition after his failure, and then, at the first opportunity afforded, confession was followed by full forgiveness, and restoration. We should ever remember that contrition and confession, real and genuine, must be the prelude to forgiveness and restoration. But "I have prayed for thee" was the procuring cause of Peter's restoration, even as the Lord's "look" was the means of producing the right moral state that led up to it.

Two exceedingly interesting interviews with His disciples follow the appearance of the Lord already referred to, at both of which Peter was present, but no reference was made by the Lord, in either case, to what had taken place in His servant's history (see John 20: 19, 26). But the Lord's care of His servant will not allow all the failure of the past, so well known by all, to slide into oblivion without His giving him, in the presence of his brethren, the assurance of His forgiveness, and restored confidence. The way in which this is brought about is peculiarly lovely.

As we have seen, the Lord had bidden the disciples go into Galilee with the assurance that there they should see Him. Acting on this injunction they repaired to the Sea of Tiberias. The Lord kept them waiting a little. He would evidently test their hearts, as He does ours. In presence of old associations old interests and old occupations, that once commanded them, can they, can we, wait only and simply for the Lord to come? This really should be our position now, as outside the religious world, Judea, and finding themselves in Galilee, a despised place, was their position then. The disciple of Jesus has to occupy just a similar position now, as he waits for the return of his Lord. The test, however, seems to have been too great for them, and when the ever-active, impulsive Simon Peter said unto them, "I go a fishing," the rest were not slow to reply, "We also go with thee." It was very natural, but it was not what the Lord sent them there for. Waiting for Him, was trying work, so to while away the time, the old and long-since-abandoned business was resumed afresh. How easy, if our hearts are not full of Christ, to resume worldly relations, revive interests, drop into habits, and get beneath influences which we absolutely,

rightly, and, as we supposed, for ever had escaped from, when we at first came to Jesus, and were rejoicing in the greatness of His love, newly tasted.

Thus was it by the Lake of Galilee. "There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathaniel of Cana in Galilee, and the two sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a-fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing" (John 21: 2, 3). It was not a simple coincidence that they caught nothing. If we are in a wrong pathway, lack of success is certain. Our God and Father has His eye upon us, and His mighty controlling hand is sure to be felt, though perhaps we see it not at the moment.

But the dark fruitless night of toil passes, and, in the morning, One stands on the shore, who says, "Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No." Again He speaks: "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes" (John 21: 6). Years before, on the same spot, had some of these men had a precisely similar experience, of toiling all night, and catching nothing, and, at Jesus' bidding, had let down the net, and caught such a multitude of fish that the net brake. It was doubtless the recollection of this that led the intuitively perceptive John to say to Peter — "It is the Lord." Of course it was! Who else could it be? The effect on Peter was immediate. "He girt his fisher's coat unto him. . . . and did cast himself into the sea." His object is clear. He wanted to get near his Lord as quickly as possible, and his rapid action, in thus swimming to the shore, to effect this object, is the most absolute proof of how thoroughly he was restored to the Lord as far as his conscience was then enlightened. Had it been otherwise he would have taken the more deliberative route of his brethren, as they rowed the two hundred cubits, dragging the net with fishes (John 21: 8).

The sight that met the eyes of the disciples, as they neared the shore, is very instructive. "As soon as they were come to land, they saw *a fire of coals* there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead" (John 21: 9-14).

This statement, as to the "third time," refers only to the disciples as a whole. It was the seventh time, if individuals be regarded, but from John's point of view it was the third. The first was on the day of His resurrection, the second a week after, when Thomas was there. These two occasions in figure present, first the Church, and secondly the godly Jewish remnant — who believe when they see the Lord. The scene of John 21 brings in the Gentiles. The throwing in of the net, and getting a mass without the net breaking, is just a little picture of what will be at the end. It is a millennial scene. In Luke 5 the net broke, and the ships began to sink. Not so here, and the Holy Ghost marks this as distinctive. Christ's millennial work is perfect. He is there after resurrection — and what He brings to pass does not rest, in itself, on man's responsibility — the net does not break. At the beginning (Luke 5) the disciples gathered a mass, but the net broke, the administrative order that contained the fish could not hold them according to that order. The

presence of the risen Saviour here alters all that — the net does not break. Again, when the disciples bring of the fish which they have caught, they find that the Lord has already some there. So will it be at the end. Before His manifestation Christ will have prepared a remnant for Himself on the earth, and after He appears He will gather out of the sea of nations a multitude that no man can number.

After this mysterious scene the Lord publicly and fully restores Peter's soul. And what sight could be more calculated to lead up to this than that which here meets his eye, viz., "a *fire of coal*, and fish laid thereon, and bread"? How Peter must have thought of that moment when he stood by "a *fire of coals*" and denied his Master! And now, as he sees not only the fire of coals, but the fish and bread, would he not be feeling — "See how the Lord loves and cares for me"?

"Come, and dine," says the Lord, but not a word about his failure is at that moment addressed to Peter. I daresay his brethren may have looked askance at him. There is a proverb among men "Never trust a horse that has once fallen;" but it is just the reverse in Divine things, and it is just when a man has been thoroughly broken down, that the Lord can trust him. This we shall now see beautifully illustrated in Peter's history.

The Lord does not reproach him with his fault, nor condemn him for his want of faithfulness, but judges the source of evil that produced it — his self-confidence. He fully restores Peter by probing his heart to its very core, and making it known to himself, so that Peter is compelled to fall back on the very omniscience of the Lord to know that he, who had boasted of having more affection for Him than all the rest, had really any affection for Him at all. The Lord's question, thrice repeated, — though differing a little each time, — must have indeed searched his heart to its depths. It was not until the third time that Simon says, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee," but Jesus did not let him go, till his conscience and heart alike were thoroughly exposed to himself. When the springs of self-trust are dried up, the heart is ready to trust the One who in love and grace only waits for such a moment, to deeply and abidingly bless the soul by revealing His unchanged grace to it.

When they had dined, the Lord says to Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me *more than these?*" referring, I suppose, to the other disciples, for Peter had said, "Though *all* should deny thee, yet will not I." The word the Lord uses for "love" implies love in a general sense. Peter replies, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee." Here Peter's word for love implies special attachment to a person. The Lord thereupon gives him a charge, saying, "Feed my lambs," but follows it by a second query not so comprehensive as the first. This time it is merely, "Lovest thou me?" and no comparison with others is suggested. Again Peter answers, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee," still sticking to his word implying special affection. The Lord thereon says unto him, "Shepherd my sheep." Then the Lord again changes the form of His question, and saying the third time, "Lovest thou me?" uses Peter's own word for "love," — "Hast thou indeed this special affection for Me?" is its meaning.

Three times Peter had publicly denied Him; three times the Lord asks him if he loves Him. And now Peter is broken down entirely, and replies, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." He, as it were, says, "Lord, Thou canst look into my very heart; Thou knowest whether I love Thee or not; though all else might doubt my love, Thou knowest all

things, Thou knowest that I do love Thee." It was enough: the springs of self-confidence and self-esteem, so ruinous to us all, had been touched; and now the Lord fully restores him, and, as publicly as He had been denied by him, puts him in a place of confidence and approval, as He sweetly says, "Feed my sheep." He says to him, as it were, "I can trust you now, Peter; I am going away, but I put into your care those I love best, My sheep and' My lambs, to shepherd them, and to feed them."

It was perfect grace that acted thus towards Peter, and for his good. Before he felt his need, or committed his fault, this grace had prayed for him, and now it shines in brightest perfection as it expresses its full confidence in him. Most would have thought that the utmost that could happen would be that he should be forgiven of the Lord, and be readmitted to the apostolic circle; instead of that, grace is lavished on him to the uttermost. Humbled by his fall, and restored to the Lord through His grace, that grace now abounds towards him, and commits to his care what it most prized. Such is grace! Such is God! Such is our Lord Jesus Christ?. Truly His ways are not as man's ways. Grace creates confidence just in proportion to the measure in which it acts towards us, and in us. It produces trust in Him who is its source. We cannot trust ourselves, but we can trust the grace that forgives our faults, and will trust us when we are broken down and humbled, as Peter was here.

How well Peter fulfilled that trust, his after-life proved. No greater proof of confidence could a friend show me, than to commit to my care, in his absence at the antipodes, those his heart loved best.

Jesus was going away. His sheep were most dear to Him. Where can He find a true, real, and loving shepherd, to whose care and guidance He can commit them! Peter is the chosen one. Infinite grace, matchless love! "Peter is the last man I should choose" — his fellow-man might say, — "Peter is the very man I can implicitly trust," is Christ's answer in grace.

This then was Peter's public restoration; and not merely was it his restoration, but the Lord giving him a special charge, thus showing His full confidence in this now humbled, self-emptied, and restored man. What could be a fuller proof of the confidence the Lord had in him? Let us not forget that He is ever the same, so we may well sing:

"Astonished at Thy feet we fall,  
Thy love exceeds our highest thought,  
Henceforth be Thou our all in all,  
Thou who our souls with blood hast bought;  
May we henceforth more faithful prove  
And ne'er forget Thy ceaseless love."

It is important to apprehend the nature of Peter's new commission in this scene. The lambs and sheep he was to feed and shepherd, would appear to be particularly the Jewish believers in Jesus. We can all profit by Peter's ministry, but they specially are before the Lord's mind, I doubt not. The links existing between Peter and Christ, known on earth, made him specially fitted to pasture the flock of the Jewish remnant. He feeds the lambs by showing them, as he does in the Acts, Jesus as the Messiah, and shepherds the sheep — the more advanced — by guiding them into the truth, and giving them suited food, as seen in his two epistles. It must be borne in mind that Peter was the apostle of the circumcision. He had committed to him the ministry of the circumcision. The earth was the scene of this ministry, and the promises its object, while at the same time leading individually to heaven. This testimony was to be rejected by the nation, and really terminated with Peter's death. It was different with John. His ministry, in his writings, goes on to the end — to the Lord's coming again.

But the grace of the Lord to Peter does not stop with giving him this new and most precious commission. Doubtless he still felt the sorrow of having missed a grand opportunity of, for a third time, again confessing the Lord, at a critical moment. Twice he had done this, as we have seen, but to save his life, in the high priest's hall, he had thrice denied his Lord. What immense comfort, therefore, must it have been to his heart to hear the Lord now say to him, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me" (John 21: 18, 19). He had failed to follow the Lord in the energy of his own will; he should be allowed to follow Him by the will of God. This grace to an erring saint is not always granted. That which we have lost through want of faith and devotedness, is not always given back. Grace restored it to Peter. To go to prison and to death for Christ's sake, which he had offered in his own strength to do, and utterly failed in, he would yet accomplish by the grace and will of God. The real effect of grace is to teach us that we have no strength. This Peter learned. Feeling his own inefficiency, and depending on the grace of Christ, he would eventually do what he pretended to be competent for, when the Lord told him the contrary. At that moment his fancied strength proved only to be weakness, before the power of the enemy; at some time to come, the grace of God would strengthen him to suffer, and die for his Lord. Then, however, it would be a matter of submission to others, and not a question of his own will, and as a result God's grace would sustain him in faithfulness even to death. The truth is, that when we have no strength, and no will, we are in a state for God to take us up, and give us to follow the Lord, and to do His will.

But Peter is Peter right on to the end, and even here again he appears as we read, "Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved, following. . . . Peter, seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?" (John 21: 20, 21). John, without doubt, is meant here, and having heard the call to Peter, himself follows Jesus. What Peter was bidden to do, John does. The Lord's answer is enigmatic, but highly instructive — "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me." It is enough to know our own path, we are not called on to inquire as to our brother's. "What shall this man do?" is too often on our lips. The Lord's reply is rather of the nature of a rebuke. It meant, "Leave your brother alone, Peter, and follow *thou* Me. You keep your eye on Me, not on your brother." How good, how salutary, such a word! One can hardly conceive that under such circumstances, with his fault just only forgiven,

and his death foretold, that Peter could have put such a question about another. But as we read the record we can only say, "That is Peter to life." No matter where you find him, he is always the same impulsive man. Discretion had little part in his composition, while warmth ever marked him, and I doubt not it was his affection for John that led to his last indiscreet question. All his others we have seen elicited valuable truth from the Lord, and this is no exception.

The Lord's reply, "If I will that he tarry till I come," did not mean, I judge, what the disciples drew from it, viz., that John should not die. The Lord did not say so, hence it is important not to impute a meaning to His words, instead of receiving one therefrom. This latter the Holy Ghost alone can afford, for taken literally such a meaning might be drawn as the brethren then drew. I apprehend the meaning of the Lord's words to be that, *in his ministry* John went on to the end — to the coming of Christ personally to judge the earth.

The assembly, the Church, as the house of God, is, in the Acts, formally recognised as taking the place of Jehovah's house at Jerusalem. The destruction of Jerusalem ended the history of the assembly as thus being an earthly centre, and also ended the Jewish system connected with the law and promises. With this Peter's special ministry closes, and what is left is the heavenly assembly, of which Paul is the minister. He treats of God's counsels in Christ, and of His work which introduces us into heavenly glory. John's ministry reveals, in his Gospel and Epistles, the Person of the Son of God, and of eternal life come down from heaven, and then in the Apocalypse the government and judgment of God at the manifestation of the Lord. He remains after Paul, and he has linked the judgment of the assembly, as the responsible witness on earth (see Rev. 2, 3), with the judgment of the world, when God, in government, shall resume His relations with the world, and send back His now rejected Son.

The "till I come," therefore, of which the Lord speaks here is not His coming for the Church — the rapture of the Saints — I apprehend, but His public manifestation, or appearing on earth in glory, and John, who lived in person until the close of all that the Lord saw fit to introduce in connection with Jerusalem, continues here *in his* ministry, until the manifestation of Christ to the world. As a saint and servant he evidently lived a long while, and served the Lord, and his latest writing — the Revelation — carries us up to the return of the Son of Man in glory. It is in this sense, I judge, that he fulfilled the Lord's word: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? "

Whether the explanation of this be clear to our minds or not, the last word of the Lord to Peter, "Follow thou me," is abundantly plain. May our hearts, each one, heed it to the full, and so please and serve Him, fully and untiringly, till He come!

## **CHAPTER 12 — PENTECOST, AND HIS FIRST SERMON.**

### **Acts 1, 2.**

WE left our apostle, in the end of John's gospel, on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, sweetly and happily restored to the favour and sunshine of the presence of his blessed Master. There we

saw what really made Peter a servant. And now the Spirit of God, in the opening chapters of Acts, brings before us this servant doing a wonderful work.

The difference between Peter in the high priest's hall, and Peter on the day of Pentecost, is this: in the high priest's hall, where you have him denying his Lord, Peter was full of himself; in the second of Acts he was "full of the Holy Ghost" — and there is an immense body of truth underlying such a statement. A man full of himself God must humble, whereas a man full of the Holy Ghost God can trust, and use for His glory. I can, therefore, quite understand, though the Lord had said to him, when He called him to follow Him, "Henceforth thou shalt catch men," why we do not hear of his catching them till Acts 2. But then what a catch! Three thousand men in one day! Let us see how it came about.

The writer of the Acts of the Apostles is the same as the writer of Luke's gospel — "the beloved physician" of that name. In fact, the Acts is an appendix to that gospel, and written to the same person — the high-born Theophilus. Let us turn for a moment to the Gospel of Luke. In the last chapter we find the disciples had got back to Jerusalem, and the Lord, addressing them after His resurrection, said, "These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me." That means the then whole revelation of God, the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures. The Lord thus puts His stamp of approval on the Old Testament Scriptures from end to end; and if you do not believe in them implicitly, it is clear that you are not keeping company with Christ. Then we read that He "opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures." That is beautiful! Before the coming of the Holy Ghost, too, observe it is that He opens their understanding to understand the Scriptures; and I doubt not it was this opening of his understanding that enabled Peter to do as he did in the end of the first of Acts.

Then the Lord goes on to say, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer." It was the necessity of love that He must die if man were to be brought to God. There is but one doorway into heaven, and that is the doorway of death; not your death, but the ever memorable death of the Son of God. And consequent on that death and resurrection, "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Begin, says the Lord, at the very worst spot, the spot where they would not have Me, the spot where they scorned and spit upon, and slew Me; begin there, but go out to all nations. Then the Lord led the disciples out as far as Bethany, and "lifted up his hands and blessed them; and it came to pass while he blessed them he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." His hands, uplifted in blessing, have never gone down since. In Exodus 17, where it was a question of conflict between Israel and Amalek, if Moses held up his hands Israel prevailed, but if Moses' hands fell Amalek prevailed; so that we read that Aaron and Hur stayed up Moses' hands. But with our Jesus, blessed be His name, no one has any need to hold up His hands, they are kept up eternally in blessing. He loves to bless. It is His joy and delight.

Now let us turn again to the Acts of the Apostles. When Luke wrote his gospel, he began, "Most excellent Theophilus;" when he wrote his second letter, he began simply "O Theophilus." I do not for a moment think that Luke was a Radical, or a society-leveller in the least, but I take it he knew that Theophilus thought far less of his worldly position and title, when he last wrote to

him, than when he got his first epistle from him. The knowledge of a rejected Saviour alters entirely a Christian's estimate of things — right enough in themselves — here below.

The Lord had been taken up, as we have seen in the end of Luke; in the first of the Acts we have this re-stated with a little more detail. We read there that the Lord, after His resurrection, and before His ascension, was seen of His disciples for "forty days, speaking to them of the things concerning the kingdom of God." All that He says and does is "through the Holy Ghost." I believe we see here what the Christian will be in the eternal state — full of the Holy Ghost, and acting entirely by Him; and, further, what he should be even now, as "dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6: 11). We have recorded in Scripture that the Lord was seen ten times in resurrection, five times on the first day of the week, and five times afterwards. He showed Himself for forty days. Why forty? Because forty was the full time of probation and testing. And there is thus the most absolute testimony as to the truth and reality of the resurrection — now, alas! so frequently denied.

This time being over, the Lord tells them not to "depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which ye have heard of me" (see John 14 - 16). He then said to them, "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." Look how beautifully the Lord defines the circle now. The fact is, the Cross, with all its wondrous fruits for God and man, having been accomplished, every dispensational barrier had been thrown down; and salvation, like a shining river, could go out to the ends of the earth, beginning at the guiltiest spot of all, but ever widening and flowing out and on till, thank God, it reached us benighted Gentiles. If you do not yet know and possess God's salvation, my reader, I have grand news for you. You may have that salvation today. Take care you do not miss it; for if you do, you will inevitably taste damnation, and that for all eternity.

From the Mount of Olives the apostles go back to Jerusalem, and assemble in the upper room, and you have the roll-call once more named, and Peter again heading the list. And while they wait, what do they do? They have a prayer-meeting! There was blessing coming, but, while waiting for its coming, we find them praying. Now let us not miss the meaning of this. If there is to be real blessing in the Church, or among the unsaved, we must have the moral condition of soul that leads up to it; you must have the heart bowed constantly in prayer if the life is to witness for God.

Peter then stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, "This scripture must needs have been fulfilled," and he quotes from the 69th and 109th Psalms.

I understand, says Peter, from Scripture, that some one else must come in to take up the "ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." He must be chosen from the ranks "of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us." How lovely that is! Look at the beautiful intimacy of Jesus with His own. The expression, "went in and out among us" breathes volumes for the affectionate heart.

Then they select two men, and turn and look to the Lord for the expression of His choice, and, according to Jewish order, they cast lots. Peter bases his action on the known Word of God, and I have no doubt God approved the action, founded on His Word, as it was, Matthias being chosen.

Now we pass on to the second chapter. What peculiarly marks the day of Pentecost is the coming of the Holy Ghost personally to earth, to abide in the believer, and in the assembly. This is the kernel of Christianity. By the death of the Lord Jesus the way had been laid open, back to God. Sin had been put away, the grave opened, death annulled, and the Lord Jesus having ascended to the right hand of God, as Man, and anew received the Holy Ghost in that place of exaltation, the way was prepared for the Holy Ghost to come to earth to take the place of Jesus, and reproduce the life of Jesus in His disciples here below.

So we read that "suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." The house was filled, and they were all filled. You have the indwelling of the Spirit of God in them personally, and also the Holy Ghost dwelling amongst them collectively, a truth of the utmost importance alike for this day, as for that. I doubt not the cloven tongues indicated that God's testimony was no longer to be confined to the Jew only. His testimony was to go to the ends of the earth, hence a divided tongue, and of fire, because it was to judge all that was contrary to God (fire is ever a symbol of judgment), to break man down, break up his pride, and consume what is opposed to God.

While we have the tongue of fire sitting on these men at the beginning of this chapter, we find the tongue of fire doing its work in the three thousand men at the end of the chapter, pricking them to the heart, and bowing them down low before the Lord in confession of their sins, and of His name.

Then follows a wonderful scene, as "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2: 4). The manifest contrast with Genesis 11, in which, because of the pride of man, we find God confounding men's tongues, is very remarkable. Here, because of the perfection in obedience of the humbled Man — Jesus — who, in every possible circumstance, and with utter will-lessness, had been absolutely devoted to, and had perfectly glorified God, there was a temporary reversal of Babel, and the apostles, empowered by the Holy Ghost, could speak in all sorts of languages that they had never learned, and all the various nationalities who were in the city came up, and had to hear about Jesus. God, so to say, rang the bell in this remarkable way just to gather souls to hear of His Son. Blessed, indeed, are the ways of the God of all grace.

Now we see what follows. Those that hear are amazed — as well they might be — and say, "What meaneth this?" While some inquire honestly, What means this? — and it is most blessed to inquire honestly what does God mean — yet, alas! others mocked. How sad, my friend, to be ranked amongst the mockers, either then or now. Do not forget that if you mock in the day of His grace, God can do similarly in the day of your calamity. (See Prov. 1: 20-33.)

Now, hear what Peter has to say, "Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken unto my words." There is something perfectly beautiful in the bold way this man speaks. He has such a sense of his Master's love, and grace, and pardon, that he can stand up now and face the whole world for his beloved Master. So he continues, "These are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." The devil will invent any reason to get rid of the testimony of God, but usually shows his folly therein, and specially so here, for it was the custom among the Jews not to break their fast before the morning sacrifice, therefore they had not eaten, much less had drunk. Peter says, as it were, This is the first instalment of the prophecy of Joel. He knows now how to handle the Scriptures, and thus he cites from, rather than directly and literally quotes, Joel. I have no doubt the complete fulfilment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2: 28-32) remains for a future day, when the Jews are again in Palestine — a restored people — hence Peter is careful not to say it is the fulfilment. Just before the Messiah, the Son of Man, comes out in judgment of the earth, Joel's prophecy will be fulfilled. But you, my reader, if you miss salvation now, will never come in for it then. You will never be converted, when the Lord comes by-and-by to set up His kingdom upon earth, if you refuse to take Christ now. The day of blessing, of which Joel speaks, is for those who have never heard the Gospel of a heavenly Saviour. All present rejecters of Him will be judged, not blessed, then.

Peter then goes on to give a lovely testimony to the Lord — "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." He calls attention to the beautiful life of his Master: what He had been doing, how on every hand He had been blessing men, as they well knew. But then what a charge he makes! He charges boldly home on them their guilt. "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel, and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Terrible impeachment! They were guilty of the murder of their Messiah, and of the refusal of the Son of God. Only seven weeks before they had refused to have the Lord, and had chosen Barabbas, a robber and a murderer, instead of Him. They had cried, "Away with him, crucify him," even though Pilate, the Roman governor, had declared Him innocent.

You may say, my unsaved reader, I never cried, Away with Him! But have you ever taken your stand on the side of the Christ whom the world rejected then, and rejects still? This day it is true for you that you must receive or reject Him. You did not help to nail Him to the tree, with your hands — true; but what about your sins, which helped to place Him there? And has He not been standing at the door of your heart, knocking, and saying, Let Me in? Yes, and you have refused to let Him in till this moment; you have refused to give Christ His right place in your heart. God have mercy on you! God save you! The mob said in that day, "Let him be crucified" — that is, get rid of Him. And what does your attitude to Christ now mean? Many a time you have had Him presented to you for your acceptance, and up till now your desire has been to get rid of Him; and you have managed to put Him away from you. Peter's solemn charge has a terrible application to you, dear unsaved reader.

But the Man whom the world refused, God has raised from the dead, and seated at His own right hand. Peter could remind his hearers that they had crucified Him; gambled for His garments under His dying eyes; turned carelessly away when they saw He was dead; set a seal upon His

tomb — and, when it was found empty, had paid "hush-money" to godless watchmen, to say they slept while His disciples stole His body. The watchers took the money and did as they were taught. The lie was believed for seven weeks, but now God sends Peter to proclaim that He is alive! He could not be holden of death; He went into it, but came up out of it, annulling its power, and gaining title to set its captives free.

Then Peter quotes David, and shows how Psalm 16 could not refer to him when it said, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hades, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption," for David had seen corruption, but the flesh of the Lord saw no corruption. Death had no claim on Him; but when God gave His Son, and man in his wickedness killed Him, by dying He annulled the power of death, and put away sin, which brought in death. As death came in by sin, so sin was put away by death; and the Man who died — and died for me, I am thankful to say — God has raised from the dead, "whereof," as Peter says, "we all are witnesses." If you were to seek for them, my friend, you could easily find twelve witnesses now to the fact that there is a risen Saviour.

But Peter continues: — "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens, but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool; therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." The work of redemption is done, the power of the devil is broken, and the Holy Ghost has come down to let us know this, and that the Lord sits on high till He makes His foes His footstool, and meantime He is gathering out His friends. Are you among His friends, my reader?

There is direct variance, Peter urges, between the house of Israel and God. They put the Lord in the tomb, and God has put Him on His throne in glory; and there He is in heaven till His enemies are made His footstool. Peter opened the door of the kingdom of heaven that day, as he unfolded, the truth that the King is in heaven. He was commissioned to unlock the Jewish leaf of the door that day, and what is the result? "They were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" They are awakened to a sense of their guilt, sin, and danger; and in reply to their query Peter says, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, for the remission of sins" — that is, judge yourselves, own your guilt, acknowledge your true state, "and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." If you own the Lord I own, you will get what I have got. "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are *afar off*, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." The Gentiles are brought in there; God is sovereign in His grace; and how we should bless Him that it is extended to us, and that He has called us, who were indeed "afar off."

Peter then adds, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation." But you say, "How can I save myself?" By coming to Jesus, who is the living Saviour, and clearing out of the world which is under judgment. "You are in wrong company this day," Peter as it were says; "come out from among them."

It was a noble address, and much blessed of God, for we read, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized; and the same day there were added about three thousand souls." This was grand fishing, indeed: and how Satan must have bewailed the hand he had in fitting the fisherman for his glorious work!

There is a lovely contrast I would here note between the reign of law, and that of grace. The day that Moses brought down the law, graven on tables of stone — only to find it broken already — three thousand men died by Levi's sword — three thousand law-breakers were hurled into eternity unblessed (Ex. 32: 28). The day the Holy Ghost came down to witness to an ascended Saviour, three thousand souls were brought to that Saviour, and were blessed and saved by Him; three thousand took their stand boldly for the Lord, having judged themselves, believed the truth, and received forgiveness of sins, and the Holy Ghost as the seal of their faith.

What follows is noteworthy. "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." This is very charming. I believe if you had gone to the breaking-of-bread meeting you would have found them all there, and, if you had gone to the prayer-meeting, you would have found them all there too. At the start of Christianity the prayer-meeting and the breaking-of-bread meeting were co-extensive. The activity of the grace of God was lovely. They were so fresh and so happy in the Lord's love that they could not get on without meeting daily. And they had wonderful testimony outside, for they were "praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

This then was the result of Peter's right use of "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," and of "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" that day. And now, my reader, may you be like one of these three thousand — believe the Saviour, receive the Saviour, and confess the Saviour, and then you will know in your heart that you have received the forgiveness of your sins, and that the Holy Ghost dwells in you, as the seal of that forgiveness.