

On the Gospel by Mark.

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Section 4 of: **The Evangelists**, being Meditations upon the Four Gospels.

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This Gospel, which succeeds that by Matthew, would, as a history of events, seem, at first sight, to be only a shorter account of the same circumstances; but, if the wakefulness of the eye be a little strengthened, the distinctness that attaches to it, and gives it its character, *will* not fail to be perceived.

The opening of it would seem to give it the last place in the series or succession of the four Gospels. But again, on a closer inspection of it, it *will* be deemed very properly to hold, as it does, the *second* place.

We have in it no genealogy of the Lord Jesus at all, either divine, human, or Jewish. We are introduced to Him at once in His manhood. We have no account of His birth, nor of the precursors of His birth; neither is mention made of His early days passed in subjection to His parents, or under the law; much less of His incarnation. All this, glorious and precious as it is, is left with the other evangelists.

John tells us of the incarnation. "The Word became flesh." This is the first and highest thought. This gives the Lord to us as He was divinely, or from everlasting.

Luke then gives us the fact of His coming into this world, and relates the manner of that coming. He tells us of the birth by the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost. And then he leaves us in sight of Him, for a little while, growing in wisdom and stature, as in the midst of family circumstances, or at home at Nazareth in Galilee.

Matthew, taking up the wondrous tale in his turn, shows us this Child born, and this Son given, in His solemn presentation to His people Israel. Being come, Immanuel, God and man in one Person, He is presented in His rights and claims as the promised Governor out of Bethlehem-Judah.

Mark then, passing all this by, shows Him to us in manhood at once. His eternal glory; His incarnation; the manner of His entering into the flesh and the world; the claims which were made for Him by voices of prophets and sights from heaven, as soon as He got here; all is passed. He Who was in the beginning; He Who was, in due time, born in Bethlehem; He Who, as a Child, had to be taken by flight into Egypt; Who afterwards grew up in grace and in years at Nazareth, and, at the age of twelve,

talked with scribes and doctors in the temple; such a One is passed by, and, at the very first moment of our Gospel, He is seen by us as girded in full strength and manhood for service. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" are Mark's first words.

So then, as I observed, this Gospel might seem to occupy the last place in the order of the four. But this is only a first impression.

Characteristically, this Gospel is the Gospel of our Lord Jesus as a *Servant*, or as in ministry. As such it opens, as such it maintains itself throughout, and as such it closes.

But we are not to say of our Lord that He is *our* Servant. He is ever serving us, it is true; nevertheless, He is not our Servant, but God's. To speak of Him as our Servant, as one once hinted to me, would be to make Him subject to our command, which could not be. So that, though in infinite grace He serves us, He is, all the while, God's Servant, and not ours.

And hence it is that we can trace, in this Gospel, so many minuter strokes and touches, such as adorn and perfect a life of service, which has its ornaments as well as its substance, its tenderness and considerateness as well as its devotedness and self-sacrifice.

I have already observed that, generally, the materials of Mark are the same as those of Matthew. The Lord is doing the same things, and is seen in the same circumstances. There is, however, this difference in purpose — in Matthew He is *testing* Israel; here He is *servicing* Israel.

Accordingly, in Matthew, the Lord is introduced in all due form, again and again, that every advantage might be given them, while it was under proof whether Israel would accept Messiah or not.

In Mark there is the absence of all form and ceremony. There is no solemn introduction of the Lord, as the Gospel opens, beyond the things that were needed in order to set Him at His work; and, as soon as He is at His work, He passes from one service to another with all diligence. And these distinctions have real beauty in them. For service, in its very nature or genius, is informal and desultory. It answers occasions as they rise. It does its work, rather than sets itself to do it. But, in testing Israel, the Lord in Matthew carefully and duly sets Himself forth in forms foretold by their prophets; assuming, in the midst of them, all those characters which realized before them the words of their own Scriptures.

This variety is, surely, a part of the perfection that attaches to this Book. The One Whom we get in each of the Gospels is carried through the same scenes and circumstances, because the history is true; but the Spirit lets Him pass before us, through those scenes, in different characters, all consistent, but one as well as another is needed, in order to present Him in His fulness. Here, in Mark, He is the Jesus Who, having come not to be ministered unto but to minister, "went about doing good."

The penman of this Gospel is, personally, as I may say, in company with his Gospel. It is Mark, or Mark-John, whom Paul and Barnabas had "to their minister;" and of whom Paul, on another occasion, said, "He is profitable unto me for the ministry." And as the apostle John was a fit penman to tell us of Him Who lay in the Father's bosom, because he himself lay in the Lord's bosom, so we may observe here a like fitness in the *penman* to the *subject*.

I would now take up this Gospel, distinguishing the parts in which it naturally presents itself, and then noticing what is characteristic.

FIRST PART. - Mark 1 - 10.

These chapters give us the Lord's services in the midst of His people Israel.

SECOND PART. — Mark 11 - 13.

These chapters give us the Lord's presentation of Himself, as their King, to His people; the immediate results of this; and then His prophetic word upon the times and fortunes of Israel, who had now rejected Him.

THIRD PART. - Mark 14, 15.

This portion of our Gospel gives us the scene of our Lord's last sufferings.

FOURTH PART. — Mark 16.

This last chapter shows our Lord to us in resurrection.

PART 1.

Mark 1 - 10.

"THE beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Nothing can be simpler, more thoroughly divested of all ceremoniousness and form, than this; and fully does it suit One Who was coming forth in service.

The whole Person is verified. But this is done without solemnity of any kind. For it is not the Lord's person that is about to be before us, nor is it His rights, but His ministry. The introduction which He is to receive here is, therefore, only that which is necessary to set Him at His gracious and blessed task.

John the Baptist announces Him as He Who was coming to baptize; that is, coming forth in ministry. But Mark does not add, as Matthew and Luke do, "Whose fan is in His hand, and He will throughly purge His floor" — because that action belongs to the Lord in His *judicial*, rather than His *ministerial*, place, and was, therefore, not within the purpose of this Gospel.

We then read of the Lord's own baptism at the hand of John; and then of His temptation; each of these things being a needful part of His introduction to ministry.

In our evangelist's account of the temptation there is one circumstance that is peculiar to him. He tells us, speaking of the Lord in that scene, that "He . . . was with the wild beasts."

This is full of interest and very fitting it is to put this mark of dignity, personal dignity, at once (ere the course of services began) upon the One Who, however He might humble Himself to the form of a servant, was none less than *Jehovah*, and the *unspotted, stainless Son of man*. He "was with the wild beasts." It was a dreary spot in itself, a wilderness. But, at this time, there was a Man there Who had never forfeited Eden. Jesus had man's original place in the creation of God. He was in the midst of the creatures of God's hand, as Adam had been in the days of his uprightness. In His presence the wild beasts were as though they were not wild, as they had been in Genesis 2.

There was no forfeiture of Eden in the person of this Son of man. The temptation now comes, as in Genesis 3, to let it be known that He will keep His first estate, as Adam did not.

The serpent enters upon the scene a second time, and the temptation takes its course. We need not say how "the last Adam" answered the serpent. When the devil left Him, angels came and ministered to Him as the Victorious One; angels, who had withstood the first Adam as the defeated one, keeping

every way the way of the tree of life. Eden, as far as *title* went, was never lost to Jesus. These august witnesses, as I may call them, the beasts of the wilderness and the angels of heaven, in their several way, seal this truth to us — therefore, all which He went through, after this, in borrow and weariness and hunger, as in a world of thorns and thistles, was in obedience to God, and in grace to sinners. It was a *willing* entrance into the forfeiture of all things. He exposed Himself to all of it; He was liable to none of it.

This is, after this manner, impressed on the person and condition of our blessed Lord, as He practically enters on His life of service. Deeply welcome it is to us, but it is quickly disposed of; and all is soon left behind. His baptism, with its attending voice from heaven and descent of the Spirit, as well as this scene in the wilderness, and the notice of John's imprisonment, all is quickly disposed of, and, after thirteen or fourteen short verses, we find Him in actual service.

Rapidity or diligence marks this service at once, and that, too, very advisedly — for a servant is to be known by his diligence — "not slothful in business" — and thus we find the word "straightway," or "anon," or "forthwith," or "immediately," so common in the first chapter.

And from this onward, through these chapters, it is in service we see the Lord engaged. To be passing from one action to another, and still doing good, is His way. And He is rather *doing* than *teaching*; for doing is the humbler work. We have few parables, and no lengthened discourses, as in Matthew and Luke; while several of His acts of grace and power are more detailed by Mark than by either of them — as in the case of Legion, and of the woman with the issue of blood, of the deaf man at Decapolis, and of the blind man at Bethsaida.

And, in all these records, there are touches and strokes that beautifully manifest the design of the Spirit. The human tones of the mind of Christ are vivid here.

Thus, in the healing of Peter's wife's mother, Mark is the only one who tells us that the Lord "took her by the hand" when He was raising her up, after the fever had left her.

So it is Mark only who tells us that, in like grace, the Lord took up the little children in His arms.

But such actions not only express the tenderness and the grace of One Who was perfect in service; they are also beautiful from their significance. Take, for instance, this action respecting the little children, just alluded to.

On this occasion, in Mark 10, it is *in His arms* the Lord takes the little children; on another, in Matt. 18, He sets one in *the midst of the disciples*; or, as we see it in Luke 9, *by Himself*, or at His own side.

There is beautiful significance in these different actions.

It was when the disciples were rebuking those who brought the children to Him, that He took them up in His arms. He would fain give the place of nearest and fondest affection to those whom ignorance of Him, and the mistakes of the poor, foolish heart of man, would have kept at a distance.

But when the disciples were disputing among themselves who should be the greatest, He takes a little child, and either sets it in their midst, or at His own side; for, whether conspicuously in the centre of the group, or distinguishingly at His own right hand, He was giving the little child the place of *honour*, rebuking the pride of life or love of distinction which was then working among them.

Beautiful, therefore, again I say, in their significance, are these different actions of the Lord touching the little children. He takes them into the place of endearment, when unbelief would have kept

them at a distance; He puts them in the place of honour, when pride or worldliness would have sought such a place for itself.

And again. Though we read of His looking round in anger, yet we soon learn that this was not the anger of one who has taken the seat of judgment, but of Him Who was grieved at heart for the hardness and unbelief of men. It was the sensitiveness of the spirit of holiness.

His sympathies are much noticed by our evangelist, as He is doing His deeds of mercy. And so His sensibilities. At the sight of sorrow He sighed — at the sight of sin He sighed deeply. Mark 7: 34; 8: 12.

In Mark's account of the rich young ruler we read that Jesus beholding him loved him; but neither Matthew nor Luke mention this emotion of the Lord's heart.

So, on two occasions, where the healing was very similar, one recorded by John, and the other by Mark, we still find the sympathy of Jesus noticed only in Mark. In the ninth chapter of John the Lord employs His spittle, and applies His hand; and then, as in the sense of authority and power, He says to the blind man, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." In Mark, 7, He again employs His spittle, and applies His hand; but, with that, He enters personally and intensely into the occasion. He looks up to heaven, as owning the Father there; He sighs, as sensible of the sorrow here; and then, but not till then, He speaks the word, and the healing comes.

These were some of His sympathies with us, and with our infirmities. They were among His ways of service; and by them He was learning to fill, in like infinite grace, His present service in heaven, as the compassionating High Priest. "In that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted."

Nor is there the same authority in His way of vindicating His glory in the face of the unbelief and scorn of man, nor the same tone of severity in His rebukes, in this Gospel, as in the others.

The ordination of the Twelve is not given so fully here as in Matthew. And it is very significant of our evangelist that he tells us that Jesus ordained the apostles, not merely that He might send them forth, as Matthew speaks, but that also they *might be with Him*, His *companions*, as it were, as well as His apostles; as though He were, which truly He was, their Fellow-labourer in the gospel.

These and such like touches and strokes may be faint, and pass notice at times; but they give character. They show Jesus as the Servant — they point out the girdle wherewith He was girded. They form the ways of One Who was skilful in showing kindness, and knew the art of serving others to perfection.

"He is beside Himself," was the language of some, as recorded by Mark. And it was true, in a sense which they thought not of. He was wanting to Himself in that prudence which man has learnt to value — for "men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself."

Consistent with all this He is seen here rather in the valley — a self-emptied, hidden One, as becomes a servant. Phil. 2: 7. He is, at times, called "Master" here, where in Matthew He is called by the higher title, "Lord." And it is only in Mark that we read that the people called Him "the Carpenter." Nor do we trace His spirit in the same conscious elevation at times — we have no Matthew 11: 25, nor Luke 10: 19, in Mark.

His miracles verified Him as the Son of David in the thoughts of the people, as Matthew tells us. Matt. 12: 23. But they are not so spoken of in our Gospel. Nor do we find the same carefulness in the Spirit here to identify Jesus of Nazareth with the promised Messiah, by constant reference to the

prophets, applying their words to Him and His doings. For it is not so much His claims on the world that the Lord is here vindicating, as man's call on His power and grace that He is ever waiting to answer.

His retirements, too, are but recruitings for fresh service. Therefore He suffered such retirement to be intruded on, if people and their necessities would have it so; for He did not claim His time for Himself.

We have an instance of this in chapter 1. After labouring in various toils from morning till evening in Capernaum, we see Him, the next morning rising a great while before day, for prayer; but His retirement being interrupted by the demands of the people, and by the word of Peter, He at once allows it, and comes forth.

So, in Mark 4, He is teaching by the seaside. He begins this day's work there, on the banks of the lake of Galilee. It proves to be a toilsome day, and in the evening of it He would fain retire. Accordingly, His disciples take Him as He was, a wearied Working-man, in the ship, and, in the care of their love for Him, they provide Him a pillow, and He falls asleep. Was it ever said with such emphasis as now, "For so He giveth His beloved sleep"? They put off from the shore; and the wind shortly rises to a storm, and the waves beat into the ship. The interruption again comes, for the fears of the disciples awake Him, and awake Him rudely. But He would know no measure of His sleep and refreshment but such as the need of others would prescribe; and therefore He at once rises to quiet the winds and the waves and the fears of His people.

So again in Mark 6. The apostles had returned from their mission, and, providing for their comfort, He takes them to a desert place, that they might rest and eat. But the multitude, who had watched them, surprise them in their retreat. It would have been a valued moment to Him, thus to have been alone with the companions of His labours, hearing from them both what they had done and what they had taught. But at the intrusion of the multitude He at once turns, and begins to teach them many things. The deeper necessity of the people calls Him off from that of the apostles. It was but one service giving place to another; but the scene does not close till He has provided for both, teaching the people, and feeding all so full were His hands, so continuously girded His loins.

And this Servant, as we have now seen, was weary betimes. There is, however, a difference to be observed in the two instances of this; I mean that in our fourth chapter, at which I have just been looking, and that in the fourth chapter of John. He finds sleep for His relief in Mark; He was independent of all refreshment in John. Here was a striking difference. But the common sensibilities of our nature will, when we inspect the two occasions a little, easily account for this.

In Mark 4 He had gone through a day of toil, and in the evening He was tired, as nature will be after labour. Sleep is then provided for Him, to restore Him to His work when the morning came. In John 4. He is weary again, hungry and thirsty also. He sits thus on the well at Sychar, waiting till the disciples return from the neighbouring village with food. But when they come back they find Him feasted and rested already. He had had a different refreshment from any which they could have brought Him, or sleep have provided Him. He had been happy in the fruit of His labour. He had known the joy of harvest, as well as the toil of sowing. A poor, careless sinner had been made happy by Him.

How simple! How intelligible, again I say, on the principles of our common humanity! There had been no woman of Samaria in Mark 4, no sinner sent away in the joy of salvation. He therefore needed sleep to restore Him. But in John 4 His Spirit is refreshed by the fruit of His labour, and He can do without food or sleep. "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," is His word here, in the stead of His using the pillow which they had provided.

We can all understand all this. Our common human sensibilities are in the secret.

But with all this nearness to us, this fellowship in these ways and experiences and sympathies of the nature He had assumed, He was still and ever a Stranger in the world. He takes His distance as He shows us His intimacy. Perfect in moral glory this is! And this is seen in Mark 6, just referred to.

The disciples return to Him, as we saw, after a day's labour. He cares for them He brings their weariness very near to Him. He takes account of it just as it is, and provides for it at once, saying to them, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile." But, the multitude following Him, He turns with the same readiness to them, taking knowledge of them as sheep not having a shepherd; and He begins to teach them.

In all this we see Him *near* - for some human need or another had demanded Him.

But the disciples, resenting His attention to the multitude, and moving Him to send them away, He lets them learn how *distant* He was, in the spirit of His mind, from them. He acts altogether contrary to their suggestion, and, at last, tells them to get alone into the boat, while He sent the multitude away.

The *need* of men shall bring Him *near*, the *spirit* of man shall keep Him *distant*.

But again, when the disciples in the boat get into fresh trouble, then is He again at their side to succour and deliver them.

How consistent in the combinations of holiness and grace all this is! His holiness ever kept Him apart in such a polluted, selfish world; His grace ever kept Him at hand and active in such a needy world. And these were shinings of that full moral glory that was in Him. Surely, we may say, His life was a lamp in the sanctuary of God, which needed no golden tongues or snuff-dishes. No dimness ever soiled it.

The Lord meets the same hindrances and contradictions here, in Mark, as He met with in the other Gospels. Pharisees and scribes resent Him, and challenge Him, and watch to ensnare Him. The fickleness of the multitude is the same, and the slow-heartedness and unbelief of His disciples. But onward He passes from one service to another, "doing good" being His purpose and His business.

Here, however, I would turn aside for a little, and observe that in the midst of all His services and humiliations, whether we find them here or in the other Gospels, personal, divine glory will at times brightly shine out. For this Serving-man is Jehovah. In the form of a servant, obedient to the deepest, most perfect point of self-emptying, yet was He in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God.

He deals with leprosy as the Jehovah of Israel alone could deal with it. He feeds the thousands of His people as Jehovah of old had fed them. The elements bowed to His word. Devils trembled at the majesty of His presence, and men felt it at times. He imparted the power to work miracles, to heal the sick, to cleanse the lepers, to raise the dead, to cast out devils; and, as another has said, while any man, if empowered by God may work a wonder, none but God can impart the power to do so. Elijah's mantle fell on Elisha; but, in using it, Elisha says, "Where is *the Lord God* of Elijah?" But it was in *His* name, the name of Jesus, that the disciples whom He had sent cast out devils. They used in *His name* the power that He had imparted to them. "The seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us *through Thy name*."

What were all these but tokens of a hidden glory that was divine!

He may hide that glory which was His, and hide it deeply under thick veils of humiliation and

weakness and service; but it was His, and it can assert itself. And let me say, though He hide it Himself, yet if unbelief obscure or mistake it, He gives no place to unbelief in such wise. He may rest for the present under the scorn and rejection of men, but He leaves not the slow-heartedness of His saints unanswered. Martha said, "I know that . . . whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee;" and again, "I know that he shall rise again . . . at the last day." But the Lord gives no place to all this. He rebukes such thoughts, clouding His glory as they do. "I am the resurrection and the life," He says; "he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." And He adds, as with intense meaning addressing Himself to Martha's condition, "Believest thou *this*?" It was neither God giving an answer to the asking of Jesus, nor was it the virtue of the last day, that He could allow the mind of Martha to rest in; He must have her, in thought and faith, reach Him in His place of full, personal glory.

"Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?" is of the same spirit. And deeply welcome to faith all this is. It sees the veil, and approves it for the present; but it will not, it dare not, it cannot, be careless about the glory that is under it.

This, however, only for a moment by the way, lest we might be less mindful of Who He is that is thus in service before us.

And now (to return to our own Gospel) I may further observe, that there is an unobtrusiveness in the midst of these activities that further adorns or perfects the character of this blessed Servant of God. At Decapolis He takes the poor deaf man aside; and when He has got him by himself He opens his ear, charging him to say nothing about it. Mark 7.

In the borders of Tyre and Sidon, though the necessities of sinners may discover Him there, as everywhere else, yet He "would have no man know it." Mark tells us this, but Matthew passes over the same occasion without an allusion to it.

And again, at Bethsaida, He takes a blind man by the hand, and leads him out of the town, and there in secret gives him sight — and sending him away, healed as he was, charges him not to go into the town, neither to tell it to any in the town. Mark 8.

For though, as the *Witness* of God, He had to be aggressive, and thus to encounter the hatred of the world, as we read in John (John 7: 7), yet, as the *Servant* of God, here in Mark, He was, after the manner we have now seen, hiding Himself, as far as His service admitted it. Service is never perfect without that. A servant is not to know himself. He is to know only his master, and to be very willing that others likewise should not know him, but only his master. And it is thus with the Lord. He goes on with His work; and, if that gather notice, His way is still to go on, and, under fresh services, still to hide Himself. This is seen in chapter 1. Simon and other disciples follow Him into His privacy, Saying, "All men seek for Thee," as though the multitude would make Him public, make Him an object — but He only hides Himself under fresh labours, answering Peter, and saying, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for therefore came I forth."

And, according to this character of His walk, we find Him, on certain occasions, more carefully veiling His glory in this Gospel than in others.

In reasoning with the Pharisees about the Sabbath He speaks of Himself, in Matthew, as "One greater than the temple." This is passed by here. And on the same occasion, both in Matthew and Luke, His lordship of the Sabbath is pleaded in a style of conscious authority. But here it is grounded simply on this, that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

So, though, in this Gospel, we have the vision on the holy mount, still there is something even

there of this veiling of Himself.

This was the one ray of the heavenly glory that illumined the dreary path of this rejected Son of man on earth. His *spirit*, it is true, was ever in the light of His Father's countenance during these years of service through the cities and villages of the land; but His *circumstances* among men were lonely and uncheered. But this scene of the transfiguration was a visitation of the glory that crossed His path for a moment, and it was full of the kingdom of heaven.* But our evangelist has some notice of it which is peculiar to him. He tells us that, on the Lord's coming down from the hill, "all the people, when they beheld Him, were greatly amazed, and running to Him saluted Him." I suppose that, in some measure, the glory was still lingering about Him, as Moses' face shone when he got down to the foot of Mount Sinai, and stood among the people again. This might have brought the Lord into a place of honour and notice; but it only shows Him forth in the more perfect form of a Servant, Who would empty Himself, or make Himself of no reputation. The robe is speedily put off, and the girdle as speedily put on. The Lord turns from the salutation of the multitude to the sorrow of the poor dumb child, whose father had brought him with a cry for mercy — so perfect was He in the spirit of service, that neither the glory at the top of the mount, nor the salutations at the foot of it, could weaken or interrupt it.

*It is the *kingdom in power* which is seen in the transfiguration; its heavenly department being principal.

And so, on the same occasion, it is when He sees the crowd running together, as to a sight, that He at once heals the poor child, avoiding, all He can, the publicity of the miracle — and when the child is healed He takes him by the hand, and lifts him up. All this is peculiar to Mark.

I have already observed that, in this Gospel, the Lord is more the *Doer* than the Teacher. There is, however, one piece of teaching, one parable, which is found only here. I mean the parable of the Seed that grew Secretly, in Mark 4. It occupies the same place in Mark that the parable of the Wheat and the Tares does in Matthew — each of these, in its several Gospel, following the parable of the Sower.

Now in this, small as it is, the character of Mark's Gospel is still preserved. The parable of the Wheat and the Tares gives us a sight of the Lord in the place of authority — for He has both servants and angels at command, and He orders the harvest as He pleases. The parable of the Seed that grew Secretly, on the contrary, exhibits Him in the place of *service*, and not of authority; for it is He Himself Who, at the first, is the Sower, and, at the end, the Reaper.

This is full of character. What at first might seem to be an exception to the general bearing of the Gospel (which does not, as we said, present our Lord so much as a teacher), is found to be in perfect keeping with it; thus introducing one witness of its unities, or its divine consistency with itself, of a very interesting kind.

And now, in closing this portion of our Gospel, and leaving our Lord in these scenes of His service, let me notice here (what indeed I have already noticed in another place), that He *never claimed the person whom He healed*.

This is to be seen alike in all the evangelists; but it is a very striking and beautiful feature in His ministry.

He never made a claim for Himself to the one that He had healed, as though the blessing He had conferred should create a title in His own favour. It is to one, "Go in peace;" to another, "Go thy way;" to another, "Take up thy bed, and walk;" to another, "Go into thine house" — or words of like spirit.

He would not let the poor Gadarene be with Him, though he sought it. Jairus's daughter He left in the bosom of her family. The child whom He healed at the foot of the holy mount He delivered to his father. The widow of Nain's son, whom He restored to life, He delivered to his mother. He claims nothing on the ground of what He did in the way of service. Grace, I may say, would not so dishonour itself. Its nature is to give, and not to receive; to impart to others, and not to enrich itself. The time for healing must not be the time for demanding. The spirit of Elisha resented the thought of receiving money, and garments, and sheep, and oxen, after he had been cleansing a leper. And the spirit of the prophet was but the faint breathing of the spirit of the Son. Jesus did good, and lent, hoping for nothing again. Grace would have been wanting in one of its finest expressions had it been otherwise; but we know that He came in order that in Him and His ways it might shine, full of the exceeding riches and glory that belong to it.

He found servants in this world, it is true, but they were the fruit of His call, and of the energy of His Spirit — the fruit, too, of affections kindled in hearts constrained by His love. He called Levi, and Levi followed; Andrew and Simon, likewise, and James and John; and they followed. But He did not heal them, and then claim them. Mary clung to Him with fervent, grateful love, for He had cast out seven devils from her. But He had not claimed her. The love of a kindled heart constrained her; but that was quite another thing.

I know not that we can sufficiently admire this. It has great excellency in it. And the first duty of faith, as well as its highest privilege and sublimest acting, is to stand before Him and His ways, adoring. We should charge our hearts to know this secret. Instead of painfully inquiring of ourselves whether we are making suited returns to the saving, life-giving grace of the Son of God, we should awake to the enjoyment of Him in His exercises of this grace. Our first business with the light that shines in Him is to learn from it what He is — calmly, thankfully, joyfully learn that, and not begin by anxiously measuring ourselves by it, or seeking to imitate it.

PART 2.

Mark 11 - 13.

THE Lord is here seen presenting the kingdom to His people Israel. Of necessity, therefore, we get the same display of royalty here, on this occasion, as in other Gospels — for that was the material, the circumstance, which constituted the occasion. Still, however, there is a chastened style in Mark's account which distinguishes it.

Thus we learn that, on His entrance into the city, and on His going up to the temple, though He was there as the King, and in the zeal of God's house was casting out those who made it a house of merchandise, yet, ere He did so, "He looked round about upon all things." In Matthew He is seen as acting *at once* upon the defiled scene - but here, as this little action shows us, He is in the calmness and reserve of One who would give time to the scene to affect His eye and His heart, ere His hand lay hold on judgment. And this is another instance of the sympathies or sensibilities of Jesus in this Gospel. He entered *personally* into the scene under His eye, and did not merely deal judicially. There was something of the divine patience in this, something of God's slowness to believe evil — as He had said in other days, concerning Sodom, "I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me; and if not, I will know."

This, surely, gives a subdued, a chastened expression to the act of judging the temple;

distinguishing it, under Mark's delineations of it, from the tone of prompt authority and decisiveness with which Matthew conveys it to us. And this is characteristic.

And again, in the course of these chapters, there is something peculiar in the notice which our evangelist takes of the scribe who questions the Lord about the first commandment. He lets us learn the exercise of that man's soul. Matthew tells us merely that he came to tempt the Lord, as one of the representatives of the revolted nation; but Mark shows him to us *morally* or *personally*, expressing what was going on within him — and then shows us, also, how the Lord took him up in the same way, morally and personally, saying to him, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

How grateful it is to the heart to read this! How acceptable to us this commentary of the Lord Himself on one of the aspects or phases of the soul! It tells us (and the secret is deeply welcome to us), that the lights and shades of the inner kingdom are all under His eye, and that He knows how to appreciate them. There appears to have been some sudden visitation of this man's spirit. He came to tempt the Lord, but ere he went away he was not far from the kingdom of God. Surely in spirit he had taken a journey; a deeply interesting passage his soul had made. It may remind us of the repentant dying thief; for he, according to Matthew, seems to have joined his companion in reviling Jesus, and then, according to Luke, he ended by trusting in and calling upon Jesus.

And in closing this scene of the royal visitation, as we may call it, the Lord, I perceive, does not occupy the seat of judgment in Mark, as He does in Matthew. He goes through all the act of judicial righteousness very rapidly. He does not read out against the nation the crimes of which they then stood guilty and convicted, and upon this pass the sentence of the law. This is done elaborately in Matthew. Here it is all disposed of in a verse or two; and quickly does He turn from it all, and look beyond it, to see a poor widow casting her two mites, which was her whole fortune, into the treasury of God. He has not so much an eye for the evil as for the good, though, at that moment, He was looking on a temple full of the one, and only, as it were, two mites of the other. The touches are all in the distinctive way of our evangelist - and surely, when their sense and bearing are perceived, we deeply welcome them.

Mark 13 corresponds with Matthew 24, 25. It is the Lord's great prophetic word concerning Israel — Israel having now fully, solemnly rejected Him. They had seen the King. but He was not, in their eye, the King in His beauty. The arm of the Lord had been revealed to them; but in their esteem it was a root out of the dry ground. Judgment has now to enter, and take its course, ere the kingdom can be restored to Israel.

In this chapter, as in all the rest, the style of Mark is preserved. There is one very strong expression of the Lord's emptied, humble, servant-character here, which we do not get elsewhere. I allude to the Lord's words in verse 32, "Neither the Son."

He was speaking of knowledge of times and seasons, and He disclaims such knowledge Himself. And this quite became Him as a Servant. To a servant the confidence or committal of secrets does not belong. The Lord Himself tells us so in another place (John 15: 15); and, accordingly, He here disclaims the knowledge of such secrets.

He had taken on Him the form of a servant, and, with that form, the qualities and attributes that attached to it; and among them, this disclaimer of the knowledge of details and counsels, such as the Father would put in His own power.

And beside, the kingdom to which He was referring while He thus spoke, He is to receive by-and-by *as a Servant*. It is not to be His simply by divine right; it is the reward of the toil of Him Who was obedient even unto death. Hence all the circumstances of it wait, not on His, but on the Father's

pleasure. The right hand and the left hand honours of it thus wait, as He tells us in another place (Matt. 20: 23); and the time of its manifestation waits, in like manner, as He tells us in this place: "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels, which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." Christ takes the kingdom as the Son and Heir of David, the Kinsman of men, and the Servant of God; not by divine but by human title; and therefore most fitly does He say, "Neither the Son," words which do not qualify *the person of the Son* but *the character of the kingdom*, as indeed we ought to apprehend at once; because it is not about Himself the Lord is speaking at the time, but about the introduction or beginning of the kingdom.

The kingdom is to be His as Son of man. It is to *man* that "the world to come" is to be subject (Heb. 2); and it is God Who is to make it so. Every tongue shall confess Jesus Lord, but this is to be to the glory of God the Father. Phil. 2. So that these words, "Neither the Son, but the Father," while they hold the distinctness of our Gospel in view, intimate likewise a profound and interesting mystery.

And we may notice also what the Lord calls Himself, in verse 35, "the Master of the house." It is "your Lord" in the corresponding place in Matthew, a title of a higher bearing.

So, at the close, He addresses the apostles in the place of *service*, more distinctly than He does in the same place in either Matthew or Luke. To each of them there is given work, the porter being commanded to watch; and this is peculiar to Mark. But we may observe, on the other hand, that the apostles are not set in their dignities in Mark, as they are in Matthew. We have not the special honour conferred on Peter in the midst of them, nor the thrones of the Twelve themselves over the tribes of Israel. And all this, the presence of what we do get, the absence of what we do not get, minute as the touches and strokes of the Spirit's penman may be, still all are characteristic, and beautiful in their place and season.

And as the Lord here, in a very brief way (as we noticed), arraigns and sentences the Jewish nation, though such is given fully and solemnly in Matthew, so all those parables, the Ten Virgins, the Talents, and the King from His throne separating the sheep and the goats, which are pictures of great judicial acts of Christ, are passed by here.

Humble His ways in this Gospel are; gracious and serving; the ways of One Who had laid aside His robes of state, and put on His girdle. All bespeaks His various grace in its perfections; and, next to the simple, happy, earnest assurance of His personal love to ourselves, nothing more helps the heart to the desire of being with Him than this discovery of His moral glory which the four Gospels afford us. I have heard of one who, tracing it there, was heard to cry out, with tears and affections, "Oh that I was with Him!"

This is what we need, and what we may well covet, beloved.

PART 3.

Mark 14, 15.

HERE we see the patient, spotless Lamb of God in His sufferings, passing from the night of the last passover to the deadly sorrow of the three hours of darkness.

His path here is generally what it is in Matt. 26, 27. Still there are some features which distinguish it.

He seems to be left more alone here. The account is less interrupted by the acts or feelings of others. We have neither the repentance of Judas, nor the purchase of the potter's field, nor the dream of Pilate's wife. And we have not the communication between Herod and Pilate, nor the lamentations of the daughters of Jerusalem; both mentioned by Luke. There is no healing of Malchus's ear here, nor any mention of the Lord's right, had He pleased it, to use the armies of heaven in His service. Neither do we hear the Lord on the cross owning the Father, nor pledging Paradise to the dying thief. Nor, when the death is all accomplished, have we the same full and glorious testimony to the value of it, from the earth, and the rocks, and the graves of the saints, as we get in Matthew. Expressions of conscious dignity, and seals of power and authority put upon Him and His work, are less noticed.

There is however, introduced, by Mark into this solemn scene, one object which we do not see elsewhere. I mean the young man who had the linen cloth tied round his naked body, and who fled away naked, as he was, leaving his linen cloth behind him, as the officers were laying hold on Jesus. But this object rather deepens on our spirit the sense of dreariness and loneliness. It is in keeping with the sight which we are here given of that ever blessed One, Who, during this hour, was forlorn and forsaken, exposed and humbled, as the Servant of the glory of God in the redemption of sinners.

All this, what we get here and not elsewhere, and what we do not get here but get elsewhere, is characteristic; all bespeaks the skill of the "ready writer" Who guided the pen of our evangelist. In John, Jesus, during this same hour, is the lonely One, I know. But His loneliness there is the elevation and distance of the Son of God. Here He is the lonely One, as we have now seen; but it is the loneliness of the willing and self-emptied Servant Who had taken the lowest place.

And, look we at Him in what light or character we may, it is but the various shining of that moral glory which was just as pure and unspotted in its kind as the personal glory which He had ere the world was, and from eternity, was perfect in its kind, and as the glories in which He will be known in the eternity to come will be perfect in their kind.

PART 4.

Mark 16.

THIS chapter gives us the fourth and closing part of our Gospel.

It shows us Jesus in resurrection. It is as Matthew 28, as Luke 24, and as John 20, 21; having, however, like all the rest, its own characteristic features.

The descent of the angel to roll away the stone, putting the sentence of death in the keepers of it, is peculiar to Matthew and, in the preceding meditation on that Gospel, I have considered why this is so.

We get, however, the words of the same angel to the women who had come to the sepulchre; for that was an expression of grace, and was suited matter for our evangelist. And this same company of women receive from the same angel the same message which they received as recorded in Matthew, but with this addition, that Peter is expressed by name. "Go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him." The words, "and Peter," are added in Mark — and this was quite in keeping with the considerate, compassionating grace of this Gospel; for Peter might well have needed that thoughtful, special kindness at that moment. He had signaled himself sadly in the midst of his brethren; and his Lord now signals him graciously in the midst of the same

brethren.

This is full of character.

The corrupting of the keepers of the sepulchre by the chief priests and elders of the people is passed by here. Properly so. It was matter for the notice of Matthew, as the rolling away of the stone had been; for it led to what "is commonly reported among the Jews to this day," and therefore lay within the scope of the Spirit in that evangelist rather than in Mark.

We have here some general notices of the visits which the risen Lord paid to His disciples, and, likewise, of their slowness of heart to credit the resurrection. And here let me ask, Does this slowness surprise us? I would say, It need not. True, indeed, we may challenge ourselves, and say, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with us that God should raise the dead?" But, by nature, we have not the knowledge of God, as the apostle speaks, on this very matter. 1 Cor. 15: 34. "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" No; but our hearts are hardened. In earlier days the apostles had not considered the miracle of the loaves and of the fragments gathered up, just because their hearts were hardened (Mark 6: 52); and here it is hardness of heart that has to account for this unbelief. And as we do not by nature think worthily of His *power*, neither do we think worthily of His *grace*. We are all astray. We are indisposed to receive any good news from God. The resurrection of Jesus, the full fruit of divine grace, is published and carried abroad; but it is not believed, just because our hearts are hard. The flesh may be unclean, as indeed it is, vicious and violent too. But withal, to give it its full revolted place and character, we must further say of it, that it refuses the message of grace and salvation from God. And one of the sure and sweet fruits of a renewed mind is its faculty to think well and happily of the Blessed One, seeing His glory in the face of Jesus. The homage of a soul that has turned from the dark and hardened and erring ways of nature is then rendered to God. And it is eternal life in us.

The risen Lord has here, in Mark, as in all the Gospels, to rebuke this unbelief of the apostles. But He removes it as well as rebukes it — pardoning it by the way; nay, sealing that pardon by the hand of a witness of great dignity — for He puts them into the ministry, committing the honour and power of His name to them in the face of every creature.

But further; it is only in this Gospel that the women who came to the sepulchre wonder how they are to get the stone removed from the mouth of it; for they knew not as yet that, let but the third day arrive, the Lord could not be holden of death. As it is likewise only in this same Gospel that Pilate marvelled that He should be so soon dead, when Joseph came to crave His body; for he knew not that, let all Scripture be but fulfilled, the Lord would give up the ghost. See John 19: 28-30; Acts 2: 24.

The natural thoughts of saints put them in close company with the thoughts and reasonings of the children of men. As in these instances. Pilate and the godly women are in like ignorance. But grace ever abounds. The women at the sepulchre are instructed and comforted; and the disciples are commissioned to bear the name of their Lord abroad to every creature.

The commission here, however, has its own character, with all the rest. It simply gives the apostles work to do. "Go ye into all the world," says their Lord to them, "and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

It is not the discipling of all nations that is here contemplated, as in Matthew, for the glory of Him Who has now accomplished all things, and is exalted; it is universal testimony with partial acceptance — the common result of *service in the gospel*. As is said of Paul's ministry at the close of the Acts of the Apostles — "Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not." Therefore the form that the commission to the apostles by their risen Lord takes here simply

contemplates service and its results, and is thus in full keeping with the whole of the Gospel.

And, still more strikingly, the Lord Himself, though about to be glorified in the highest will be found, as the closing words tell us, in service also. For it is here, and here only, we read this — "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following."

Thus our Gospel closes in the character with which it had opened, and which it had preserved throughout. It opened with the Lord in service — "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" — it closes by revealing Him to us, though hid and glorified in heaven, as still "working." Jesus is in ministry, whether He be the rejected One among men on earth, or the accepted One at the right hand of God in heaven, where all principalities and authorities and powers are made subject to Him. He "went about doing good." He approved Himself, indeed, to have come among us, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. As such a One, the Holy Ghost in Mark first looked at Him, and as such does He keep Him in view to the end.

Very duly does his Gospel take its place after that of Matthew, and before those by Luke and John; though, as I observed at the beginning, it might be judged to come as the last. It comes after Matthew; because there Jesus as Messiah is *testing* Israel — and that was the first thing the Lord had to do, on His coming into the world, and entering on His holy, wondrous course. We have seen this in the preceding paper on Matthew. It comes before Luke and John; for the Lord Jesus is here in Mark, the Servant of the Father's grace and pleasure in Israel; in Luke He takes a larger and higher scene of action, as a Teacher and an anointed Man, rather dealing morally with men; and at last in John He rises to the highest, as in divine grace, in solitariness and in sovereignty, dealing with sinners.

We will, therefore, leave each of the Gospels just *where* we find them put by the hand of God; and we accept them just what we find them to be under the Spirit of God. The candle has been lighted, and set in the candlestick. We have only by faith to know it to be the candle of the Lord, to walk by the light of it through the darkness of this present world, waiting for that world to come, of which it is the bright, infallible witness.