

On the Gospel by Matthew.

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In this Gospel our Lord Jesus Christ is eminently and characteristically in connection with the Jew. It is very fitting that this should be so; that is, that the New Testament should open with a formal presentation of the Lord to Israel. The way of God in the earth had contracted itself to that nation; or rather, He had separated that nation to Himself to be His centre round which to gather all the nations in light, allegiance, and worship.

For this is His way; bright and perfect as such must be. There is separation, and yet largeness: separation because He is holy; largeness because He is gracious.

The river, at the creation, had its source in the garden of Eden; but it was parted thence, and became four heads, to water the face of the earth. Noah and his sons were set in the new world, God's preserved election; but they were to replenish the world, and to hold it in government and service under God. Abraham, in a still further day, was called alone from the abominations that were overspreading the earth; but in his seed all the families of men were to be blest. And so Israel was God's people; His throne and His tabernacle were among them; but still they were to be the centre of divine government and worship for all the nations.

Such are God's counsel and way; separation to Himself, but largeness of purpose and grace far and wide, all the world round.

Israel being this separated people, divine counsels touching the earth or the nations centred in them. The light that revealed God, the customs and ordinances which bespoke His mind, and were the witness which He bore to Himself in a dark, revolted world, were in the midst of them. They were the garden of Eden in their day, where the river which was to water the face of the earth took its rise. The Saviour of the world was to be their Messiah. The Bearer of life to men dead in sins, was to be the King of Israel. So that, at His appearing, He could not but present Himself, with the fruit and virtue of His presence, to the acceptance of this people.

The Scriptures of the New Testament, therefore, most fitly open with a full and formal proposal

of the Lord Jesus to the Jews. And, accordingly, this is Matthew's subject; for Matthew opens this new volume of the oracles of God. He details succinctly, and yet solemnly and fully, the making of the claims of Jesus, Jehovah-Messiah, upon His people Israel.

This is what this Gospel by Matthew gives us. And, according to this, its contents are easily distinguished and arranged, as in the following parts.

FIRST PART. — Matthew 1, 2.

The first proposal of the Lord Jesus to Israel; that is, as the Child born in Bethlehem, the city of David; according to the prophet Micah.

SECOND PART. — Matthew 3 - 20.

The second proposal of Himself by the Lord Jesus to His people; that is, as the Light from Zebulun and Naphtali; according to the prophet Isaiah.

THIRD PART. — Matthew 21 - 25.

The third proposal of Himself by the Lord Jesus to His people; that is, as the Kin. just and lowly, and bringing salvation; according to the prophet Zechariah.

FOURTH PART. — Matthew 26 - 28.

The result of Israel's refusal of the Lord; for Israel did refuse Him - upon each of these proposals of Himself to them.

Such are the contents of this Gospel, and such their arrangement in their simplest form. It is the record of the trial of the question whether or not Israel would accept their Messiah. Other things, as we shall see in the progress of it, are looked at now and again; but the Spirit in the evangelist never loses sight of this great leading subject. And I would now, in some further carefulness of heart and thought, consider this Gospel itself in these its several parts.

PART 1.

Matthew 1, 2.

JESUS is born; but He is born to the Jews, as well as of the Jews. His genealogy is given to us from Abraham and from David, heads and fathers of Israel; and His birth is announced in characters which Israel could read as their own language. The Child born is "Emmanuel," and Jesus God with Israel, and the Saviour of Israel. "To us," in some sense specially, Israel might now say, "a Child is born, to us a Son is given."

Jesus was born King of the Jews, and in the city of David. Son and Heir of David; as we read, "Of the seed of David according to the flesh," though, in His full person, He was David's Lord.

The rights of the family of David were His; and those rights were founded in divine title, and full of majesty and honour in the earth.

In 1 Chr. 17 the covenant made with David, the promise made to him touching his house and throne, is announced by Nathan. Mercy is to be David's for ever, the honour of his throne and the stability of his house likewise for ever.

In Psalm 89 this covenant is cited; but there is added the condition touching David's children,

that, if they were not faithful, they should know the judgment of the Lord. And we know how this came to pass. The promise made conditional on the faithfulness of David's children was lost by them and to them, as generation after generation, in the history of the kingdom of Judah, witnessed.

But discipline is not forgetfulness. The promise is suspended because of conditions broken by a faithless Solomon, or by a rebellious Zedekiah; but it stands good in God's faithfulness, and in the hand of the Lord Christ. In Him all the promises are Yea and Amen.

Accordingly, when Jesus was born, the Spirit, by angels and by prophets, recalls, after so many ages, the covenant at first announced by Nathan. This is done, if not in terms, in spirit and reality, by Gabriel's word to Mary, and then by the word of Zacharias. Luke 1. Jesus is introduced as the Seed of David, Whom the oracles of God, in 1 Chr. 17 and Psalm 89, had spoken of; Heb. 1: 5 identifies Jesus with David's Seed of 1 Chr. 17.

This is simple and sure, though another wondrous witness of the divine unities that are found in Scripture. And blessed it is to see light thus shining out after centuries of darkness, when the hand of the Gentile had been uppermost, and the honour of David had been in the dust. David's Seed is brought forth in Luke 2; and now, in Matt. 2, this Seed is presented in full form and character, the Bethlehemite of the prophet Micah. And being thus set in His place (the Bethlehemite, the Seed of David, and King of the Jews), the Gentiles come to Him. This was needed to give the moment its full solemnity. All the prophets had thus invested it. Shiloh was to be of Judah; but to the Shiloh of Judah was to be the gathering of the peoples. The King of Israel was to be the God of the whole earth. The Jews were God's people, but the Gentiles were to rejoice with them. The Root of Jesse was to stand for an ensign of Israel, but the Gentiles were to seek to it. And our prophecy from Micah speaks the like language; for, after telling of the Ruler of Israel that was to be born in Bethlehem, it goes on to say of Him, "For now shall He be great unto the ends of the earth." Micah 5: 2-4. We therefore get the visit of the wise men from the distant East, when this Child is born in Bethlehem. They come, though it be to Him that is born King of the Jews, yet to worship Him *themselves*.

Thus the Gentiles appear as before God in Zion, and things for a moment (a moment full of typical or mysterious beauty) are put in divine order. Israel is the head. The first dominion has come to the daughter of Zion. The Gentiles give place, and Jerusalem is sought unto by the ends of the earth.

All, after this manner, is done in full solemnity. Nothing is wanting to make complete this presentation of the Child of Bethlehem according to the prophecy of Micah. If the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem receive Him not, they are without excuse.

The rejection, however, was immediate and peremptory, sealed by murderous hands which the spirit of the world in the heart had moved, but which sought to cover itself by lies and hypocrisy. Nothing can exceed the iniquity of Herod. The throne at Jerusalem was, at that time, in his possession, and he will not part with it, though the title of another be divine. If he may hold it, he will not give it even to God Himself. This is the language of his acts. And like killer like people. Jerusalem, as well as Herod, is troubled at the word of the men of the East, and ready executioners of the work of death are found at his bidding. The priests of the Lord had once been slain, because they had helped David; the children of Bethlehem shall perish now, because David's Lord may be among them. The voice of weeping is heard in Ramah. Messiah the Bethlehemite is refused. Israel will not be gathered, and Herod will still be king, though Jesus be first an Exile in Egypt, and then a Nazarene in the earth.

Thus is made, and thus ends, the first presentation of Christ to Israel. All this is peculiar to Matthew; and I need not add how characteristic it is of that which I have suggested to be the purpose of his Gospel.

In looking back on these chapters, some things may give us a little further thought.

What force and authority, I may say, is in that one word "Emmanuel." Did the soul but duly entertain it, what power to displace all things else would be found in it! *God with us*, is a thought, or a fact, or a mystery, which might well claim authority to make room for itself, whatever else would have to give way. And this may witness to each of us how little we have known the sublime, authoritative force of that one sentence, "They shall call His name Emmanuel."

The wretched man who shares some of the principal action of chapter 2, and to whom we have already referred, knew nothing of that name. Desperate, victorious love of the world was seated in his heart. Unseen things had been brought nigh to him. The world of spirits and of glories, the world that faith deals with, the world of God and His angels, had been presented to his eye and to his ear. The star, by the report of the wise men, and the oracle of the prophet, by the interpretation of the scribes, had been pressing that world closely upon him; but that world was a trespasser. Herod's heart refused to enter it; for it had learnt nothing of the displacing, supreme authority of that one word, "Emmanuel."

The wise men, on the contrary, had blessedly learnt it. The star commanded them. At its bidding they had risen up, and taken a long, untried journey, which knew no end till "Emmanuel" was reached. Their souls had found authority in the revelation of God. It had worked effectually in them. The intelligence and the decision, the victories and the consolations, of faith are illustrated in this passing sight which we get of them. It is a history which, in its measure, may claim a place with that of Stephen in Acts 7. Both are brief, but brilliant.

The Joseph of these chapters shows us the life of faith also; not indeed in the same earnest character, but in that principle of it which says, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments." There may be fear and infirmity in Joseph; but the Lord will meet this with His provisions, as He met the decisive, victorious faith of the men of the East with His *consolations*. Joseph, hearing how Archelaus was reigning in Judea, in the room of his father Herod, is afraid to go thither; and God, in consideration of his fears, directs him, by a dream, to turn aside to the parts of Galilee. And, I suppose, many of us, in our little histories, have experienced the like tenderness and consideration of our weakness; when, through want of faith, or heart for Jesus, we could not reach His elevation, He has, by His providence, met us on our level.

The scribes, likewise, of Matthew 2, may read us a lesson as profitably as any. The lesson, however, is a painful, humbling one. They exhibit the heartlessness of mere Biblical information. Out of the Bible they teach the poor travellers their way; but they take not one step of it with them, though it were to the Bethlehemite of their prophet. Those wayfaring men of God may go alone, for aught they care. Oh, the terrible sight which this affords, beloved, and the solemn admonition it has for us!

PART 2.

Matthew 3 - 20.

YEARS have now passed since the day of the Child of Bethlehem. The long season of subjection to His parents at Nazareth is over, His term of obedience under the law, as the circumcised One; and now, being thirty years old, He is coming forth as the Light from the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, according to the prophet Isaiah.

There is, however, an introduction to this second presentation of Christ to Israel, as there had

been to the first. The Child born had His genealogy recorded from Abraham and from David, His *legal* genealogy, Heir and Representative as He was of the rights made sure to those heads of the nation by the covenants of God; and then He came forth, in solemn form presented as the Bethlehemite of Micah.

In like manner this Light of the prophet Isaiah is now introduced.

The ministry of John, the preparer of the way of the Lord, as Isaiah had spoken, goes before it.

The baptism of the Lord by the hand of John then takes place; for Jesus would fulfil all righteousness. He Who, as circumcised, had thoroughly honoured God in Moses, or under law, fulfilling righteousness then, would now (as God, in dispensation, was going from Moses to John) follow obediently, and fulfil *all* righteousness, the righteousness announced by the *Baptist*, as well as that demanded by the *lawgiver*.

Then we get His commission or ordination, under the voice of the Father, and by endowment of the Spirit.

And then the temptation; a necessary part of this great solemnity also, and needful to the introduction of the Lord into His ministry.

If the work which now lay before Him be redemption; if He be about to repair, yea, more than repair, the mischief which the first man had wrought, and which till other men had but witnessed and perpetuated, so must He personally stand where the first man, and all beside, had failed. Hence the temptation. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil. The Spirit, Who had descended and rested on Him at His baptism, in a bodily shape like a dove, now puts Him forth to withstand the serpent, who is also the roaring lion; for the dove-like ministry of grace to sinners is one with the full defeat of man's destroyer. Jesus came to save sinners, and to destroy the works of the devil.

Accordingly, Jesus, in the very outset, and as introducing Himself to His work, withstands Satan. He proves Himself to be impregnable. Eve surrendered God's word to the serpent; Jesus withstands him by it. No attempt of the enemy prevails. The Holy Thing that had been born is still as holy in full manhood as He had been in the virgin's womb. He proves Himself not to be in the common defeat and captivity. He leaves Satan without any title against Him; and thus He *binds* him.

And this binding of him is the first great action of our Deliverer with our destroyer.

He then comes forth at once, to enter his house and spoil his goods.

In the due season He will be his Bruiser, as well as his, Binder and Spoiler.

He will *bruise his head on Calvary*.

Then, in the far distance, He will *cast him from heaven*. Rev. 12.

Then He will *put him into the bottomless pit*. Rev. 20.

And finally, He will *cast him into the lake of fire*. Rev. 20.

These are the ways of our great Deliverer with our adversary; and these ways He here begins in the wilderness of the temptation. How simple, and yet how glorious! How perfect in order, as well as mighty in action, from first to last! No one binds or bruises Satan but Jesus the Son of God. Samson typifies him as the Stronger Man entering the strong man's house, to spoil his goods; and all the saints will have Satan bruised under their feet in season; but Jesus the Son of God bound the strong man, and bruised the head of the serpent. These works were all His own, and His only.

And all this was introductory to His ministry. As having fulfilled all righteousness, whether under the law of Moses, or under the baptism of John; as owned and ordained of the Father, in Whose eyes the feet of this Messenger were to be more than beautiful; as endowed by the Holy Ghost, and as the Binder of the strong man, the Son comes forth to fulfil His course. John had now been cast into prison, and his service was thus over. And, in order that Scripture might get, in every thing, its full answer from Him, the Lord departs into Galilee, and comes and dwells in Capernaum, on the sea-coast, in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali; because thus had it been written by the prophet, "The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up." This great light broke forth in regions which bordered on the great Gentile world, destined as it was, in its full and final power, to lighten every land.

Precious, as well as perfect, all this is. And this great light was the Light of life. It rose as on the shadow of death; for the darkness which it came to scatter was the darkness of death. If ignorance be in man, it is ignorance which is the loss of the life of God. Man is alienated from the life of God, by reason of the ignorance that is in him, because of the blindness of his heart. Eph. 4: 18. The Light that was now going forth was, therefore, a quickening Light. The Lord *heals*. He went about doing good. He preaches and He teaches; but He heals also. Soul and body, all the need and misery of fallen man, were His concern. He would leave behind Him, wherever He went, through the cities and villages of Israel, the voice of health and thanksgiving.

He begins His service, as John had begun his, by calling for repentance; and that, too, on the warranty of the same great truth. "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," was the voice of each of them. And as John had made moral demands upon the people, suited to the repentance which such a ministry as his would challenge, so the Son, the Beloved, now teaches according to the repentance or newness of mind which such a One as He must look for. The Son, in His teaching, must needs go beyond the lawgiver, Moses; nor can He conform Himself to John, who had come "in the way of righteousness." And this we find in the Sermon on the Mount, the first and great sample of the teaching of the Lord Jesus. There we have morals beyond the measure of Moses, and a largeness of grace, a light of purity, a strength of victory over the world, a humbleness and a self-sacrificing, a goodness of all sorts, and details of mind, character, and conduct, into which the Baptist never entered.

This, however, is not preaching the gospel. It is the morals which suited the school where the Son taught. And with such teaching the Lord meets His disciples on the mount, and then comes down to meet all manner of sorrow, need, and suffering among the people, at the foot of it. The leper, the centurion's servant, Peter's wife's mother, and the whole multitude of sick folk that come to Him, are made to know the virtue that was in Him, and that it was a divine Physician Who had taken up their case. No medicine was needed. It was the Lord of life Himself Who was healing them.

And yet it was the *sympathizing*, as well as the *divine* Physician. He Who was now on His way to the altar as the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world, by the way, or on the road, was taking our infirmities, and bearing our sicknesses. This was Jesus in Israel. Matt. 8: 17. He had no medicines, nor did He prescribe any care or treatment. He spake, and it was done. He touched the fever, and it fled; the leprosy, and it was cleansed. There was all this intense personality, so to speak, this full and deep sympathy, this contact as of eye with eye, mouth with mouth, hand with hand; and yet no defilement. It was *God's* knowledge of good and evil, and *God's* dealing with such things Jesus bore all our burdens and infirmities, whether in sympathy or atonement; but He was unsoiled in the midst of them all. He was in *God's* holiness apart from them, and in *God's* grace and power in disposing of them.

And yet He was nothing, and had nothing, in the earth. If He be addressed as a Master His followers must count on not having the holes of foxes or the nests of birds; for He Himself had not where to lay His head. He had, in undertaking our redemption, entered into the forfeiture of every thing; that forfeiture which man, by sin, had incurred. By personal right this Son of man owned every thing, He had never lost Eden, nor man's place in the creation of God, in its fulness and order and beauty.

But with all this personal title, having kept up His first estate where Adam had lost it; with all this, I say, He took nothing. He had lost nothing, but still He would have nothing. Judicially He was exposed to no privation or sorrow. The earth on which He was entitled to walk was not one of thorns and thistles; but voluntarily He took up all sorrow and privation, and walked as acquainted with grief all His days. By-and-by He will leave Himself in the hands of wicked men who come to eat up His flesh, though He might have the army of heaven, twelve legions of angels, to rescue Him; so now, with title to all things, He takes nothing "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head."

And yet, with all this emptying of Himself, He was above that, which was around Him. He stands over disease, and rebukes it. He speaks to winds and waves, and they obey Him. He commands devils, and at His bidding they leave one place and enter into another, though without His word they could boast of their liberty to go up and down in the earth, and to and fro upon it. Job 1, 2; 1 Peter 5. He forgives sins also. Peter's wife's mother in her fever; the sea of Galilee with its winds and waves; the poor Gadarene in his fury; the palsied man at Capernaum in his sins and disease; all these shall tell of this supreme, universal authority that was in Him.

He is allowed to do His work for a short space (as through the time of Matt. 8), without challenge or hindrance. It was, however, but brief breathing time that the Lord of glory was given in this world. The Child of Bethlehem, for a moment, receives the homage of the Gentiles; but He is speedily, after that, on the road to Egypt. So the Light from Galilee casts out a beam or two across the darkness; but it would then have been put out in obscurity, if man could have prevailed. The world, in the Jew, proves that it loves its own darkness, and will contend for it, resenting the Light that was now shining. The heads of the people are offended in Him, because He was the Son of Joseph, as they said, the carpenter of Nazareth. They accuse Him of blasphemy, when He was forgiving sins; of being the Friend of publicans and sinners, when He was doing the works of grace; of being Beelzebub, because He cast out devils; of breaking the Sabbath, because He relieved the needy and the sorrowful one day as well as another; they ask Him for signs, though He was filling every moment and every place with signs that were clear as the cloudless morning or evening sky; they accuse Him of breaking traditions, when He was insisting on the commandments of God! What concord, we may surely ask, has light with darkness? The enmity may address itself to Him somewhat timidly at first, but it feeds itself as it lives and grows, and soon rages fiercely and fearlessly. And as it had been with Herod and Jerusalem, so it is now with the teachers and the cities. Jerusalem was moved, with Herod, at the word of the wise men from the East; the cities are now one with their teachers, in the rejection of the Light that was shining in the land. Jesus has to lament over them because they repented not. There is indeed a multitude that follow Him, but truly it was a giddy multitude. Disciples are attracted from the mass of the nation, but Jesus had rather to bear with them, than to find refreshment from them; and we know how it ended between Him and them.

Full of solemn meaning it is to us of *this* day, that the Lord in *that* day looked on Israel as an unkept, unfed flock. "When He saw the multitude, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." And yet (though this was the

judgment of the Great Shepherd) there was much *religion* then. Sects were numerous; feast-days were kept; and there was a great stir in all that which might have marked a day of public religious decency and devotion. That generation were soon to bear witness to themselves that they would not go into the judgment-hall of the Gentiles, lest they should be defiled, and be thereby hindered from keeping the passover. The money that was soon to purchase the blood of a guiltless Man they would not put into the treasury. Excision from the synagogue was dreaded, and Moses was boasted in; the Gentile was despised likewise, and the Samaritan was shunned. Ceremonial cleanness would be preserved. Teachers abounded, and zeal. And yet, under the eye of Him Who saw them as God saw them, Israel was without a shepherd, an unkept, unfed flock. The land was as a field which needed the tillage of spring. It was no *reaping* time then, as it ought to have been, where all this religiousness was, and when the Heir of the vineyard had come. In the thoughts of the Lord of the harvest it was rather a time for "the first works" to be done over again, a *sowing* time; and the servants had to be sent into the field with the plough and the seed, and not with the sickle.

But as it had been with the Master, so are the servants to count on its being with them. In sending out the Twelve, in Matt. 10, the Lord gives them, as with Himself, a ministry of healing. But He warns them of what lay before them, that they were to be as sheep in the midst of wolves; that they would be called before magistrates and rulers for His sake, find enemies in their own kindred, have to *endure* to the end, and be called Beelzebub, as He had been. He knew the *circumstances* that must attend their *testimony* to God in such a world as this. The Sun with healing in His wings had risen, and Israel should have sung, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases." But Israel could not learn that song (the Israel of that day); for they refused to be healed. Israel "would not."

Strange this is; for man knows how to value his own advantages. He knows the joy of restored nature, and how to welcome the return of days of health and activity. But such is the enmity of the carnal mind, that if blessings come accompanied with the claims and presence of God, they meet with no welcome here. We love the good things that flatter or indulge us, but not those things which bring God near to us. And yet from Christ we can get no other. He brings God to us with the blessing. Surely He does. This is His good and perfect gift (James 1: 17), this is His way and His work in the world. He glorifies God as He relieves the sinner. If man has been ruined, God has been dishonoured; and Jesus does a perfect work, vindicating the name and truth of God just as surely and as fully as He brings deliverance and life and blessing to man.

This has ever been so, and must needs have been so, in the ways of God in this world. His claims in righteousness have ever been owned, as the need of the sinner has ever been answered. God will not surrender His honour to our blessing. He will secure both; be *just*, while He is a *Justifier*. Mere mercy is not known in His ways. It is mercy to the sinner founded on satisfaction to God. It is blood upon the mercy-seat; the blood witnessing that the ransom has been paid, and giving mercy full warrant to open all its stores. Righteousness and peace kiss each other.

This is the power and character of the cross; but this also is the principle of the ministry, the point now before us in this Gospel. When the Lord went forth Himself, as in Matt. 4, He healed all that had diseases and torments, He cast out devils, and cleansed the lepers. But with all that He preached, saying, "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He published God's claims while He met man's need. And so now, in Matt. 10. Sending out the twelve apostles as to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, He both commissions them, and empowers them to heal the sick, to cleanse the lepers, to raise the dead, and to cast out devils; but He commands them, at the same time, to preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." God's rights, again I may say, were to be published, while man's sorrow

was to be relieved.

It is, however, this very thing, this full and perfect work of the Lord, that the heart of man is not prepared to welcome. And yet therein is its glory. Man is blest, but God is brought near. This does not do for man. The manna, if it come direct from heaven, and that continually, will, ere long, be loathed; though it be white as coriander seed, and sweet as honey. And so Jesus and His servants will be refused, and have to suffer, though they dispense health through all the villages of the land. Strange it seems, again I say; but, the enmity of the carnal mind may account for it.

In looking at the *ministry* of the Lord now, as we did at His *birth* in the First Part of our Gospel, we still find things that are peculiar. All the circumstances attending His birth as the Bethlehemite, as we saw in Matt. 1, 2, were exclusively the things of Matthew; and so in this Second Part, he is the only evangelist who introduces the Lord's ministry as the Light from Galilee, according to the Jewish prophet; and he is likewise the only one who tells us of the limitation put on the mission of the Twelve, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (so strictly Jewish is he); the only one, also, who speaks of the kingdom as the kingdom *of heaven*, a title which bespeaks the dispensational or national character of the kingdom, rather than its moral, abstract character, which is conveyed to us by its other title, the kingdom *of God*.

The mission of John the Baptist, with the inquiry as to Who the Lord was, our evangelist has together with Luke; and, in considering Luke's Gospel. I have noticed it. The Lord's grief over the unbelief of the cities of Israel I have also noticed in the same meditations on Luke. In Matthew this occurs at the close of Matt. 11. The Father, the Son, the headship of all things in Himself. and the family taught and drawn of the Father, in sovereign grace, and by the effectual light and power of His Spirit, are the objects present to the mind of our Lord there. He enters the territory. so to speak, which He occupies in John. The occasion naturally called Him that way. He had just been surveying the moral wastes of Israel; and from thence He looks up to the purpose and energy of the Father, in grace *quicken*g souls into the rest which a lifegiving Son, under commission from the Father, has for them. And this is more characteristic of *John's* Gospel than any thing else we get in Matthew. Full of interest I believe this to be.

The narratives or cases in John distinguish themselves from those we get in the other Gospels. In Matthew and Mark, I may say, there are no illustrations of *quicken*g power; no cases in which that divine operation is made the subject or principal business. The call of Matthew himself, in Matt. 9, is that instance which appears most like to this. The cases are, generally speaking, illustrations of *exercised faith*.

In Luke we have illustrations of each of these; but generally, as in Matthew and Mark, of faith exercised. Still, as in Peter, in the Samaritan leper, in Zaccheus, and in the dying thief, we have cases of the quickening power of God, or of souls beginning to live.

In John, however, on the contrary, we have, I may say, only one instance of faith exercised, but many of the beginning of life. The nobleman of Capernaum illustrates faith; but, in all the other cases, it is the quickening which we contemplate. Blessed sight! In Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael; in the Samaritan woman, and then in the Samaritans whom her word awakened; in the sinner of Matt. 8, in the blind beggar of Matt. 9, and in the Nicodemus of Matt. 3, 7, and 19, we see the beginning of life, or instances of the quickening power of God.

This distinction is remarkable; yet fully characteristic of each of the evangelists. In Matthew, as we have been seeing, the Lord is in the midst of His own people Israel, giving witness of Himself in

grace and power, and testing Israel's condition. So, with some distinguishing beauty, I might say, in Mark. We therefore would not expect instances of quickening there, but cases of faith (where it was found as in a remnant), or the sad witness of general unbelief. In Luke the Lord is more abroad, more free to act as the One Who had come to man, as well as to Israel; and consequently we get there a larger exhibition of His work, a more various expression of instances, both of exercised faith, and of quickening power. But, in John, the Lord is the life-giving Son, the Word become flesh, full of grace and truth, giving power to sinners to become the sons of God. And this sets Him immediately and alone with souls, to do His blessed work of quickening. This variety is strikingly and beautifully significant.

In our Gospel the Lord was testing Israel. But He found them wanting.

The Light had again done its work in the land. It would fain have awakened from slumber, and then have cheered and guided, according to its proper virtue; but the darkness "would not." The Light, therefore, exposed It judged by exposing; that is, *morally* judged all that was around it; other judgment the hand of the Lord carried out. He did not strive nor cry, nor let His voice be heard in the street. He would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. He spoils the goods of the strong man; but, like Samson, He will not touch Israel. He came not to judge, but to save.

The figure of the unclean spirit going out, and then returning, and finding the house swept and garnished, dwelling there again with seven other spirits more wicked than himself, is His picture of the Jewish generation in their last and worst estate. Israel had become Gentile. Their circumcision may be counted for uncircumcision. He had come to His own, but His own had not received Him. So that the mind of the divine Teacher takes a new direction, and the Light that had risen in Galilee, and would have illuminated the whole land, has now (in spirit or in anticipation) to cast its beams on other and distant parts of the earth.

It is thus as we open Matt. 13.

Here we get, for the first time, a full anticipation of the present age.

The Lord's action here, at the very outset, has meaning in it. He went out from the house, and sat by the sea-side. v. 1.

As yet the world of the Gentiles had not been contemplated as the field of His labours. The faith of a Gentile, so early as in the time of Matt. 8, had led Him to speak of those who should come from the East, and from the West, to sit down with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, in the kingdom; but that was only one glance of that eye which surveys all things, and sees the end from the beginning. It was not the fixed gaze of Him Who had foreseen and appointed the field of the world to be the place of divine husbandry in the gospel. But now, in chapter 8, that eye looks out to the world of the Gentiles, and fixes itself there; for there, ere long, the Spirit and the truth would be dealing with man, and the Lord of the harvest would have His husbandry there, and not in the cities and villages of Israel. "The field is the world."

And now, likewise, the Lord begins to speak in parables; a circumstance deeply significant of the moment, because this style of speaking was one kind of judgment upon Israel. It was as the raising of the pillar between Israel and the Egyptians; only Israel was now put on the dark side of it. The Lord, as He Himself tells us, was now speaking in parables, that that word of the prophet might be fulfilled, "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive." Here lay the reason why He now began to use these dark sayings. They had their own secret, each of them; but it was not given to Israel to know it. The Lord had a people who should be instructed by them, instructed in mysteries, mysteries of the kingdom; but Israel was left in darkness by them. Sentence of

blindness of eye was beginning to be executed upon them; their *dispersion* was not yet.

The Sower, in the parable which opens this chapter, is *among men*. He has gone forth, and "the field" is the world." And thence, throughout the chapter, the Lord as, in spirit or by anticipation, among the Gentiles, tracing, in a series of parables, the history of His gospel in the world, or during this present Gentile age. He looks at the tare-field, the scene of mingled good and evil, such as Christendom now is. He then contemplates in the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven, the prevalency of the evil thing. Then, in the parables of the Treasure and the Pearl, the preciousness, but yet the obscurity, of the good thing. And may I not say that this is graphic, to the very life, of what has come to pass, and which, with our own eyes, we see at this very hour? There is before us a field of mingled seed, the work of the Lord and the work of the enemy, with the prevalency of that which is of the enemy, and the obscurity of that which is precious and of God. What an anticipation of what we see, and cannot but see, all around us! The world of this day, that part of the earth which is the scene of the Sower's toil, is truly a tare-field, a field of mingled seed. But faith knows that a time of separation is at hand. There is to be a harvest, according to the further teaching of another of these parables.

There is to be the end of the age, when the net, which has been cast into the sea, shall be drawn to the shore, and the good be gathered into baskets, and the bad be cast away.

These things we learn here; and this chapter, in its structure, and generally in its materials, is peculiar to Matthew. Some of the parables are found nowhere else; and those which are common to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, take a peculiar connection here.

It was a distinguished moment in the Lord's ministry. "Things new and old" were before Him, the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven itself, the rule of the God of heaven over the earth and its nations, was no new thing. Daniel had distinctly told of such a kingdom, and all the prophets gave witness to it, in their way and measure. But the kingdom under such conditions as the Lord presents it in this chapter was altogether a new thing, foreign to all the thoughts and intimations of the prophets. Blindness of eye and hardness of heart executed upon Israel, and, during that season, the seed of God, the word of grace and truth, sown in the distant "field" of the "world," there passing through such a history as this chapter gives it; this surely was a new thing. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the creation (Acts 15: 18); but some of His saints have to wait till the due time for their disclosure come; and such a time for the telling out of some of them was the time of this chapter. The Lord, for a moment, in spirit, leaves Israel; and we, by anticipation, are introduced to our own Gentile history.

The occasion, however, quickly passes. Ere the chapter closes we find Him again in spirit, as well as in action and reality, in the midst of His Israel; not speaking, as in parables, the mysteries of the kingdom by the sea-side, but teaching and healing in the synagogues round about His own country. With the lost sheep of the house of Israel His business was, and He must needs return. And so He does.

This fresh period of the Lord's labours, after this interval of Matt. 13, opens with a very serious event. Herod had put John the Baptist to death.

Herod's experience at this time is awfully significant of the state of man's heart. We read of him: "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and said unto his servants, This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him."

A bad conscience is a very lively, stirring inmate of the human bosom - a good one is calm and noiseless. A bad conscience is apt to act hastily, taking alarm at any thing and every thing, fearing where no fear is. It was that which, in Joseph's brethren, called up guilt to remembrance, in a day of

innocency and false accusation.

Herod's conscience had kept the image of the murdered John ever before him, and the most distant thing would easily associate itself, in his mind, with that image. The works of Jesus would suggest to him that John was risen from the dead; and the thought was hell to Herod.

For truly the resurrection of a murdered man must be intolerable to the heart of his murderer. It tells him that He in Whose hands are the issues of life and death has put Himself on the side of his victim. And thus was it, at this time, in the apprehensions of Herod. and thus is it to be, by-and-by, in the apprehensions of the world; for in the day of the manifestation of the power of Jesus, Whom the world is now rejecting, kings, mighty men, bondmen, freemen, chief captains, great men, and rich men, all will call on the mountains and rocks to hide them from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. Rev. 6: 16.

This experience of Herod has, thus, a voice for the ear of the world. For the resurrection tells the world that God in the highest has set Himself on the side of Him Whom man has despised and rejected.

The news of this martyrdom of John is brought to the Lord, and it is evident that He is moved by it. He enters into the bearing of it upon Himself; for it did bear directly upon His own personal safety. If the messenger were thus dealt with, what might the Lord of the temple expect? If John has been put to death what will be done with Jesus? Such would be the natural suggestion of His soul at this time. After this He said to His disciples, speaking of John, "They have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them;" and His spirit, I believe, at this time, was anticipating such an utterance; for we read of Him, that He at once retires to, a desert place apart. Matt. 14: 13. As we see Him in John's Gospel again and again leaving Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him (John 7: 1; John 10: 31, 40); so now, on hearing that Herod had put John to death, He retires; and from that moment, for a season; that is, from Matt. 14: 13 to Matt. 17: 22, He continues in distant corners of the land. He was aware of danger, and He would not heedlessly encounter it. He will retire from the reach of it, if that can be done without any sacrifice of what became Him. He, therefore, for a season, is not seen in His usual track, in Capernaum or the parts around it, nor in Judea or at Jerusalem.

And how perfect, like every thing else, is this path of our Master, during this solemn and interesting season! Let His personal glory be what it may (and we know that He was none less than God over all, blessed for ever), yet was He Man in all the proper sensibilities of humanity. Those touches and passages in His history, which bespeak the weakness of His circumstances among men, are as precious as the mighty works which He wrought for them in that strength which was divine. The weary Traveller at the well of Sychar is as welcome a sight as the transfigured Lord of glory on the mount. And at this season, from the time of chapter 14: 13 to the time of chapter 17: 22, we see Him in the weakness of human circumstances. His life is in danger from the hand of man, and He retires; while we track Him, during this time, first in a desert place, then on a solitary mountain, then in Gennesaret, then on the furthest borders to the west, then on a mountain again, then in the coasts of Magdala to the furthest east, then at the highest northern point, and, at last, on a high mountain apart, which, in spirit or in mystery, was heaven itself. Matt. 14: 13, 23, 34; Matt. 15: 21, 29, 39; Matt. 16: 13; Matt. 17: 1.

Beautiful, perfect, natural path for the feet of this glorious One; at this time the exposed, imperilled One, the David as hunted like a partridge on the hills

But though consciously in danger, and therefore walking in comparative retirement, not heedlessly exposing Himself, He shows us that He was not afraid of the enemy that threatened Him, nor unmindful of the love and service which, in grace, He owed the people. For it is during this time that He answers, again and again, the challenges of His adversaries, and again and again feeds the

multitudes that wait on Him.

How full of moral glory all this is! And this is the Jesus Whose path shines before us. He would not despise the danger that threatened Him; and yet He would not be disturbed by it so as to forget how to carry Himself either to friends or foes, towards dependants or persecutors. Precious fruit in season from this Tree, which had been planted by the rivers of water!

And yet there is more than this.

While on the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, during this time, He is sought by a woman of Canaan. She brings her sorrow to Him. She gives Him her confidence.

She would use Him; just what love delights in; the very joy which He came into the world to gather at the hand and heart of sinners. She knows that He is both able and ready to serve her. The occasion is one of very tender and touching interest.

Apparently in spite of all her grief the Lord asserts God's principles, and passes her by. To the disciples he says, in her hearing "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And to herself He says, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." But she bows. She owns Him to be the Steward of God's truth, and she would not for a moment suppose that He would surrender that truth to her and her necessities. She lets God be glorified according to His own counsels, and Jesus continue the faithful Witness of those counsels, though she were to remain in sorrow still. "Truth, Lord," she answers, vindicating all that Jesus had said; "yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

This was lovely; it was perfect in its generation; fruit of divine workmanship in her soul. She would be blest only in accordance with the principles and ways of God's grace and government, of which she received the Lord as the sure, infallible Witness.

The mother in Luke 2 is quite below the Gentile of Matt. 15. She did not know that Jesus was to be about His Father's business. She would rather that He attended to her. This stranger owned that it was His Father's business He was always to be about; and she would let God's way, in the faithful hand of Christ, be exalted, though she herself were to be set aside by it. And all this was a beautiful witness of her subjection to God. Her words were deeply welcome to the heart of the Lord; and that, too, at a time when that same heart was saddened enough by all that He was meeting among His own people.

Man would have used such an opportunity for himself. If Israel have slighted Him, the Gentile has sought Him. If dangers from His own people have cast Him out, and strangers have received Him, surely He may change His place. Nature would have reasoned thus. A Syrophenician was suing Him, while Israel was refusing Him. Will He not pass over? Will He not cross the border? No. He was the obedient One. He will not, like another, go over to the king of Gath, or to the land of the Philistines. He confers not with flesh and blood, nor does He take His warrant from circumstances or from providences. He had been sent as the Minister of the circumcision, to confirm the promises made to the fathers; and though Israel may forget the voices of their prophets and the hopes of their nation, He cannot forget His commission. He is theirs, and not the Gentiles'; and this He lets this Gentile know: nor will He dispense virtue to her, or let His mercies reach her necessities, till she takes her proper Gentile place in subjection to Israel. Then, indeed, let her take all that she wanted. "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Perfect indeed this is. How full of moral glory the whole of this path, from first to last! Danger separates the Lord to sequestered mountains and wildernesses, but He does not shrink from the face of the enemy through fear, neither does He suspend His services of love through resentment, nor forget

the rights of others, though in the midst of wrongs and sufferings from them.

David, under like circumstances, as we see him in 1 Sam. 18 - 30, does not give us this. In many a way he behaves himself beautifully. But, with all that, David is no model. Sadly he failed then, admirable and amiable man as he was above many. His lies at Nob cost the blood of the priests; his lies at Gath the capture of Ziklag. He conceived vengeance in his heart, and his purpose had to be turned aside by the word of a woman - and he would have been found fighting against the people of God in the ranks of the uncircumcised, had not the hand of God swayed the minds of the princes of the Philistines.

And yet David is indeed among the choicest of the children of men. But the David of 1 Sam. 18 - 30 is not the Jesus of Matt. 14-16, though in kindred circumstances. They were, each of them, in retirement because of danger, and the threatening of the power that was, in their respective days, in Israel; but the two histories only prove afresh that *there is but One*. None but He for our sins, and none but He for God's glory. Good things may be *said* by them of old time, good things may be *done* by them of old time, but all perfection of all kinds is with Jesus only. And happy is the thought, welcome indeed is the contrast. None but Jesus! In Him only the sinner finds his relief, in Him only God gets His glory. And these thoughts arise as we track the Lord's path through this part of our Gospel. Long, if one may speak of oneself, has it been the admiration of the soul; and solemn and interesting it is indeed. But it has its end, and we must look at its end. This we reach in Matt. 17.

The certainty of our view of an object depends very principally on the light in which it is set; and our enjoyment of a prospect is greatly determined by the way in which we approach it. It was unbelief in Israel which put the Lord in the tare-field, as we have already seen; and it is the same which now puts Him on the hill of glory. We ought to see this in order to appreciate His place in either Matt. 13 or Matt. 17.

Every step of His bright path of blessing on earth, and in the midst of Israel, left traces behind it of One Who had come as the Repairer of the breach. He was, as we may say, renewing His covenant with His ancient people, His covenant of health and salvation. But they "would not." The great man and the poor man, the king and the multitude, bore their several witness to this. They "would not."

In the palace of the king the harp and the viol and the wine were there, and the blood of the righteous. The sin of Babylon was found in Jerusalem, and more than the sin of Babylon. Herod's was a feast full of more horrid rites than those which drew forth the fingers of a man's hand, to write the sentence of death upon Belshazzar and his kingdom. The vessels of the temple were profaned there but the blood of the righteous was slain here. This was the voice from the palace. The solitudes of Caesarea Philippi were heard also, and they witnessed the same, that Israel "would not." "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" asked the Lord of His apostles, as they were there together. But they had no answer for Him which could tell Him that He had been received by them. The exultation of the prophet, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given," the proper exultation of Israel over their Messiah, was not taken up by the people. They may have high thoughts and honourable thoughts of Him, as Elias, or as Jeremias; but this will not do; He was not understood.

This was a great moment. We must linger here for a little. It is an occasion which we cannot well pass by.

No confession short of that of "the Son of the living God" will do. The people may have high and honourable thoughts of Jesus, as I have just said. They may speak of Him as "a good man," or as "a prophet," as Elias or Jeremias; but nothing of this kind will do; nothing less than the faith which apprehends and receives Him as the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The reason of the need of this faith is simple. Our state of ruin in this world, ruin by reason of sin and death, calls for the presence of God Himself among us, and that, too, in the character of Conqueror over sin and death. And He Whom God has sent is such a One. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the living God in flesh; come here for the very purpose of bringing back life into this scene of death, destroying the works of the devil, and putting away sin. This is the One Whom our condition demands. Such is our ruin that nothing less than this will do for us; and if we can in our own thoughts, do with anything less than this, we show that we have not yet discovered our real condition, our condition in the presence of God. All acceptance of Christ short of this is nothing. It is no acceptance of Him. He may be a Prophet, He may be a King, He may be a Doer of wonders, or a Teacher of heavenly secrets; but if this be all our apprehension of Him, our all is nothing

Faith has great and noble work to do in such a scene as this world, and in such circumstances as human life furnishes every day. It has to reach its own objects through many veils, and to dwell in its own world in spite of many hindrances. It is the things not seen, and the things hoped for, that it deals with; and such things lie at a distance, or under coverings; and faith has to be active and energetic in order to reach them and deal with them.

In John 11 we look on a scene of death. Such, as I have said, our ruined condition in this world really is. Every one, save the Lord Himself, seems to have apprehended nothing but death. The disciples, Martha and her friends, and even Mary, talked only of death; and, as far as the present moment went, they have no faith in any thing beyond it. Jesus, in the midst of all this, stands alone, eyeing life, and talking of life. He moved onward in the consciousness of it, carrying in Himself light in this overshadowing of darkness and gloom. But there was no faith there doing its duties; that is, discovering Him. Martha represents this absence of faith; just as the multitude do in Matthew 16: 14. She meets the Lord, but her best thought about Him is this; that whatsoever He would ask of God, God would give it Him. But this will not do. This was not faith doing its proper work, discovering the glory that was hidden in Jesus of Nazareth.

The Son will empty Himself. He will take the form of a servant. He will be obedient unto death. He will cover Himself as with a cloud, and he hid under a thick veil, a veil not only of flesh, but of flesh in humiliation, and weakness, and poverty. But while He is doing all this He cannot admit the absence of that faith which does its proper work only when it discovers Him. He will not be in company with depreciating thoughts about Him. He looks for faith's discoveries of His glory, in the saints that He walks with.

He therefore rebukes Martha. Instead of admitting that God will give to Him, as Martha had said, on His asking Him, He says to her, as on the authority of His own personal glory, "Thy brother shall rise again." And instead of complying with her afterthought, that He should rise again in the last day, He says to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

How all this commends itself to our souls! The Lord will give no place to these imperfect apprehensions of Him. Needful it was, in the riches of His grace, that He should empty Himself; our sins could find their relief in nothing less than that. But right it is that faith should make a full discovery of Him under this veil of self-emptiness.

But, happy to add, if Martha represent the unbelief which comes short of a just apprehension of Jesus, Peter, on this occasion, in our Gospel, represents the faith which, of the operation of God, does the due work of faith, discovering the hidden glory. Blessed to see this. Peter had it by revelation of the Father. Flesh and blood was not equal to render this duty, or do this business of faith. It was a

revelation to Peter, as it must be to all of us.

On learning the thoughts of the people about Him, Jesus turns to His disciples, and says, "But Whom say ye that I am?" And then Peter's confession is made. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," he says.

Jesus was satisfied; nay, He was filled with delight.. The glory of a direct revelation from the Father to the spirit and intelligence of one of His own now shone before Him; and He knew the rapture of such a moment. "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona," says the Lord; "for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven;" and then He recognizes this mystery (that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God) as the foundation of all building for eternity.

Surely this was a great moment. It warrants our tarrying over this place of our Gospel for this little space. We have turned aside to hear the word of the loving Martha in John 11; and taken occasion to contrast the poverty and imperfection of that, calling out a rebuke from the Lord, with this word of Peter uttered under a revelation of the Father, drawing forth the satisfaction and delight of the Lord.

But this moment was pregnant with great results. The darkness of man touching the Son of the living God shared the moment with the revelation of that Son which the Father had made to Peter. All this gave character to this great occasion, and the Lord instructs us by it.

As the unbelief of the earth now stood in proof before Him, from the report which His disciples had brought Him about the opinions of the people concerning Him. there was therefore but a step, so to speak, between Him and heaven. Accordingly, He prepares His apostles for it; for a sight of the kingdom in its day of power and glory, when the One Whom the earth was now rejecting should appear in His magnificence. "Verily I say unto you," speaks the Lord now to His Twelve, "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom."

After six days, in accordance with this promise, Peter, James, and John are taken by their Lord to a high mountain apart, and there they are given a sight of Him in His glorified body, with Moses and Elias in glory also.

Hitherto there had been no vision like this. Abraham and Jacob had visions of angels and of the Lord of angels; but before them His glory was veiled. Gideon and Manoah had also seen Him, and so had Joshua, The burning bush, the cleft rock, and the top of Pisgah, had put Moses in company with God. Jacob saw the ladder whose top reached to heaven. Moses and the elders of Israel saw the God of Israel with the heavens under His feet, as a paved work of a sapphire stone. Prophets had seen Him in mystic garments, Isaiah in the temple, and Daniel at the river of Hiddekel. Elisha had a peculiar vision; not of the Lord, but of the chariot and horsemen of Israel, and of the ascending prophet his master. And this, in one sense, was the brightest of any. It soared very loftily into the heavenly purposes of God. It was as the rapture or translation of the saints, as that will be in the day of 1 Thess. 4. It was an ascension. Still, however, it was not a vision of men in glory. Elisha did not see a glorified human body, though he did see, in a mystery, the heavenly convoy of it. He was rather in 1 Thess. 4: than in 1 Cor. 15. But now, on the holy hill, Peter, James, and John have a finer sight of his master, than Elisha himself had of him on the other side of Jordan. They saw Elijah in glory, which Elisha did not.

So that hitherto there had been no vision quite equal to this in our seventeenth chapter. Stephen's, in a day after this, may be said to exceed it. But there was no vision in earlier days wherein men were seen, as now they were, in personal glory, transfigured after the image of the heavenly. And, had we but more desire after the presence of the Lord, we could not live forgetful of this great occasion. The light of the holy hill, where the majesty of Jesus was seen, and where the voice from the excellent glory

was heard, would cheer the heart far beyond what it is wont to do; if one may utter his heart for others.

And thus was it now, in the progress of our Gospel. The unbelief of Israel. that is, of the earth, sealed by the answer which the Lord received to His inquiry, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" led Him to heaven for a moment. For if the earth were not ready to welcome Him, heaven in its higher glory stood open to Him.

This, however, like His visit to the tare-field of Christendom in Matt. 13, is but for a moment. His business is with Israel and with the earth, and to Israel and the earth He therefore quickly returns.

But we noticed on Matt. 13 that the Lord, in spirit, continues among the Gentiles, or in this present dispensation of ours, all through the important series of parables which forms the material of that chapter. Something like this may now be noticed after this visit to heaven in Matt. 17. For, although the Lord returns to Israel and the earth, still, through this stage of His ministry, which does not end till we enter Matt. 21, there is something of the heavenly mind in Him. He descends the hill, and lays aside His garments of glory; but His words savour of One Who had heavenly impressions on His spirit. The light; which had shone forth from Zebulun on the cities and villages of the land, had now imbibed something of the heavenly glory; and, in its shinings from henceforth, some of that glory is seen in it.

Thus, in setting forth the little child, rebuking the pride of His disciples, the Lord speaks of the Church in her unworldly principles, and in her place and authority in the Spirit. And, in the course of these chapters, He comments in such a way on the law of marriage, He prescribes such a rule of perfection to the rich young ruler, He makes such promises of place and honour in the regeneration or the coming millennial kingdom to His servants, as let us feel that He had returned to the earth from the holy hill with something of the heavenly mind forward and vivid in Him.

This may be gathered. It is indeed so, that He is not glorified at the foot of that hill, as He had been at the top of it; nor does He make the Church, or the heavenly calling, His subject. It would have been out of season. The mystery of the Church had to wait for other ministry, under the gift and presence of the Holy Ghost, and upon His glorification. But now, since there had been a momentary anticipation of heavenly glory, there is enough to let us know that the Light of Galilee had now gathered to itself something of that glory.

And, in company with this, I think we may perceive, that though He has come back to Israel His people on earth, yet He is now, in a measure, taking His distance from them. He is somewhat less with the multitude during the time of these chapters. He receives them, if sought by them; He answers them, if challenged by them. Surely. But still His mind appears to take its distance from them.

This distance, however, is not abandonment. The time for that had not yet fully come. A long and dreary time of His hidden face awaited Israel, but it had not begun in the days of Matthew 18 - 20.* We have seen Him proposed or presented to Israel as the Bethlehemite of the prophet Micah, and as the Light from Galilee of the prophet Isaiah. We have seen Him slighted and rejected, challenged and watched. We have heard His lamentations over the cities of the land, because of their unbelief. We have seen Him, for two several mystic moments, taking a place either in the world among the Gentiles, as in Matt. 13, or in the kingdom with the glorified, as in Matt. 17. But He has not yet done with Israel. They had been a long-loved people. The Glory in the day of Ezekiel knew not how to leave its ancient dwelling-place in the temple; God knew not how to withdraw His prophets from Israel, still rising up early and sending them, though generations had refused them (Ezek. 8 - 11; 2 Chr. 36: 15, 16); and now Jesus, the Glory of the temple and the God of the prophets, still lingers about the threshold of the house, and rises up again and again to speak to them.

*At the opening of Matt. 19 (v. 1) the Lord begins to leave Galilee. Since the time of Matt. 4: 12, according to Matthew, He had been in those parts, as the Light from Zebulun and Naphtali; but now He begins to put Himself in the way to Judea. For, as we shall find, it will be in Judea, and not in Galilee, that He is to make the third and last presentation of Himself to Israel.

We have, therefore, still to hear Him pleading with His people, as we are now about to do in the third part or section of our Gospel.

PART 3.

Matthew 21 - 25.

THIS portion of our Gospel opens with the third and last presentation of Christ to Israel. It is according to the voice of the prophet Zechariah. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Zech. 9: 9.

All is done in full solemnity. The test of the heart of Israel shall be applied under every advantage; the way, let me say, of our God on all such occasions.

When Adam, at the beginning, was set in the garden to keep it, all was for him; there was nothing in his whole estate then which might not have pleaded with him for his Creator. So, afterwards, when Noah was set in the new world, he was there under every advantage of honour and happiness; the bow in the cloud being a ready witness to him, if needs be, that the Lord God was mindful of him, and would be faithful. Israel in the land of Canaan wanted nothing. "What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done?" was the demand of the Lord in the face of His people. The hedge was raised, the tower was built, the winepress was digged, and the choicest vine was planted. And so now, in these proposals or presentations of Messiah to Israel nothing is wanting. The Bethlehemite was born according to the prophet, and He was "great to the ends of the earth," according to the same prophet, the far Eastern Gentiles coming to Bethlehem that they might worship Him. The Light shines from Galilee, from the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, according to another prophet; and a "great Light" indeed, as he had spoken, it proves itself to be, rising as with healing in its wings upon a people that were dwelling in the land of the shadow of death. And now the King promised by a third prophet appears, according to the word which had gone before upon Him, and in full solemnity. The harmonies of many voices from Scripture may be heard now. Psalms 8, 24, and 118, as well as Zechariah 9, are in our hearing on this great occasion.

The moment was indeed full of wonders. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," is heard; for the owner of the ass acknowledged the lordship of Jesus, and set His title paramount to his own. The ass itself, as well as its owner, was in the power of the moment; for the foal accompanied the mother, or the mother her foal; we can scarcely tell which, and it matters not; both were brought, and brought together to Jesus; for there was to be then no trespass on the sympathies of nature. The kid could not, at such a moment, be seethed in its mother's milk. That moment was as the dawn of the millennial day, and the creation must take its part in the joy and power of it. The people, by their hosannas and their palm-branches, were telling of a happy day, a feast of tabernacles for the tribes of the Lord; and if the multitude thus exult in their hosannas, the beasts shall exult in their burdens. In the day of His temptation the wild beasts were with the Lord, to witness that Eden had not been forfeited by Him (Mark 1: 13); so here, the beasts of burden rejoice in their service, as though the kingdom were

now entered by Him, and creation were delivered from its groaning.

Surely, again I may say, it was a moment full of wonders, a bright and festive hour indeed. This had not been so in the day of Samuel. The King loved then, as they went, for their calves were left behind, while they, the mothers, bore the ark to Beth-shemesh. 1 Sam. 6. Nature might receive a wound then, and continue in her groaning; but now, in the presence of the Lord of the millennial world, nature must rejoice.

How simple, yet how grand and brilliant, all this is! It is, however, but for a moment. All this is so, that, whether they would hear or whether they would forbear, Israel should know that the shout of a King had been *near* them. The question was, Would they have it *among* them? But no; again they "would not." If the Bethlehemite were exiled, and the Light from Zebulun shone in darkness which comprehended it not, the King shall be a disallowed, rejected King. He enters the city amid the wonder of the multitude. "Who is this?" they say. He fulfils the zeal of Messiah according to the psalmist. Psalm 69: 9. He heals, as doing the acknowledged works of the Son of David. But speedily, instead of shouts and rejoicings, insults and challenges await Him in the royal city. The enmity of the heads and representatives of Israel soon declares itself; they disallow the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel; they are sore displeased in the Son of David; and think only how they may kill the Heir of the vineyard.

What remains to Him now? What has He to do now? This is the rejection of the King Who brought salvation with Him, after the rejection of the Child of Bethlehem and the Light of Galilee. What remains? "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more." "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider." These voices may be heard now. "An end, the end is come," may be heard likewise. The barren fig-tree is therefore cursed according to the parable, it is now cut down. It had been spared for three long years, and it had known the patience of the husbandman digging about it and dunging it; but it was barren still. "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever," is now said to it. The curse is pronounced, for the time of long-suffering is past; "and," as we read, "presently the fig-tree withered away."

Such was the solemn issue of this third and last presentation of Himself by their Messiah, Jehovah-Messiah, to Israel, and Israel's refusal of Him.

The disciples marvel at the fig-tree, which the Lord had cursed, so speedily withering away; and He then delivers the oracle about the removal of the mountain; a symbol of something still more strange and terrible than the withering of the fig-tree. "Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done." All must give place. The mighty barriers which men have raised against the establishing of the Lord's power in the earth shall be set aside, and then men shall learn "that Thou, Whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the Most High over all the earth;" and "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills."

Bethany was His retreat at this time. Rejected, and therefore as a stranger here, He finds His place in the family of faith that loved Him in the midst of the world's enmity. And when He comes back again, as He does, from the village to the city, from Bethany to Jerusalem, it is not, as it had hitherto been, to renew and pursue His service of love and power, but to expose and convict Israel, and leave them under condemnation. This we now further see in the course of these Matt. 21 - 23.

In the parables of the Two Sons, the Wicked Husbandmen, and the Marriage of the King's Son, which He delivers in the midst of the heads of the people, on His return to them from Bethany, He convicts Israel of disobedience to all the ways of God, whether *the law*, by the *ministry of the Baptist*,

or by the *grace of Jews*. He is then in full, direct collision with the great representatives of the nation, Herodians, Sadducees, and Pharisees; answering them and questioning them. And having gone through all this, having exposed them and silenced them, He sums up the evidence of their guilt, and delivers the sentence of righteousness. Israel is judged and left. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

He then goes out with His apostles to the Mount of Olives. In the language of the prophet Zechariah, He takes His staff "Beauty" and cuts it asunder; that is, He withdraws Himself from Israel; for He is, whether they know it or not, their beauty, their glory, their perfection.

The time had fully come for this. The Stone had been disallowed by the builders, according to the psalmist; the three shepherds, Herodians, Sadducees, and Pharisees, had been cut off as in one month, according to the prophet; the flock, therefore, the Lord would now no longer feed, according to the same prophet. Zech. 11; Psalm 118.

It was also at this moment, at the close of Matt. 23, that the Lord may be seen and heard as looking back upon Israel, and His late ministry in the midst of them, as with the language of Isaiah upon His lips: "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away. Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer? Is My hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? behold, at My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering" Isaiah 50.

What an anticipation! The Spirit in the prophet seems to breathe this very moment of Matt. 23. Jerusalem is now as a divorced wife, put away for her transgressions. Her Maker had been her Husband, the Lord of hosts. In the days before these of the Gospel by Matthew, in the days of the judges, the kings, and the prophets, she had been as a woman loved of her friend, but an adulteress. The gods of the nations had been her confidence. Now her own God was refused. He had come and called, but there was none to answer. And yet, surely, He might ask, "Is My hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem?" Had He lost the power or forgotten the love which had delivered them in other days? Had He not been to Israel now, through their cities and villages, what of old He had been to them in Egypt, when He dried up its sea, and clothed its heavens with blackness? His healings and feedings, all His doings of grace and power, could answer for Him. It was their iniquity and unbelief that had now separated between them and their Redeemer. And He turns from them now, as this wondrous chapter of Isaiah goes on to tell us, first to speak a word in season to His elect, and then to give His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that pluck off the hair.

Wondrous indeed is this Isaiah 50. So is Zechariah 11. Each of them anticipates the Gospel by Matthew in its outline and structure. And now, at the opening of our Matt. 24, the Lord retires, according to Isaiah, to speak a word in season to those that are weary, His poor followers who had continued with Him in His temptations; or, according to Zechariah, as the Word of the Lord to be waited upon by the poor of the flock.*

*I may observe that there is, generally, through this Gospel, a great care and diligence to link with the voices of the prophets what is transpiring at the time; and this is a mark of the strong Jewish character of the whole action.

The disciples follow Him to the Mount of Olives. They will accompany Him to the same place again, ere long; and that, too, on a more solemn occasion. Now they wait on Him there, as "the poor of the flock," and He, as "the Word of the Lord," instructs them. Matt. 24, 25.

He discloses to them secrets of coming days, such secrets as concerned Israel. He tells them of the beginning of sorrows, of the troubles that should come on the earth, through wars, earthquakes, and pestilences. He tells them of the trials and perils of the faithful ones in Israel, whom He warns and advises and encourages, according to their circumstances. He forewarns them of the great tribulation, of the carcase and of the eagles, of the ordinances of heaven giving fearful notes of preparation; and then of the sign in heaven, the mourning of the tribes of the earth and of the coming of the Son of man. He tells them, moreover, of the gathering of the elect from the four ends of heaven, and of the settlement of the kingdom under the throne of glory. And, by the way, He delivers, in the parables of the Ten Virgins and of the Talents, judgment upon those who had, during His absence, professed either to wait for Him or to serve Him; distinguishing between those with whom this waiting and this service had been a reality, and those with whom such things had been profession merely

Very full indeed this prophetic word is. It carries us, in thought or in faith, through the days of the trouble and the judgment of Israel, to the settlement of the nations under the throne of the millennial kingdom where the Son of man sits.*

*I read Matt. 25: 31 as a continuation of the history (which was interrupted by moral or parenthetic matter) from Matt. 24: 31.

Among all this I would specify one thing not, I believe, of such common observation as many others, but helping to maintain that character of our Gospel which we have seen it to bear from the beginning. I mean this.

The leaves on the fig-tree, the Lord tells us in Matt. 24: 32, give notice of summer being near; and so, He says, the things which He had been detailing would give notice, when they came to pass, that the kingdom was near.

Now, the things which He had been detailing were *judgments on Israel*, the sorrows and visitations of that people under the hand of God.

This is solemn. In the days of Joshua and of David, *victories* gave notice that the inheritance and the reign of peace were at hand. One conquest after another by the sword of Joshua told the tribes that the land would soon be divided among them; and one conquest after another by the sword of David, in like manner, gave notice to the people that, shortly, no evil or enemy would be occurrent, but that peaceful glory would fill the land. But now it is not such signs that Israel is to look for. *Judgments*, and not victories, must now precede the kingdom or the inheritance; judgments or sorrows upon themselves, and not conquests of their enemies. For Israel has been untrue. Israel has now rejected her Lord; and, therefore, "these things," sorrows and judgments, must come to pass, ere the kingdom be theirs. Summer days are to come. The sunny season, the age of millennial brightness, will be for Israel and the earth; but sorrows and visitations are the leaves of the fig-tree which are, as its harbingers, to announce that age of glory.

The valley of Achor is now to be the door of hope Israel has sinned, as in the day of Jericho, and cannot go forward to the inheritance, save through the purging judgments of God. All the prophets join with the Lord in pointing to these same leaves of the fig-tree as ushering in the summer. Read Moses in Deut. 32; read Isaiah throughout; read Ezekiel in his twentieth chapter; Daniel at the close of his ninth; and Hosea in his first and second. These are just at present before me, as telling us the same mystery;

that sorrows and judgments are Israel's way to the kingdom.

In looking back from this point of our Gospel we see, indeed, a ministry of patient, long-suffering grace. It was a ministry, however, well known in the ways of God with Israel. The Book of Judges, yea, the earlier books of the wilderness, Exodus and Numbers, the Books also of Kings and Chronicles, show us the same ministry. All this was the dresser of the vineyard saying again and again Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it." It was the Lord Himself saying, "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing." But Israel "would not." This has been likewise seen again and again.

The sign from heaven, sought as it was at His hands by Sadducees and Pharisees together — for enmity to Him was strong enough to blend elements even so mutually repulsive as these — the Lord did not and could not give. He could not make Himself acceptable to the world, or accredit Himself on the world's principles. And the uncircumcised shall rebuke the generation that sought this. The men of Nineveh asked for no sign from heaven, neither did the queen of Sheba. They took heart and conscience to God and His word. The preaching of Jonah and the wisdom of Solomon reached them, without any thing to satisfy the pride of man, or the course and spirit of the world; and they would rise in judgment with this generation, and condemn it. But in due time, though in a way they looked not for, a sign from heaven shall be given to them. They asked for it (Matt. 16: 1), and they shall have it (Matt. 24: 29, 30); but it shall be a sign of coming judgment a sign that the Son of man is on His way from heaven in the clouds to execute the vengeance written. "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

As yet, however, and through this long, unmeasured age of His absence, it is the Lamentations of Jeremiah that are heard by the ear of faith, amid the desolations of Zion. The weeping of Rachel, heard in the second chapter of our Gospel, rises still more full of woe and mourning upon the ear in Matt. 23. And if that be grief which, as we read of it, refuses to be comforted, was grief, I ask, ever so eloquent, ever so full of the passions of nature, as on the lips of Jeremiah? Listen to him telling out, as in the person of the daughter of Zion, the secret of a broken heart. And yet, in the deepest utterance of that heart, how is God vindicated!

What thing shall I take to witness for thee? what thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? what shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin-daughter of Zion? for thy breach is great like the sea: who can heal thee? Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered *thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity*; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment." Lamentations 2: 13, 14.

This is indeed the utterance of a broken heart vindicating God. According to Jeremiah, Jerusalem must account to herself for her captivity and banishment. Her iniquity has been her ruin. And so with the lamentation of Jesus over her. She had killed the prophets, and stoned the messengers of God, and after all, she "would not." Her wound is incurable, but herself has done it. Her iniquity has been her captivity, says the prophet. Because she would not, therefore she is not gathered, says the Lord.

PART 4.

Matthew 26 - 28.

THESE chapters give us necessary matter, the closing scenes of the life of our Lord here; His death and resurrection; such, therefore, as is common to all the Gospels, and such also as, to a general intent, is the same in all. There are, however, even in these common narratives, marks which are characteristic; such as I have noticed in my meditations on Luke and John, already referred to.

In Matthew we need not these marks in detached pieces of the narrative: it is the whole of this Gospel, as I observed before, which bespeaks its purpose, letting us know that it is Messiah's question with the Israel of His day that we are reading. It takes a well-formed character thence, as we have now seen; its structure and its parts leaving us without doubt as to its intent and object. Still we should find characteristic marks of a minuter kind, did we look for them: and many such I have had occasion to exhibit, while meditating on the Gospel by Luke. And I would now notice some further things which are peculiar to Matthew, and characteristic of him, in these last chapters.

I think we may observe that in neither Matthew nor Mark is the Lord presented so much in thoughts of His own personal elevation and glory as in Luke or John. He is seen rather as One that is consciously in *man's* hand, yielding Himself to that enmity which, according to this Gospel, had been at work against Him from the beginning. For the cross, needfully fulfilling the counsel of God, in the accomplishing of redemption, in another light was the fruit of Jewish enmity, the fruit of man's reprobate, revolted heart. In the slaying of the Lord Jesus man was doing, through his own wickedness, what God, in His own riches of grace, had determined before should be done. Acts 4: 28. And Matthew and Mark rather put that character upon this deed.

In Matthew and Mark, consequently, we get this scene much the same. And yet Matthew has some things which distinguish him.

For instance, he is the only evangelist who notices the word of the prophet about the potter's field. That field was bought with the price of the Lord's blood, and it was made the place to bury strangers in. And this had a meaning for Israel, with whom Matthew has to do. Judas's act was Israel's act. He was guide to those who took Jesus. Acts 1: 16. It was they who with wicked hands crucified and slew Him, as the apostle tells them, and their land is "Aceldama" to this day. Joel 3: 21. It is the field of blood, and the grave of aliens. It is a defiled land, and Gentiles have it in possession.

So the answer of the multitude to Pilate, in order that they might quiet every scruple of his mind, and that he might be led on to do with Jesus as they desired - this is likewise peculiar to Matthew. The people seem to have perceived the hesitation of the governor; and, to make sure of their prey, they say to him, "His blood be on us and on our children." And, I ask, can any thing be more characteristic? Does not this solemnly tell us that the death of the Lord, as looked at in Matthew, was the death of a Martyr at the hands of the Jews?

This is very significant. Surely we know it was the death or immolation of the Lamb of God, under the hand of God; but surely also, it was the death or martyrdom of the Righteous, at the hands of wicked men.

And, as still maintaining its peculiarity to the very end, this is the only Gospel which tells us of Jewish enmity pursuing the Lord beyond the cross. It is Matthew, and Matthew only, who tells us of the sealing of the stone, and of the setting of the watch, at the door of the sepulchre. This was permitted

by the Roman governor, at the request and suggestion of the elders and priests of Israel. Pilate cared nothing about it; it was the settled purpose and bitter hatred of the Jewish mind; following the Lord beyond the grave; proving itself unconquerable. No coals of fire, though heaped on the head again and again, reduce it, nor does death quiet it. His sepulchre must witness it, as His life and death have done. Our evangelist does not let us lose sight of it for a moment. It is that enmity which opens his Gospel, in the attempt of Herod against the young Child's life, and it is the same which nosy closes it, at the tomb of their martyred Messiah. Nay, His resurrection shall likewise witness it; for when the sepulchre has disappointed it, and, in spite of the seal and the soldiers, the Lord has risen, the chief priests and the elders are at the same work again. They had procured the guard of Roman soldiers to watch the sepulchre, and now they corrupt the Roman soldiers with large money, to tell a lie about the sepulchre. Matt. 27: 69; Matt. 28: 12.

Strikingly indeed does the Spirit keep the pen of the evangelist true to his subject throughout. Christ has been presented again and again to Israel, and that, too, according to their own prophets, and in the marvellous healing, blessing grace of His own ministry; but He has only drawn forth Israel's hatred again and again from the beginning even to the end.

This enmity of man to God is to be seen all along man's history; but, indeed, we get it exhibiting itself here to the full. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." No attractions soften it, no threats subdue it. At the beginning, Cain sins in spite of the Lord's personal pleading with him; Nimrod defies God's judgments; Pharaoh is proof against the solemn visitations of Jehovah's hand upon his land; Amalek insults the unfurled banner of the Lord; and Balaam hardens himself against the checks of God's Spirit. Absalom, and Haman, and Herod may stand forth as further witnesses of man; and so may the fierce multitude that ran madly upon Stephen, though his face, at the moment, shone like that of an angel. And, by-and-by, the apostates of the Apocalypse, at the close of the history, will be bold to withstand the white-horsed Rider and His army, descending in glory and power from heaven. Is not all this the witness of something incorrigible and incurable, which no attractions can soften, and no threats control? And a sample equal to any of these we get in these priests of Israel, and in these soldiers of Rome. The veil had just been rent as in the presence of the one, and the tomb in the presence of the other, but they consent together to invent a lie, and falsify it all.

Man is desperate in his stiff-neckedness and enmity. Who will trust a heart which has been thus exposed?

And further still, as to this enmity of Israel. We read here, in our twenty-eighth chapter, that this lie of the confederate priests and soldiers (that the disciples came and stole away the body of Jesus while the watch were asleep), is commonly reported to this day; a fair token of the old enmity, and of its being continued through all generations of the nation, to this day.

It will not, however, do to kick against the pricks. It is but self-destruction. Jesus rises on the third, the appointed, day; and His resurrection is judgment on His enemies. It tells us this, that He with Whom are the issues of life and death, has put Himself on the side of the world's Victim, on the side of Him Whom man has cast out and refused. It tells us that there is a question between God and the world about Jesus; and the end of that question must be *judgment*, the judgment of that which has arrayed itself against God. Therefore it is written, "He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained; *whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.*" Acts 17.

This is the power and fruit of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus which we get in our Gospel. A pledge of this is given in the opening of Matt. 28. The angel rolls back the sealed stone. It bore the

official signet, that the purpose might not be changed; and who will dare to touch it? It would be death to any man. But He that sat in the heavens laughed it to scorn. The angel sits in triumph upon it, and puts the sentence of death into the keepers of it. Israel had set God's sure Stone, His elect, tried Stone, at naught, and had chosen for themselves one which bore another seal; but this in which they trusted is now set at naught by God; for it is not the Rock of God's people, as they may now themselves be judges. And the full fruit of this pledge shall be brought forth in that day, when the enemies of Jesus shall be made His footstool, and the falling of the disallowed stone shall grind to powder. Matt. 21: 42-44; Matt. 22: 44.

This is the voice of the resurrection, as we read it in Matthew. Of course I need not say how it has other voices which faith listens to; how it tells of remission of sins, and how it pledges, like a first-fruits, the harvest in the day of the rising and ascending heavenly family. But here, in Matthew, it speaks of *judgment*. It is as the budding rod of Numbers 17, which was brought forth, as a living thing, from the presence of God, to silence the murmuring, rebellious camp of Israel.

It is only in Matthew that we get this scene at the sealed stone; but that, of course, because it is only in Matthew that we get the sealed stone itself, as we saw before.

But how perfect in the unity of the whole Gospel this is! It is the Gospel of Israel's enmity to Messiah, and their rejection of Him; and here that enmity receives the full pledge of its coming judgment in the day of the power of Him Whom they had rejected.

But further. Judgment of His enemies is to be followed by the seating of Himself in the place of power and dominion. The judgment is to make way for the glory. Accordingly, the resurrection of the Lord in this Gospel closes by showing Him to us in that place; and this is the only Gospel that does so. Here only do we hear the risen Lord using these words, when speaking to His apostles: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

This is the exaltation and lordship of the risen Jesus. The conversion of the nations, and the gathering of the whole earth, the whole Gentile world, in obedience to Him, is here assumed; and this, too, as the fruit of that apostleship which the Lord had already ordained; an apostleship *Jewish* in its character; for it is to His *Twelve* that He commits this ministry.

This, therefore, is a gathering of the nations to the risen Jesus, as the Lord of Israel. And thus, in this last chapter, the Lord in resurrection "resumes His Jewish relations," and, through those relations, His connection with the whole earth.

He witnesses universal lordship as in His hand, power both in heaven and in earth; and thereupon He makes His claim to the discipleship and obedience of all nations. We have nothing of the effect of the resurrection upon heavenly places here, nothing of the mystery of the glorified family. It is only Jesus exalted, and exalted as Messiah; and, upon that, the discipling of the whole earth, on the testimony and teaching of the Jewish apostleship. It is the Lord returned to the earth, for the ends of forming a people for His name there, and there displaying His kingdom. The ascension is not seen here. It is only the *risen*, not the *ascended*, Christ we get here; and therefore the women may hold Him, and worship Him, though, in John's Gospel, Mary must not so much as touch Him (John 20: 17); for there He was on His way to the Father. His resurrection led only to His ascension there; the earth was only a stage to heaven. Here it is *the end* of His glorious, triumphant journey.

How consistent with the purpose of the Spirit of God in our evangelist all this is! Jewish enmity

and unbelief still work, and keep this condition of things, this headship of the nations in Jesus their Messiah, unrealized. But the promises of all the prophets who have spoken in God's name from the beginning shall be made good; the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established, and all nations shall flow unto it; and the rights of Jesus-Messiah be vindicated in sovereign power. The "mercies of David" are "sure," made sure by the resurrection which we are contemplating (Acts 13: 34); and He shall reappear, and claim them, and enjoy them, and exercise them, through the everlasting, millennial age.

The Seed of David, all faithfulness and truth as He is, shall have His rights, and His people, all wretched and unbelieving as they have been, and still are, shall be made willing. As yet, as it is written of them, they "would not;" but, by-and-by, as it is again written of them, they shall be made "willing." Matt. 23: 37; Psalm 110: 3. And then shall the promises all be established.

But we have a still further and very wondrous pledge of this blessing that is to be the portion of Israel and of Jerusalem in coming days of Messiah's glory and power. And Matthew, in full consistency with his whole Gospel, is the only evangelist that gives it to us.

He records the following great fact in these closing chapters; that after the Lord had yielded up His life on the cross, "the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many."

This was a marvellous event, and as significant as it was marvellous.

Graves were opened as the fruit of the triumph of the Lord's death; and then these opened graves yielded up bodies of saints after His resurrection; and then these risen saints went and showed themselves in the holy city.

What glory for Jesus! What a publishing of the full victory of His death! If the veil of the temple yielded then, so did the graves of the saints. Heaven delighted to own that victory, and hell was forced to own it!

But, if this were glory to Jesus, what grace was it to Jerusalem!

A special message was sent to Peter, by the angel of the same risen Lord: "Go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him." And tender and considerate that was; for Peter needed a special pledge at the hand of his denied Master. And so a special, a very special and marvellous pledge, in like grace, is here given to Jerusalem, when these first-fruits of the Lord's resurrection, of His triumph over sin and death, are thus borne to her.

And she is called "The Holy City." Still excellent wonders of grace indeed! Jerusalem takes from the pen of our evangelist her title of honour. This is the city over which, a day or two since, the Lord had wept, the city out of which (He had lately testified) a prophet could not perish. He had withdrawn Himself from it leaving it in guilty desolation. He had, a few hours before, been crucified there; and by its own doings, it had earned for itself the title of Sodom and Egypt.

Rev. 11: 8. But now it is "the holy city." In the counsel of grace, and in the language of the Spirit, Jerusalem is "The Holy City."

What a pledge of the cleansing of that fountain which had now been opened, as prophets speak, even for Jerusalem! What an earnest was this of that day when the captivity of Zion shall be brought again, and this speech shall be used in the land of Judah, "The Lord bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness." Jer. 31: 23.

The grace of those words, "Beginning at Jerusalem," has been commonly admired, and properly so; that when the risen Lord was sending forth to all the world the tidings of salvation in the remission of sins, He would have it first declared in the guilty city, the bloody Jerusalem. But we need scarcely wonder at that, since we have before it this wondrous and glorious pledge of grace — the very first-fruits of our Lord's triumphant resurrection sent to Jerusalem as "the holy city"!

But all the prophets tell us of this grace that aboundeth, and of Israel's final blessing through it.

The glory, in Ezekiel, has to leave the city at the beginning, because of the abominations that were done there; but, at the last, it returns. And now, as we see, the glory in the Gospel by Matthew does exactly the same. Jesus is the glory. He leaves the city; but He leaves sure, infallible tokens of His return in due season. Thus Ezekiel and Matthew are together; so Isaiah and Matthew are together. The divorced wife of Isaiah became, in due time, a joyful mother of children. And here, in Matthew, we hear the same. Jerusalem is left by the Lord, as one put away and desolate, in Matt. 23; but at the last, in Matt. 28, her apostleship of twelve will disciple all nations. See Isa. 50 and 54. What harmonies! In the ways of the Lord is continuance, and Israel shall be saved. Isa. 54: 5.

The light; of the prophets rises and shines again, after so long a time, in the evangelists. The glory in Ezekiel, and Jesus in Matthew, take the same journeys; the Jerusalem of Isaiah is the Jerusalem of our evangelist. We might not have expected this, but so we find it. And as we thus listen to the voices of prophets and evangelists, as in concert, we may remember those two happy lines

"In vetere Testamento novum latet,
In novo Testamento vetus patet."
The lights of God which sweetly dawn
In earliest books divine,
As morning hours to noonday lead,
Along the volume shine.
'Tis but the same, tho' bright'ning sun,
Which clearer, warmer glows;
The clouds which veiled his rising beam,
Fly ere the evening close.

So consistent, as well as rich; so changeless, as well as full, is the grace of God in all His purposes, and those oracles of God which record those purposes. "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour," utters the prophet; and the Jesus of our evangelist is the God of Israel thus hiding Himself, turning His back on Jerusalem for a time, and saying, "Ye shall not see Me." Isaiah 45: 15; Matt. 23: 39.

Such, I doubt not, is the bearing of our Gospel generally, and of the closing part of it, which I have now been looking at, particularly.

I may say it is a very complete and needful and wondrous lesson in the way of our God that we sit down to read in this Gospel. Jewish enmity we have watched and tracked from the beginning of it to the end of it. It proved to be unwearied, relentless, true to itself, refusing to yield to any entreaty, or to surrender itself on any terms. It pursued the Lord at His birth, throughout His life, up to His death, in His grave, after His death, and, as our evangelist further shows us, "until this day."

It rejected Him in every form in which He could present Himself. He was again and again introduced to His Israel by their own prophets, but they would not know Him.

In the course of all this fearful exhibition of unbelief in Israel, the Spirit, by our evangelist, takes occasion, by reason of this enmity, to glance, for a moment, at the dealing of God with the Gentiles (as we saw in Matt. 13); and then, for another moment (as we saw in Matt. 17), to anticipate the kingdom in its heavenly glory; for these things are the results, settled surely in divine grace and sovereignty, of this enmity.

And then, at the close, our evangelist is led, by the same Spirit, to give intimations of the judgment which is to come upon this enmity, and also of that abounding grace which is to gather and to bless Israel in the last days of the glorious millennial kingdom.

May I not, therefore, say of it, that it is a complete and wondrous scripture? Marvellous indeed, that such treasures of wisdom and knowledge should be found in one short book! But it is God's, and who teacheth like Him? "What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." And sure I am, "if we wait patiently on the Lord, all difficulties of Scripture are inlets to light and blessing." This has been said by another, and I think I can say, I have found it so though the waiting upon Him has been cold and feeble. And the heart further bows to another saying: "Spiritual conceptions dazzle and illuminate and cheer the mind, before they guide and content it; and we can never teach with the same vigour those truths which we only see and enjoy, as we do those by which we are guided and controlled."

MARK

INTRODUCTION.

IN the various and fruitful light of Scripture what fresh wonders do, at times, cast themselves forth under the eye of the soul! Its seed is in itself, like the trees of Eden. Its witness is in itself, like all the works of God. Its honours and its virtues are all its own — made ours, indeed, only by the power of the Holy Ghost. But such it is. Its worth and its excellency proceed from itself; and we want only the faith that walks in the light of it, apprehending and enjoying Him Whose wisdom and grace it reveals to us.

That each of the four Gospels has its own character and purpose, under the Spirit of God, is now sufficiently familiar to us. And, indeed, this was a judgment among the people of God from the earliest days of Christianity. They perceived then, as we do now, variety in unity; so that some of them said, "It is not so properly four Gospels that we have, as a four-sided Gospel." The one life is seen in different relations — the same Jesus passes through the same scenes and circumstances, in divers characters.

This is variety in unity. And this leads me to suggest that, in like manner, the Book of God has also unity in variety. We see our world in all the parts of it, and ourselves in all the persons of it. We listen, for instance, to the grace which addresses us as sinners, and learn ruin and redemption now, as Adam learnt them in the day of Genesis 3. When putting on the righteousness of God by faith we find ourselves in the family and fellowship of Abraham, as in Genesis 15. At the table of the Lord, spread in the midst of the redeemed every resurrection-day, we sit in one spirit with the congregation of God, as in Exodus 12. In the conflict of flesh and spirit we not only see what manner of people the saints in Paul's day were: but we read our own well known every-day experience.

Thus we are at home throughout the whole Volume, tracing our own world in all the scenes of it,

and ourselves in the actors. And this is unity in variety. Such is the wondrous character of the Book.

Thousands of years are but one and the same day. The Book is one, though Moses and John, the earliest and the latest writers in it, were separated by centuries and centuries; and though kings and fishermen, scribes and herdmen, prophets and publicans, separated by all the habits of human life and human circumstances, were called to put their hand to it.

It is a Book of wonders, but the Book itself is a principal wonder, as this may show us. Its naturalness and its beauty are, with all this, admirable beyond expression. This quality of the Book of God once reminded another of a striking analogy in the kingdom of nature. "It is," he said, as "a noble tree, of which the inward energy, the freedom of the sovereign vital power, produces a variety of forms, in which the details of human order may appear to be wanting, but in which there is a beauty which no human art can imitate."

True indeed; and true also is what he adds after contemplating the materials which form and furnish this Book. "All combine to crown with divine glory the demonstration of the origin and authorship of the Book which contains these things."

May meditation on it be mixed with faith, that the soul may be profited while the heart is charmed!