

# Our Lord's Parables.

W W Fereday.

## Table of Contents

Foreword.....	1
The Sower.....	2
The Wheat and the Tares.....	3
The Mustard Tree.....	4
The Leaven.....	5
The Hidden Treasure.....	5
The Pearl.....	6
The Two Servants.....	8
The Labourers in the Vineyard.....	9
The Two Sons.....	9
The Wicked Husbandmen.....	10
The Ten Virgins.....	12
The Talents.....	13
The Sleeping Husbandman.....	14
The Two Builders.....	14
The Two Debtors.....	15
The Good Samaritan.....	16
The Stronger than the Strong.....	17
The Rich Fool.....	18
The Returning Lord.....	18
The Fig Tree in the Vineyard.....	19
The Great Supper.....	20
The Lost Sheep.....	21
The Lost Silver.....	22
The Prodigal Son.....	23
The Elder Son.....	24
The Unjust Steward.....	24
The Unjust Judge.....	25
The Pharisee and the Publican.....	26
The Pounds.....	27
The Fig-Tree and all the Trees.....	28

## Foreword

The Saviour, in His ministry, spoke so frequently in an illustrative manner that it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a formal parable was intended, or whether He merely used parabolic language. The new wine and new garments, and the lighted candle, for example, while parabolic in

character, have been left aside for the purposes of this book.

But some may be surprised at the omission of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the Sheep and the Goats (Luke 16; Matt. 25). The former I am not free to regard as a parable, while having no controversy with those who do so regard it. Not only is it not called a parable, but names are introduced, a thing without precedent in Our Lord's parables, so far as I remember. I prefer to look at the Rich Man and Lazarus as actual characters, whose history both in this world and beyond is solemnly traced by the Saviour for the moral profit of men everywhere.

Matt. 25: 31-46 is commonly regarded as a parable, but, as I judge, mistakenly. The passage describes an important incident in the judgment of the quick at the Lord's appearing. The Gentiles will be challenged as to their treatment of those whom the King calls "My brethren," i.e., the latter-day remnant of Israel. I see nothing parabolic in the passage beyond the words, "he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." With this explanation, I leave the matter to the judgment of my brethren.

The Parables are treated in the order in which they are found in the Gospels.

W. W. F.

## **The Sower.**

This, the first of our Lord's parables, was uttered under very painful circumstances. The Jewish leaders, after much previous evil behaviour, had just gone the length of attributing His power to Beelzebub. Further than this they could not well go in wickedness. Leaders and people were in such a condition of alienation from God that the blessings promised to Israel could not possibly be brought in at that time. From that point the Saviour commenced to use the enigmatical form of speech, which was intelligible enough to the pious minority, while utterly obscure to the profane mass. Like the cloud in Moses' day, which stood between Israel and the Egyptians, the parables were light to the one and darkness to the other.

The Saviour likened Himself to a sower of seed (Matt. 13: 3-8) This marks a new departure in the ways of God with man. During the earlier ages of the world's history God had been seeking fruit from man (from Israel especially), as He was well entitled to do. But He sought it vain, flesh being incorrigibly evil. Every succeeding dispensation only served to bring this out the more vividly. Man violated his conscience, set at nought the testimony of God's works, trampled under foot His law, and slew the prophets who remonstrated with him concerning his evil. It only remained to murder the Father's well-beloved Son in order to fill the cup of human iniquity to the full. God no longer looks for fruit from man; His present action is to sow the good seed of the Gospel, and so produce His own fruit. This work has been proceeding ever since the Son of God came to earth.

But the human heart is not always responsive to the good seed of God's Word. The Lord shows in His parable that on this account the greater part of that which is sown becomes wasted. Men hear, but do not profit by what they hear. Four classes of hearers are indicated; the Saviour's own interpretation making the meaning clear beyond dispute. There are first the wayside hearers. Here we have the careless folk, who listen but heed not, their minds being too indifferent to permit of their becoming interested. As the birds catch up seed sown by the wayside, so Satan removes from these even the remembrance of the things which have been spoken. The preacher may be admired, but his message passes away. Then there are the rocky-ground hearers. They are perhaps the most disappointing of all. They respond immediately to the Word preached, and so cause much rejoicing to those who seek their

good; but having no depth, as soon as difficulties arise, they throw their confession of Christ to the winds. These are the impressionable folk. They readily weep when the Saviour is presented to them; but it is mere sentiment, both conscience and heart being unaffected. The third class are the thorny-ground hearers. Good seed has no chance in a bed of thorns. These are the encumbered folk, and they include both rich and poor. The rich man is too full of his estates and horses and dogs to give deep attention to spiritual concerns, and the poor man is too burdened with the anxieties of life. In both cases, earthly affairs being put first, the soul is lost. The last class are the good-ground hearers. These, having experienced the action of God's harrow in their conscience, have learned their guilt and wretchedness, and have put their whole trust in the Saviour Who died for their sins and rose again. In these only is there permanence, though even amongst the true-hearted ones the fruit varies in measure some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundredfold.

## **The Wheat and the Tares.**

Six of the seven parables found in Matt. 13 are divinely described as similitudes of the Kingdom of heaven. The parable of the Wheat and the Tares is the first of the six, and with it is given the Saviour's interpretation thereof to His disciples. The Kingdom of Heaven in its present form covers the whole profession of Christianity, whether true or false. In the coming age it will cover the whole earth, as predicted in Old Testament prophecies. Let us not confound the Kingdom of heaven with heaven itself. This is one of the blunders of Popery, and the blunder is most serious in its results, Many are today in the Kingdom of heaven who will have no place in heaven; their profession of allegiance to the absent Christ being merely formal and unreal.

The Son of Man has sown good seed in His field. Christianity thus began with a number of persons who were true sons of the Kingdom. Satan soon set to work to corrupt the new testimony. He effected his purpose by introducing false brethren amongst the true. This happened "while men slept," i.e., when Christ's servants became so negligent of their Master's interests, and so dull in their spiritual perception, that they admitted to the outward communion of Christianity men whom they should never have countenanced-unregenerate persons, sons of the wicked one (Jude 4). These are called, not "tares," but "darnel-a worthless weed very like wheat in its early growth.

When it became manifest that the crop was mixed and spoiled, the servants enquired of the householder if they should gather up the tares. He replied: "Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them." To gather out weeds is to kill them. In like manner the wheatfield of Christendom can only be weeded by putting to death every false professor of Christ's name. This is expressly forbidden, and for the grave reason that true wheat would be in danger of being mistakenly rooted up by erratic servants. Our Lord's prohibition has not been heeded in Christendom. Zealous ecclesiastics, Papist and Protestant, have from time to time sought to eradicate from the earth those whom they have judged as weeds, only to fall into the very blunder deprecated by the Saviour. Some of God's best wheat has been destroyed in the process; many of His truest saints have been burnt at the stake or otherwise martyred. Both wheat and tares are to grow together until the harvest. This means that they are to live side by side in the world (for "the field is the world"), neither molesting the other. To have fellowship together in the Church is quite another matter. So evil a blend was never contemplated in the parable.

Harvest-time is at the end of the age, at least a thousand years before the end of the world. The Saviour will gather every true believer into His barn at His coming again, and the angels will deal with the residue in unsparing judgement. Christ's heavenly glory, with all its blessedness, is the destiny of

every blood-washed confessor; the lake of fire, with all its unutterable woe, is the eternal portion of every empty professor of His name. When the final separation has taken place, the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. From their exalted position of heavenly bliss the redeemed will dispense the blessing of God throughout the coming ages to the countless myriads who will be placed beneath their sway in the earth below. The final result will demonstrate that God's purposes of grace have not failed, whatever the seeming success of the great adversary during the present time.

## **The Mustard Tree.**

The Saviour next likened the Kingdom of heaven "to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" (Matt. 13: 31-32). This is ominous, when we remember that the birds, according to the teaching of the parable of the Sower, represent the agents of the devil (vv. 4, 19). The mustard tree is the profession of Christianity, which began in the humblest possible way, but which in time so completely changed its character as to become a great political force in the earth. Here, as elsewhere in Scripture, the tree is the symbol of worldly power (Ezek. 17: 3; Dan. 4: 22).

Christianity is essentially a heavenly system. The Church of God belongs not to the present evil world, but to the scene of glory where Christ dwells. When Christians walked in separation from the course of things here, and with heart-devotedness to their Lord, their testimony was unequivocal, and such as God could bless to the salvation of souls. When the Christian community became influential in the earth, its spiritual usefulness declined, and it became a powerful engine in the hands of Satan. A great and imposing thing in the earth, with all the art's-music, architecture, etc.-pressed into its service, is the very opposite of all that Christ was. The sensuous worship of the cathedral and the abbey is as offensive to God as the simple worship of "the upper room" was His delight.

Let no reader misunderstand, It is not meant that the blessings of Christianity should have been confined within narrow limits. Far from it. The Gospel was intended to be spread abroad; for God loved the world, and Christ gave Himself a ransom for all. But Christian profession should have continued humble and unworldly, seeking nothing in the shape of power and honour where the Saviour only found a cross and a tomb. Instead of this, that which is called "the Church," whether viewed in its Roman, Anglican, or Nonconformist aspects, has been insatiable in its lust for worldly power. It has frequently been a terror to Governments, and it is at this hour a power in the earth which the civil authorities dare not ignore. This, instead of being matter for congratulation on the part of true Christians, is cause for deepest humiliation before God, that men bearing the Lord's name should have so blindly become the dupes of Satan in the falsifying of their own calling and testimony.

In the branches of the mustard tree the birds found a congenial home. The Scriptures speak of Christendom in its last phase as "the habitation of demons, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird" (Rev. 18: 2). This is true in a large measure at the present time. Had Christianity continued humble and unpretentious, its ministry would never have been sought as a "profession," and it certainly would never have filled its offices with sportsmen, drunkards, and the like. Alas, for the centuries of dishonour to the name of the Holy and the True which have been occasioned by the unclean birds who have found a lodging in the branches, even the topmost branches, of the great mustard tree!

## **The Leaven.**

Of all our Lord's parables probably none have been so seriously misunderstood as that of the leaven hidden in the meal (Matt. 13: 33). It is affirmed most confidently by many that this parable shows the whole world converted by the blessed influences of Christianity. Unfortunately for this interpretation, every Scripture passage which deals with the close of the present era speaks not of conversion and blessing, but of apostasy and wickedness as its characteristic features.

Exodus 12: 15 and Lev. 2: 11 will suffice to show how the Saviour's Jewish audience must have understood the simile of leaven. For fifteen centuries they had been under divine command to exclude leaven from their houses during their religious festivals, and they were forbidden to blend it with any of their offerings made by fire. It is thus the emblem of what is evil, and in this way it was frequently used by the Saviour in His teaching. The leaven of the Pharisees, the leaven of the Sadducees, and the leaven of Herod, representing respectively Ritualism, Rationalism, and Worldliness, all came from time to time under His lash.

How then should we read the parable? Something of a corrupt character is shown as subduing everything by which it is surrounded within a certain area. It is Christian doctrine in the vitiated form in which "the Church" has presented it to the world since apostolic energy ceased. Whole nations have become Christianised, hence the familiar word 'Christendom.' Not all the nations of the earth certainly, for Heathenism, Buddhism and Mohammedanism hold sway between them over the greater part of mankind. But what has the Christianising of nations effected? It would be folly to suppose that when historians tell us that such and such nations embraced Christianity long ago that necessarily all the persons composing those nations became savingly converted to God. Nothing of the kind is meant, but simply that, as a result of certain influences that were brought to bear upon them, they were induced to change their religion. But an unfaithful Church, in order to make Christianity palatable to the masses, compromised God's truth most pitifully. Thus, as the heathen had been accustomed for ages to hold carousals at certain seasons of the year in honour of their gods, they were suffered to continue them in the name of Christ. This is the unholy origin of Christmastide, Wakes, etc.

Christianity is essentially a spiritual and heavenly order of things. Therein is the heart of God revealed to men in pardoning grace, blotting out all the trespasses of all who unfeignedly believe in the Saviour's atoning blood. All these are accorded a new standing in Divine favour in the risen One who is now in the glory of God. They belong to heaven, not merely as a place of repose when this world can be held no longer, but as a scene where they should even now live by faith. All this, and much more that is of infinite importance and blessedness, has become utterly beclouded by the invention of a sacerdotal system, which substitutes the visible for the invisible, and the priest for Christ. This is the form, alas in which the world best knows Christianity. It is leaven, corrupt and corrupting until divine forbearance comes to an end, when it will be swept out of the way in unsparing judgment.

## **The Hidden Treasure.**

Having spoken four parables in the hearing of the multitudes on the seashore the Saviour retired into the house with His disciples. He had other matters to communicate which only men born of the Spirit could be expected to understand. In His public utterances He had shown the Kingdom of heaven, i.e., Christian profession in its outward aspect-what any eye could see and any mind comprehend. He had graphically described the rise, development, and doom of Christianity, viewed as an external system. But if He had said no more, it might have been inferred that Satan was destined to be

completely triumphant over all the work of God. For it is beyond controversy that the parables of the tares, mustard-tree, and leaven portend disaster, viewed from a spiritual standpoint.

In the privacy of the house the Lord presented another aspect of things to His disciples, others besides the twelve being included in His audience (Mark 4: 10). Three additional parables were given, the first of these being that of the hidden treasure. "The Kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found it he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth the field" (Matt. 13: 44 The field is the world, according to the Lord's own interpretation; the treasure represents the saints who are in it. By the saints we mean all who truly believe in the Saviour's name, and who have been washed from their sins in His precious blood. He purchased the world for the sake of the hidden treasure, as a man to-day might purchase a quantity of old books for the sake of one volume on which his heart is set. The world is thus Christ's, not only by right of creation but also by right of purchase. Nothing can hinder it ultimately coming into His possession, with every person therein, however rebellious. The Father has given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as the Father has given Him (John 17: 2). When the age is completed, Christ will be seen surrounded by all His own (not one missing), even though the outer framework of Christendom be utterly wrecked. His enemies will then be constrained to bow to Him, in acknowledgement of His title and rights, and will for ever justify the righteous sentence which He will pass upon them for their contumacy and unbelief.

Every believing heart is overwhelmed with wonder and adoration at the thought of the purchase price. He "selles all that He hath." Our blessing required the surrender of His heavenly glory, the degradation of the Bethlehem manger, and the shame of the cross of Calvary. Sin could only be atoned for by death and bloodshedding. But even from this the Saviour did not shrink, for the joy of being able to surround Himself eternally with happy myriads picked up by sovereign grace out of the ruin of everything below. If His own will experience joy in finding themselves in His heavenly presence, His heart will find deepest joy in having them there.

## The Pearl

It is such a common notion that the pearl of great price is the Saviour Himself that it seems almost irreverent to challenge it. Yet the popular interpretation is open to serious objection for two reasons: (1) it would put this parable entirely out of harmony with the teaching of its context; (2) it represents the sinner as sacrificing something-all indeed-in order to acquire Christ. But Christ cannot be purchased. He is God's unspeakable gift to man, and all the blessings which are the fruit of His atonement, Eternal life, etc.-are gifts also. Peter severely denounced the man who thought the gift of God might be purchased with money. Moreover, the sinner is represented in Scripture as having "nothing to pay" (Luke 7: 42). He who cannot meet his just obligations is surely in no position to buy costly pearls. And it should be remembered that it is the Saviour who seeks the sinner, rather than the sinner the Saviour.

The parable runs thus:-"The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matt. 13: 45-46). As in the case of the hidden treasure. the purchaser is Christ. The pearl is the Church, which, in Scripture, is the aggregate of all believing persons from the descent of the Holy Ghost, until the coming of the Saviour into the air (Acts 2; 1 Thess. 4: 15-18). The hidden treasure may have consisted of hundreds of pieces of gold and silver, and thus suitably represents believers in all ages, who have been, and will yet be saved out of the wreck of Adam's world by the infinite grace of God.

But the pearl represents the saved of the Christian period specifically. The Church holds a very special place in the ways of God. The divine purposes concerning it were retained as a secret in the divine bosom until Paul was raised up as a chosen vessel to communicate them to men (Eph 3: 3-4). He was in a peculiar sense the minister of the Church; and from him we learn that the Church is Christ's body now, and will be His bride throughout eternity. In these special relationships the saved of the preceding and following ages have no part though the everlasting home of all God's saints is one-"the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb. 12: 22).

The single pearl shows the unity and beauty of the Church as Christ sees and estimates it. The joyful Finder of the earlier parable is the toilsome Seeker in the parable before us. To have the pearl for His own He sacrificed His all. He left heaven's glory, and accepted in lieu thereof the lowly circumstances of earth. His earthly throne, as David's Son and Heir, He also surrendered, and accepted instead the cross and the tomb. All this was in order that He might possess Himself of the pearl upon which He had set His heart. As the Spirit elsewhere puts it: "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5: 25). Surely the affections of all the objects of His favour should be set upon such a Saviour for ever.

### **The Drag-Net**

This is the last of the series of parables that were uttered by our Lord on the memorable day of Matt. 13: "The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away" (Matt 13: 47-48). Here we have the final results of the operations of God, man, and Satan during the period called Christianity. As a net cast into the sea the Gospel has gone forth into all the world, with its touching appeal to men of every nation. It has achieved results which are manifest to the eyes of all. Both good and bad have been gathered in: the good fish representing those who, having humbly acknowledged their guilt and ruin, have been cleansed from their sins by the Saviour's precious blood; the bad being those (alas! how many) who "profess and call themselves Christians," with no love for the Saviour's person, and no living faith in the Gospel. It is vain to urge that we must not judge. How is it possible for the Christian to obey the injunction to love the brethren if he cannot distinguish between "the brethren" and all others? (1 John 3: 14). How refuse fellowship to an unbeliever if it is impossible to define such (2 Cor. 6: 15). Or how avoid false teachers who bring in damnable heresies, if none can tell who are false and who are true (2 Peter 2: 1). Although mistakes in discernment are only too possible, all those to whom Christ is something more than a mere name are solemnly responsible to distinguish, in godly fear, between those who are good and those who are bad, companying with the one, and eschewing the other.

When the gospel net is full it will be drawn to shore. How soon this will take place is known to none but God, though everything around us is suggestive that the end of the age is drawing near. Then will ensue the great separation, which will sever the ungodly from even the outward communion of the godly for ever. According to the teaching of the parable, the fishermen's duty was to care for the good fish. This is the present responsibility of those who in this day profess to serve the absent Christ. The bad fish the fishermen merely cast out of the net, as not being those for whom they were in search. The judgement of God upon false professors will be meted out, not by human hands, but by angelic power. "So shall it be at the end of the age (not 'world'): the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13: 49-50). Such is the end of Christendom, as described by God Himself; not the whole world subdued to Christ by the operation of religious agencies, but eternal ruin for many who have passed current amongst their fellows as Christians indeed. The Saviour will undoubtedly have His own,

though the final discrimination by His unerring hand will reveal an appalling amount of unreality and hypocrisy in the circle of those who, in one way or another, bear His holy name.

## The Two Servants

One of the ugliest features of fallen human nature -insensibility to divine grace-is exposed in all its hideousness in the parable of the Two servants (Matt. 18: 23-35). It happened on this wise. Peter had just enquired of the Lord if seven times would suffice for the forgiveness of an erring brother, and had received the startling reply, "Until seventy times seven." The parable before us was added immediately, and in it the exceeding grace of God and the incorrigible evil of man stand clearly revealed.

The outline of the parable is as follows. A certain king, in taking account of his servants, found one who owed him ten thousand talents about three millions sterling in English money. The defaulter being penniless, the King ordered that he, and his wife, children and goods to be sold. In his distress the debtor fell at his master's feet, crying: "Lord, have patience with me and I will pay thee all." The King's heart being moved with compassion, the whole vast debt was immediately remitted. Presently the forgiven one met a fellow-servant who owed him a hundred pence-about three pounds in our currency; and instead of extending to him clemency after the pattern of that which had been so recently shown to himself, he seized him by the throat saying: "Pay me that thou owest." In his utter heartlessness, he gave no heed to the tears of his fellow, but cast him into prison until payment should be made.

This parable may be read both dispensationally and morally. Dispensationally it presents to us the history of the people of Israel. Centuries of law breaking had made them serious defaulters before the Son of God came into the world, and to all this they added the enormous guilt of shedding His blood. In answer to His gracious prayer, "Father, forgive them," divine favour was shown to the nation after the Holy Ghost came down from heaven. To Israel first the Gospel of divine forgiveness was sent (Acts 3: 26). This instead of melting their hearts, only served to bring out their utter moral insensibility to God's goodness. Scorning the Gospel for themselves, in their hatred to the Gentiles they put every obstacle in the way of its being preached to them (1 Thess 2: 16). This has filled their cup of iniquity to the brim. They are now suffering divine chastisement until their term is accomplished, and they have received of Jehovah's hand double for all their sins (Isa. 40: 2).

We must read this parable morally also. Viewed from this standpoint, it appeals loudly to us all. Every man is a defaulter in relation to God. Perfect obedience and love is His due from us, but who among us has ever rendered it. Yet the heart of God yearns over all His bankrupt debtors, and, on the basis of the atoning blood of Jesus, He proclaims full pardon to everyone. Myriads profess to have received His pardon. "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" is the language of multitudes in Christendom daily. But conduct alone proves whether or not the grace of God has really penetrated the soul. Where this is the case, the forgiven one gratefully walks in the spirit of grace towards all, meekly enduring wrong, and sincerely seeking every man's eternal good. Those who content themselves with saying "Lord, Lord," while not doing the things that He says, will find themselves ultimately in the place of the wicked servant of our parable, who was severely denounced by his lord for his hypocrisy and evil, and was forthwith delivered to the tormentors. "He shall have judgement without mercy that hath showed no mercy (James 2: 13). Our God will be satisfied with nothing less than reality in those who have to do with Him.

## The Labourers in the Vineyard.

There is absolutely nothing in this parable about the salvation of the soul. Salvation is altogether the fruit of sovereign grace, bestowed upon the unworthy on the basis of the blood of Jesus, the thought of wages or reward being utterly foreign to it. But every saved one is a servant, responsible in all things to his Lord. It is of this that our parable speaks.

Peter's remark in Matt. 19: 27 called it forth. "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore." In reply he was told that faithful service will in no wise go unrewarded, and that as regards the apostles, special honour is reserved for them in the golden era when the Son of man will sit upon His throne. But perceiving in Peter's remark a tendency to exalt human doings and sacrifices unduly, the Lord added the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt. 20: 1-16)

The penny (or denarius) for which the householder agreed with his first batch of workers was the usual labourer's wage in that day. The agreement was thus equitable to all parties. At pay-time a difficulty arose concerning some whom the master found unemployed at the eleventh hour, and sent into the vineyard. In their case no wage was fixed; they were simply told, "Whatsoever is right ye shall receive." They trusted to the master's goodness—a safe principle where God is concerned. At pay-time these eleventh-hour labourers were recompensed first, and each received a penny. When those who were engaged in the morning came before the steward they supposed they would receive more, and they did not hesitate to complain to the master because no more than a penny was given to them. The master remonstrated with the ringleader thus: Friend, I do thee no wrong; didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take up that which is thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do as I will with my own. Or is thine eye evil, because I am good? (R.V)

The point is the absolute right of the Lord of all to do as He pleases in His own realm—a right which no reverent mind would contest for a moment. Human pettiness, even in true saints, is apt to appraise its own service and to magnify its own labours in the Lord's vineyard. But all such notions are rebuked by the recollection of what each soul owes to its Redeemer. At infinite cost, amidst circumstances of unparalleled grief and shame, He secured our salvation at the cross of Calvary. From the moment that this immense fact is apprehended, devoted service becomes the happy occupation of him who has received so inestimable a blessing. Love is the only true motive; every Scripture statement concerning ultimate reward being given as encouragement merely. When our noblest doings are compared with what Christ has done for us, we feel constrained to put our hand upon our mouth, and cast ourselves adoringly at His feet. He will delight to commend and reward even a cup of cold water given for His sake, but far be it from us to utter one word about the best we have done. It is grace alone which has put us into the path of Christ, the same grace sustains us therein, and grace will not fail to crown it munificently when the end is reached.

## The Two Sons.

No preacher was ever less disposed for controversy than the Son of God, yet none were ever so incisive in their handling of contentious critics as He. And no wonder; being the Searcher of all hearts He knew perfectly the motives which actuated those who assailed

Him; and being Himself the Truth He knew just what was required to meet every occasion.

During His last week in Jerusalem He was frequently assailed by the religious leaders of Israel.

On one occasion, after He had exposed their spiritual incompetency for the sacred office, He gave utterance to the parable of the Two sons, wherein is set forth the hopeless case of men who say and do not. "A certain man had two sons, and he came to the first, and said, 'Son, go work to-day in my vineyard'. He answered and said, 'I will not': but afterwards he repented and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, Sir': and went not" (Matt. 21: 28-30) The rebellious son, who at first refused to do his father's will, represents the publicans and the harlots. Immersed in iniquity, these hearkened to the stern denunciations of John the Baptist, and bowed their hearts in true contrition before God. When the Saviour's ministry of grace reached their ears they welcomed it, and thus became true heirs of the Kingdom. The son who promised obedience but did not render it represents the priests and Pharisees. These, steeped in religion, and profoundly contemptuous of "publicans and sinners," were in fact the veriest hypocrites. Nothing could be more cutting than the Saviour's words concerning them on another occasion: "All therefore whatsoever they bid you, observe and do; but do not ye after their works; for they say and do not" (Matt. 23: 3). For such men, no sentence could be more righteous than this: "Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you.

This parable should raise the most serious thoughts in men's minds to-day. All around us are those who "profess and call themselves Christians," with leaders and shepherds not a few. From all these God demands reality. Deeds, not words, are His holy requirement. A pious "Lord, Lord," can never deceive Him. True faith in the Saviour's name and in the blood He shed produces holiness, separation from the world, and devotedness to the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Where these things are not seen, profession is the merest sham, which may pass muster with men in the present world, but will be fully exposed in another scene. However startling it may appear, it is nevertheless true that maybe a religious person will be lost for ever. But it is equally true that multitudes of the earth's vilest will be found in the blessedness of the Father's house when the gathering moment comes. The very vileness of these latter disposes them to seek the Saviour's face, and to avail themselves of His great salvation. Like the crucified thief who said, "Lord, remember me," their cry of repentance has been heard, and divine forgiveness has been vouchsafed to them full and free. Salvation is altogether of grace, and it is the happy portion of every true believer, wherever found.

## **The Wicked Husbandmen.**

The Saviour was fully aware, during His last visit to Jerusalem, that conspiracy was abroad, and that the leaders of Israel were planning His death. In this striking parable, recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, He exposes their design fully. This so exasperated His enemies that they would have laid violent hands upon Him forthwith, but they feared the people (Matt. 21: 46).

The parable of the Husbandmen, though directed against the leaders, gives the whole history of Israel from the day that God began to bestow favours upon them. Their beautiful inheritance is likened to a vineyard, containing everything conducive to abundant fruit-bearing. In the East rent is paid, not in money altogether, but partly in kind. But God looked in vain for any return from Israel (Matt. 21: 33-41). Eight centuries before Christ's coming He complained thus: "What could have been done more to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? (Isa. 5: 4). Nothing but the basest ingratitude and sin was ever rendered by Israel for all the favours wherewith God blessed them. Violence and murder were meted out to His messengers: they "beat one, and killed another, and stoned another." Stephen challenged them thus severely, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" (Acts 7: 52). The climax of insult and iniquity was reached when the Son came, and they said among themselves: "This is the Heir; come,

let us kill Him, and seize on His inheritance." Within a week these words received their painful fulfilment - the Son of God lay dead in the tomb.

The history of Israel is the history of man everywhere. In their record we see our own hearts reflected. We shall miss all the moral value of the parable if we fail to perceive this. Fallen man is utterly unfruitful for God; and, what is worse, his heart is filled with antagonism to God and His Son. The apostle's words as to this in Rom. 8: 7-8 are very sweeping: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Nothing avails but a new creation by means of the Spirit and the Word.

In answer to the Lord's demand as to what should be done to the lawless husbandmen, His hearers pronounced their own sentence. "He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." They wanted the inheritance for themselves, apart altogether from divine interference and claim; they should have destruction instead. The Stone which the builders rejected was about to become the head of the corner; and the day will arrive when the Stone will descend with crushing violence upon all transgressors, and grind them to powder (Matt. 21: 42-44) Even the forbearance of God has its limits.

The judgement of unfruitful Israel has already fallen; the judgement of unfaithful Christendom is rapidly approaching. From it there is no escape for any, but through faith in the Saviour's name, and in His precious atoning blood.

### **The Marriage of the King's Son.**

This parable, unlike that of the Husbandmen, is a similitude of the kingdom of heaven. The former parable gives the history of Israel under the law; the latter describes their conduct in the presence of divine grace. In the one, God is represented as presenting claims (as He was entitled to do); in the other, He invites to a feast. Taken together, the two parables show the utter failure of flesh in connection with both law and grace. Such is man that if God asks him for something he will not render it; and if God offers him something he will not accept it.

"A certain King made a marriage for his son" (Matt. 22: 1-14). The King is God; the son is the Lord Jesus. Remarkably, the bride does not figure in the parable at all: everything is ordered for the pleasure of the son. This is the principle on which God is acting in His present dealings with men. In sending salvation to us, with all its inestimable blessings for eternity, His prime object is to give joy and honour to His beloved Son, in whom all the divine counsels are centred. But men have no regard for either God or His Son; hence our parable speaks of two invitations absolutely refused. There were two distinct missions to Israel; one before, and one after, the cross of Calvary. The second was rejected with violence to the messengers; they "entreated them spitefully and slew them." The children of those who killed the Old Testament prophets treated in like manner the New Testament apostles. Peter, John, and Paul experienced their cruelty, whilst Stephen and James were murdered by them. Our Lord gave a further warning as to all this in Matt. 23: 34: Judgement followed, as the parable foretold. The King's armies (in this case the Romans, under Titus) destroyed the murderers and burnt up their city. Compare Luke 21: 20-24.

But the King's goodness was not quenched by the ingratitude and evil of the first invited guests. Accordingly the servants were bidden to go into the highways and bring in all they could find, "both bad and good." Thus the grace of God, so scornfully rejected by Israel, has been extended to the Gentiles. "Whosoever" is now the grand Gospel cry. Divine love to the world is now proclaimed on the basis of the atoning blood of Jesus. But all is not right with these Gentile called ones. "When the King came in to see the guests he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment." A promiscuous

gathering collected from the highways was not expected to possess raiment suitable for a royal banqueting house; wedding robes had therefore been provided. The individual upon whom the King's eye rested dared to affront the King by appearing in raiment of his own. He either thought too highly of his own apparel to put it aside, or too lightly of what befitted the presence of the King to suffer himself to don the wedding garment. This man is the representative of a class. In his presumptuous ignoring of the wedding garment he is the prototype of religious men destitute of Christ. All these boast of their own righteousness instead of submitting themselves to the righteousness of God (Rom. 10: 3). Unless God in His infinite mercy opens their eyes to their true position, the outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth must be their portion for ever. The King's inspection of those who profess to have accepted His call may be nearer than any of us suppose.

## **The Ten Virgins.**

This parable describes prophetically the conduct of professing Christians in relation to the hope of the Lord's coming. It is most certain that when the Son of God went up into the Father's house He left behind Him the promise to come again, and gather home to Himself all those for whom He died (John 14: 3). For the fulfilment of this, all should have looked with fervent desire.

Then shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish" (Matt. 25: 1-13). Christianity is a heavenly order of things. When it really engages a man's heart it sets him entirely outside of the present evil world, with his face towards the glory of God. The fact that his Saviour is no longer here has spoiled the world for the Christian. A stranger below, he waits for Christ's coming from above. It is Satan's unceasing aim to pervert the heavenly character of Christianity; hence the worldly employments with which religious leaders fill the minds of those who follow them-bazaars, concerts, and the like.

The virgins are divinely divided into two companies-the wise and the foolish; the essential difference being that the one had oil in their vessels with their lamps, and the other had not. Oil is the emblem of the Holy Spirit, who is God's great gift to all who believe the Gospel (Eph. 1: 13). He who has not God's Spirit is no Christian, whatever his pretensions (Rom. 8: 9). "While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept. The hope of the Lord's coming for His people, which so fired the souls of believers in the apostle's day, became lost when the apostles were no more. Since that time men in Christendom have spoken only of the day of judgement at the end of all things. The Te Deum, with other ancient writings, acknowledges this solemn truth, but of the Saviour's descent into the air to call up His saints not a trace can be found in the literary remains of centuries.

But the midnight cry has gone forth. The nineteenth century witnessed a revival of the hope. From one end of Christendom to the other the cry now resounds: "Behold the Bridegroom; go ye out to meet Him. Under the mighty impulse of the midnight cry multitudes of true believers-"wise virgins" have aroused themselves, and have shaken themselves free of worldly associations, religious or otherwise, and have resumed the original waiting attitude of the Church of God. The foolish virgins are also full of activity, though in a wrong direction. Realising that something is lacking, they are redoubling their religious zeal, in the hope of fitting themselves thereby for the Bridegroom's presence. Sacraments and formalities of every kind are their confidence and stay.

Our parable shows that when the bridegroom came, "they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut." Readiness consists, not in attention to religious formalities, but in unfeigned faith in the Saviour's name, and in His atoning blood. Only those of whom this is true find

themselves on the right side of the door, when the critical moment arrives. Those outside appeal in vain: "Lord, Lord, open to us." But one reply is possible: "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not. Both true and nominal Christians, like the wise and foolish virgins, are alike in their profession, but the return of the Lord from heaven will make clearly manifest how deep is the moral gulf which really separates the one class from the other.

## The Talents.

This parable has a voice to all who hold the position of servants of Christ during His absence in heaven. He likens Himself to "a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered to them his goods." (Matt. 25: 14-30). The only true motive for service to Christ is affection for His person. Salvation is by grace alone; it is the purchase of His blood, neither pious deeds nor service of any kind having aught to do with the matter. He who ventures to serve Christ in any capacity apart from appreciation of His blood, and love to His person, only undertakes that which will bring down judgement upon his head in the great day.

The sovereignty of the Lord is seen in that to one was committed five talents, to another two, and to another one-"to each man according to his several ability. Thus Apollos was not so richly endowed as Paul, but both were equally responsible to do their best with what they had. This principle applies still. Let no true witness for Christ bemoan the smallness of his gifts, "for if there be first the willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" 2 Cor 8: 12 Some of the servants of our parable, having received their talents, forthwith went and traded with them. What need for delay. In like manner, those who in our day have received qualifications from Christ are solemnly responsible to go forth and use them, asking permission from no man. The notion of official ordination has been the bane of Christian ministry for centuries. Romanists, Greeks, Anglicans, and Nonconformists agree in the fiction that ordination of some kind is necessary ere a man handle sacred things. The practical result of this is that many are installed as servants of Christ who have never known His salvation, and who are in consequence dead hindrances to the operation of the Spirit of God while others of a more spiritual type are discredited as unauthorised and piratical. Scripture nowhere asserts the need of official appointment for preaching the Word of God, still less for "the due administration of the sacraments." Elders and deacons were apostolically ordained, but these officers had nothing directly to do with public ministry. The work of the one was rule and visitation; and of the other, care for widows, etc. When John, in his second epistle, warned the elect lady against heretical teachers, he did not bid her examine their credentials, but to test their teaching. Paul gloried in the fact that he was an apostle, neither of men, nor by men (Gal. 1: 1). No man had anything whatever to do with his call to service.

When the lord returned, he called his servants together, and reckoned with them. In like manner will the Lord Jesus, at His coming again, investigate the doings of all who have professed to serve Him during His absence. The man who had received five talents was called first, as the one most responsible. He had gained five talents more, and was rewarded with his master's commendation. The man who had received the two had gained two more. His commendation was word for word the same as that of his more privileged brother. Each had done his best with his master's goods, and each was therefore invited to enter into the joy of his lord. Bliss with Christ is the happy end of all true labour for His name. The man with the single talent was cast into the outer darkness. He represents Christendom's unconverted preachers, whose hearts have never been warmed by the love of Christ, and who cannot therefore find delight in pleasing Him. Unworthy motives explain their public position, the duties of which they shirk as miserably as the man in our parable. Though such speak with the tongues of men

and of angels, it is but as sounding brass in the divine ears. Unless God mercifully lead them to repentance, Balaam's doom must be theirs for ever.

## **The Sleeping Husbandman,**

"So is the Kingdom of God as if a man should cast seed on the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come" (Mark 4: 26-29) This parable is peculiar to the Second Evangelist. Its point is the non-intervention of the Lord of the harvest with the outward course of Christianity. He Himself was the beginner of the present testimony to God's grace and goodness, in person, during His humiliation and by means of the Holy Spirit after He ascended on high. The Gospels tell us of His personal labours, Mark concluding with the statement that after His departure the disciples continued the testimony, "the Lord working with them."

He has thus "cast seed on the ground," the results being left to the responsibility of men. The reception which has been accorded to the Gospel seed is fully detailed in the parable of the Sower. The greater part of it has been rendered unproductive through the evil of the human heart. But the Lord does not interfere. He remains quiescent for the present in the glory of God. The apparent indifference of the Lord of the harvest has been a frequent cause of perplexity to the godly. They have witnessed the excellent of the earth cast to the lions by the heathen, and tortured in the Inquisition, and burned at the stake by the religious chiefs of Christendom, and their anguished hearts have marvelled at the silence of heaven. No angels have appeared for the deliverance of the oppressed, as in the case of imprisoned Peter; and no miracles have been wrought on their behalf as in the day when the three Hebrews were cast into the fiery furnace. "Oh Lord, how long?" has been the agonised cry of such as have marvelled at the triumph of evil, especially in the religious sphere.

For the present, matters are suffered to take their own course. That no purpose of God is failing of its accomplishment is clear from our parable. Fruit is most certainly being produced for God in the world, "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." Whatever the apparent trend of things, the Gospel is undoubtedly winning true hearts for the Saviour Who died and rose again. By and bye He will surround Himself in the Father's house with the full fruit of His great Calvary sacrifice.

When harvest-time arrives, His attitude of non-intervention will be abandoned and He will exert Himself in power. Then "He putteth in the sickle." In that day He will discriminate, as He only can unfailingly, between those who really love His name and those who love Him not. For His own there is prepared a place in the glory above; for all others, whatever their religious profession or ecclesiastical status, there is reserved blackness of darkness for ever.

## **The Two Builders.**

Both Matthew and Luke give this heart-searching parable at the close of our Lord's sermon on the mount. Multitudes had listened to His teaching with wonder and admiration. His gracious words attracted them, and His authoritative tone (so unlike that of their scribes) commanded at least their respect. In their estimation "Never man spake like this Man."

So far well, but the human heart is deplorably fickle and unreal. This leads men to hear, and even to approve what they hear, while rendering no obedience to the heavenly message. Hence the

importance of the parable of the two builders. Whosoever cometh to Me and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: he is like a man who built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on the rock" (Luke 6: 47-48). The man who hears manifestly stands in a position altogether different from that of him who hears not. The latter is utterly indifferent; the former gives more or less attention to the things which are eternal. But unless his sole foundation is the teaching of the Son of God, he has absolutely nothing that will avail him when the storm of divine judgement arises. "Back to Christ" is the cry today. Well, be it so; but what has Christ told us? In John 3: 5 He insists upon every man's need of the new birth; in the same chapter (v. 14) He declares the absolute necessity for His atoning sacrifice: and then proceeds to show (v. 16) that the heart of God has provided what the throne of God demanded. "He so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son." His own lips have told us also that every man's eternal future depends upon his attitude towards Himself. "Back to Christ," if really meant, must lead men to bow at His feet in humble acknowledgement of His person and sacrifice. All who have taken this happy place have laid their foundation on the rock, and for them the impending judgement of God, however terrible, has no alarm.

"But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation, built an house upon the earth; against which the storm did beat violently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great" (Luke 6: 49). Thus graphically does the Lord of all describe the collapse of all the hopes of such as have not built upon His words. Heaven is silent today: no fiery bolts proceed thence to drive the guilty into eternal woe: but a veritable hurricane of divine wrath will burst forth ere long, which will reveal indisputably where men really stand. Every unreal superstructure will then totter and fall. The fairest moral and religious exterior will not shield from judgement those who have not as lost sinners put their trust in the Saviour and in His precious blood. As the prophet declared ages ago: "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place" (Isa. 28: 17). Happy, eternally happy, is the man who has built on Christ, the Son of God. This foundation will stand, and this alone.

## **The Two Debtors.**

The Saviour was sitting at meat in the house of a Pharisee. His spirit was sorely grieved at the time. He had just had occasion to rebuke the men of His generation for their indifference to both John the Baptist and Himself. The stern asceticism of the forerunner so irritated them that they said he had a demon; and the geniality and graciousness of the Saviour so offended them that they called Him a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners (Luke 7: 31-35).

Something to refresh His heart would have been deeply appreciated at that moment. But He was not to receive it at the hands of His host. He in his deplorable blindness was wholly unconscious of whom he had at his board that day. His God was there, but he knew it not. Yet he was a religious man—one of the ultra-religious indeed. His Guest, was, in his eyes, simply a travelling preacher, to whom it might be well to grant a meal. It had occurred to him that He might possibly be a prophet but this thought he dismissed as he noted His conduct in his house. So little did he esteem his Guest that he did not even offer Him the usual Eastern courtesies—water for His feet, etc. Truly there is nothing so blinding or benumbing as empty, formal religion.

Presently a woman of the city—a moral derelict from the streets—crept into the dining-hall, hearing that Jesus was there. Her soul was burdened. Sin lay heavily upon her. But she discerned in Jesus the Saviour of sinners. Whether He suited others or not mattered little to her; to one burdened with guilt like herself He was just the One she needed. None other in the universe could meet her case. She had

heard of His grace to sinners, and her heart was attracted. No restraints or Pharisaical proprieties were suffered to stand in her way. She sought Him out, and claimed, not in words but in deeds, a personal interest in His saving grace. To the deep disgust of the host she rained tears upon the Saviour's feet, wiped them with the hair of her head, kissed them fervently, and anointed them with ointment.

The Lord, aware of what was passing in the mind of the Pharisee, turned to him thus: "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?" (Luke 7: 40-42). To such a parable but one answer was possible, and the application was evident. If each man's record of sin is not actually vile, there is no room for boasting, since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It ill becomes one therefore to scorn another. Each would be well advised to seek pardoning grace for himself.

Turning to the woman, the Saviour said: "Thy sins are forgiven. He had come down from heaven for the salvation of such as she, and He was on His way to Calvary to expiate her guilt. Never again could she number herself amongst "miserable sinners"; ever after with gratitude her lips would say, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins, and in the life everlasting. Amen."

## **The Good Samaritan.**

This touching parable was related by the Saviour as a rebuke to a caviller, who had challenged Him as to what he should do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10: 25-37). To an honest enquirer, He would have replied that eternal life is the gift of God to those who believe on His Son; but to a caviller He could only speak of the law of Sinai. Unabashed and unconvicted (though a professional exponent of the divine law) His questioner then asked: "And who is my neighbour?" This parable was then given, which not only furnished a complete answer to the question, but also shows in a vivid way man's utterly ruined condition as God sees it. No one who understands the parable of the Good Samaritan would ever seek to obtain eternal life by meritorious works of any kind.

The man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and who experienced so disastrous a journey is a representative character; in him every man may see his own portrait, if he will. It is folly to speak of human progress; man's course has been retrograde ever since the catastrophe in Eden. He has fallen into the hands of the hosts of evil, who have stripped him of his once fair robe of innocence, injuring him mortally in so doing. His condition is hopeless so far as creature aid is concerned.

Two persons passed by as the stricken traveller lay weltering in his blood, the one a priest and the other a Levite; but neither proffered a helping hand. Yet the law taught that even the ass of an enemy was to be succoured if he was seen groaning under his burden (Ex. 23: 5). But why did the Saviour select, out of the many classes and ranks of men, the priest and the Levite as those who did nothing for the dying one? Surely to teach us the utter inability of the system which these characters represented to meet the need of ruined man. The priest's business was with religious forms and ceremonies, and the Levite was responsible to instruct the people in the law of God: yet both of these are represented by a divine hand as doing nothing for a man in his hour of deadly peril. What a lesson is here! Yet so little heed has been paid to it that to this hour multitudes in their quest for salvation cast themselves, some upon priests, and some upon moralists, to meet their deep need. The blunder of it is painful to contemplate.

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had

compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him." Thus graphically the Saviour describes His own mission of grace. From heaven's glory He journeyed, going ever downward until Calvary was reached, where He bowed His head in death as an atonement for human guilt. Man being righteously under sentence of death, He must needs suffer and die in order to lift him out of his degradation and ruin. The Jews once called Him a Samaritan in contempt (John 8: 48); in our parable He meekly accepts the title. Yet the scorn of man could not be suffered to dry up the springs of His grace, hence His loving provision of oil and wine, typifying the Spirit's application to the soul of the healing efficacy of His precious blood. In the picture before us we have the man, cured, carried, and cared for in every way. There is yet a higher aspect of saving grace the sinner brought into the Father's presence, to be for ever a sharer of divine joys. But this is shown to us in the later parable of the prodigal son.

## **The Stronger than the Strong**

It was suggested by some that the power by which the Son of God wrought in this world was the power of Beelzebub. The suggestion was as absurd as it was blasphemous. But it furnished the Saviour with an opportunity of showing the relation of man to Satan as the fruit of the fall, and His own relation to the enemy as having come from heaven for man's deliverance and blessing. He put it thus: "When the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when the stronger than he shall come upon him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils" (Luke 11: 21-22). The strong one is Satan; the stronger than he is the Son of God. Satan's "palace" is the world as it is now; "his goods" are the men and women who dwell therein. The position is a terrible one; none the less so because the mass have no realization of it. Man's revolt from God has not yielded him the independence to which he aspired; it has reduced him to Satanic servitude instead. The Lord Himself on three occasions spoke of the enemy as "prince of this world."

The blind eagerness with which men pursue their lusts and pleasures, some decent and some indecent, is sufficient proof of Satan's dominion over them. Even though no satisfaction is found for money or effort, and though the ultimate issue is manifestly ruinous, men rush heedlessly on. In fact, if they would extricate themselves from the toils of the destroyer, they have no power to do so. Satan has nothing to fear from the struggles of his captives, be they ever so frantic. His hold is firm; his dominion is ancient; and his resources are beyond anything known to the children of men.

But Christ has come. From the Father's heart He came, as the living expression of His compassion for the wretched and lost. Hear Him proclaiming in the synagogue of Nazareth the character of His mission. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; because He hath anointed Me to preach deliverance to the captives," etc. (Luke 4: 18). Ere deliverance could be, He must meet the strong man and overcome him. In the wilderness He bound him; at the cross He bruised him. By submitting to death for a brief moment, He annulled Satan's Power. His resurrection is the glorious proof of His complete triumph over all the might of the enemy. Deliverance is, in consequence, available for all. None need remain a single hour under the dominion of the strong man. The cry of distress will assuredly be heard; pardon and eternal life will be freely bestowed upon all who believe on the Son. The soul is thus set free for ever.

In the same discourse the Saviour gave utterance to the connected parable of the restless spirit (Luke 11: 24-26). It is the case of one from whom the unclean spirit has gone out (not cast out), only to return later with seven-fold power. Dispensation-ally, this is the history of the nation of Israel, from

which the demon of idolatry went out after the Babylonish captivity, with the certainty of returning in its most evil form in the day of the Anti-Christ (Matt. 12: 45) The Christ of God having been disowned in Zion, "the abomination of desolation" is destined to stand in Israel's holy place (Matt. 24: 15) Reformation is insufficient, whether for that nation or for individuals, in this or in any other day. It will not avail to put the soul beyond the reach of the enemy's power. living faith in the One Who died and rose again can alone effectually meet human need.

## **The Rich Fool.**

Someone had just appealed to the Saviour concerning a property dispute. He declined to interfere, the matter being foreign to His mission at that time. He had come from heaven, not to adjust the world's wrongs, but to seek men's souls in love. The crooked will certainly be made straight by His hand, but in another era. For this He must return from His present place on high. But meanwhile, He Who never missed an opportunity of dealing with men's consciences concerning things unseen and eternal, used the occasion of the appeal to warn His hearers against absorption with this world's affairs. In order to present this the more forcibly He added the familiar parable of the rich fool (Luke 12: 13-21).

The world has never been without such characters as the Saviour here describes. His omniscient eye had observed the like repeatedly. Men to whom the Creator has been specially kind, into whose lap He has poured blessings in abundance, and who have only used His favours to the utter exclusion of Himself from their thoughts. The rich man of our parable was hampered in regard to his produce. His farm had brought forth plentifully, and his barns were full to overflowing, so that greater storehouses must be erected. The possibility of any hitch arising in connection with his projects never occurred to his mind, so self-confident was he. Accordingly, he addressed himself thus: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." No thought of God, no thought of eternity, found room in his foolish mind. To him this world was everything, and he confidently expected to hold and enjoy it indefinitely.

He ought to have remembered that for man, unlike the beasts, there is a life beyond this world; and a God to meet, to whom all must render an account. The divine word to him, and to all of his kind, is, "Thou fool." This is God's epithet, not man's. Surely it is not too strong a term to apply to one who absolutely ignores his possession of a never-dying soul. He who thinks of nothing but his few years in this world, in utter forgetfulness of the ages upon ages which lie beyond, is a fool indeed. In Luke 16 the Saviour draws aside the veil, and shows us the torments of one to whom this world had been everything. He did it in mercy, as a warning to men in all succeeding ages.

The question was recently asked concerning a deceased millionaire: "How much did he leave?" The solemn reply was given: "He left it all." So to the fool of our parable God said: "This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall these things be which thou hast provided?" "Whose," indeed! A matter of but small moment to the original possessor when the gates of death have closed upon him. To find then that a supreme blunder has been committed is almost too awful to contemplate. To get one's eyes opened to the reality of things when the border-line is passed can only lead to eternal despair; to face realities now will result in humble saving faith in God and His beloved Son. This is life indeed.

## **The Returning Lord.**

The Saviour frequently spoke to His disciples of His going away and coming again, and indicated

to them two things that should characterise them during His absence—watching and working. The watching attitude is described in Luke 12: 35-36 thus: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately." This attitude was early abandoned by the Church. When the Church became worldly, she lost touch of the truth of her Lord's return, and settled down to the enjoyment of ease and honour here. Having thus forgotten her heavenly calling, she fell into the blunder that her mission was to improve the world; and in the pursuit of this object she became too blind to perceive that her fancy was not being realised, and that instead the world was corrupting and ruining her.

The Lord in His grace has revived the lost hope in these last days, with the happy result that many to-day are looking with fervour for His coming again. Watching is necessarily the fruit of affection, and this the absent Lord values more than the costliest sacrifices or the most toilsome labours. The highest possible character of reward is set before His watching ones: "He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12: 37). Every believing heart cherishes the prospect of serving Christ eternally with a perfection of service that is impossible at present; here we have quite another thought—more delightful far—that He will condescend to render service to us. It will be His joy for ever to minister to the happiness of those whom He has redeemed by His blood.

Working has its place no less than watching. Salvation is by grace alone, works having nothing whatever to do with it. Its basis is the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. But the realisation of this incites the soul to hearty labour for His name's sake. Concerning the diligent worker, the Lord has said: "He will make him ruler over all that He hath" (Luke 12: 44). This honour is great—too great, indeed, for the most spiritual mind to grasp at present; but it is altogether a lower character of reward than that which is in store for watchers. To work for Christ is good; to watch for Christ is better.

The Lord proceeded to speak of the evil servant who says in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming, and who, in consequence, beats his fellow servants and carouses with the drunken" (Luke 12: 45). It is the false religious professor who says "Lord, Lord," but has no mind to do what He says. Such the Lord will not only disown but destroy at His coming. In His work of judgement He will discriminate between those who knew His will, and those who knew it not. This is just the difference between the professing Christian and the heathen. Evil is evil, wherever it is found, and must needs be judged; but responsibility is measured according to what men know of God and His Word (Luke 12: 47, 48). Upon this equitable principle need we marvel if the heaviest strokes of the divine hand fall upon Great Britain when the hour comes for judgement to begin?

## **The Fig Tree in the Vineyard,**

The history of Israel is the history of man. The special dealings of God with that nation have served to bring out the incorrigible evil of human nature. Tested in every way, endowed with every conceivable privilege, encompassed by divine care and attention, man is a hopeless failure. He yields no fruit for God. The parable of the fig-tree in the vineyard shows this with all plainness.

The city of Jerusalem had just experienced a painful shock. The Roman governor, Pilate had butchered a number of Galileans, who had come thither to offer sacrifices. Some reported this to the Lord Jesus, desiring to hear His opinion upon the subject. In His usual way, He used the opportunity to deal a direct blow at the consciences of those who questioned Him. "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay: but, except ye

repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13: 1-3). Nothing is easier than to impute exceptional wickedness to those overtaken by calamity, in utter forgetfulness of the fact that man as man-man everywhere-is deserving only of the judgement of God. The Saviour accordingly added a parable, in which it is shown that the whole nation (not a few Galileans only) was altogether unprofitable to God, and, in consequence, going on to judgement. "A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard: and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he to the dresser of his vineyard, 'Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, 'Lord, let it alone 'this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and' if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down'" (Luke 13: 6-8). Both the vineyard and the vine represent the nation of Israel (Isa. 5; Ps. 80); the fig tree planted in the vineyard represents the remnant of Judah which returned from the Babylonian captivity. A bright testimony for God should have gone forth from a people so graciously blest; instead, such was their hypocrisy and evil, the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles through them (Rom. 2: 24). The "three years" suggest the various testings by means of the law, the prophets, and Christ (Acts 7: 51-53). By none of these had the people's hearts been reached. God was still without any return from them. One more opportunity-only one-was to be granted in answer to the prayer of the dresser of the vineyard. This is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, who prayed: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34). The fresh opportunity was the testimony of the Holy Ghost after Christ's departure to heaven. This resulted in the murder of Stephen, and in the chasing out of Christ's other witnesses (1 Thess. 2: 15). The fig tree has therefore been cut down: the guilty nation has been expelled from the land by the righteous judgement of God.

Christendom's turn is coming. Nineteen centuries of Gospel light have produced little else than worldliness, pride, and blasphemy-all perpetrated under cover of Christ's holy name. Divine forbearance, long exercised, will ere long come to an end. Then the stroke will fall, and Christendom will be the scene of the sorest judgements of God. Let each individual look to himself. What answer does my heart give to the costly sacrifice of Calvary, and the exceeding riches of divine grace proclaimed in virtue of it. Not until the heart appreciates Christ and His atoning blood can fruit begin to be produced for God.

## **The Great Supper.**

The Lord of all was dining with one of the rulers, who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees. Being the Sabbath day, He was watched critically by all who were present at the table. Observing a dropsical man before Him, He healed him, administering at the same time a stern rebuke to those who blamed Him for it in their hearts. He then addressed a remonstrance to His fellow guests for the self seeking which had led all of them to choose the best seats at the feast; and this He followed with a word to His host as to showing kindness to the poor and needy rather than to those who were certain to recompense him again. The pride and selfishness which His holy eye thus detected contrasted deplorably with His own profound humility and grace (Luke 14).

One of the guests interposing with the remark: 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God,' the Saviour gave utterance to the parable of the Great Supper, wherein is shown that, however eager men may be for the best seats at feasts provided by their fellows, when God spreads a feast they want no place whatever, but pray to be excused.

The Great Supper is an attractive presentation of the grace of God as revealed in the Gospel. The first invited guests were the religious mass in Israel. To them the Saviour first showed Himself with

tenderest overtures of love. "And they all with one consent began to make excuse." The character of the excuses show that the blessings of God may be used to exclude God Himself from the affections. Such possessions as ground and oxen, and above all a wife, are good gifts from God to men. That these should turn the heart away from, rather than to, God, only proves how evil the human heart is. There is, moreover, glaring absurdity in the excuses given. Those who had bought property and oxen, having concluded their bargains, could well wait until the next day in order to see and prove what they had purchased. There was nothing in the circumstances to hinder their presence at the supper if their hearts really desired to be there.

Being thus affronted by those he had invited, the master of the house sent his servant into the streets and lanes of the city, with orders to bring in the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind. These represent the moral outcasts of Israel—the publicans and the harlots, concerning whom the Saviour once said to His religious hearers, "they go into the Kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21: 31).

But this was not sufficient; accordingly the servant was instructed to "go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." The servant referred to in this parable is the Holy Spirit of God, Who has graciously made it His business to reach men with the glad tidings of divine goodness and love. The highway and hedge folk are the Gentiles, to whom the Gospel of God is now being proclaimed, Israel having definitely refused it. As Peter put it to his Jewish audience on the day of Pentecost, "How the Gentile world is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2: 39)

How the Gentile world has treated God's invitation is painfully evident sacrifice of His Son for men's salvation should subdue every heart to which it is presented. His gracious offer of pardon and justification to all who believe in the Son should evoke the humble gratitude of every one who is privileged to hear of it. But the human heart is everywhere alike, whether in the Gentile or in the Jew. It wants nothing to do with God and His Son. The flimsiest and most contemptible excuses are too readily found, to the present and eternal loss of all who are guilty of such egregious folly.

## **The Lost Sheep.**

The cynical remarks of the religious classes in Israel rendered it necessary for the Saviour to justify His attitude towards the guilty and lost. The three parables of Luke 15 were accordingly given, in which is explained, in a manner calculated to move every true heart, the yearning of the divine Trinity over the erring, and the various parts played by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the blessing of such. In the parable of the lost sheep we have portrayed the work of the Son; in that of the lost piece of Silver we have the work of the Spirit; while in the parable of the prodigal son we have graphically described the warmth of affection with which the Father welcomes the wanderer home.

The Lord spoke first of His own work for two reasons. First, because it was with Him men were finding fault at that moment, and second, because His self sacrifice on behalf of sinners necessarily precedes (and is, indeed, the basis) of the work of the Spirit and of the Father in men's souls. He put this question to His critics: "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" (Luke 15: 4). If they would be so solicitous about a straying animal, why marvel that the Lord of all should yearn over lost men, made in the image and glory of God? To seek and to save such, He was even then upon that wonderful journey which began from the heights of heavenly bliss, and which would only end when the cross of Calvary had been endured. Such grace as this has no charm for religionists, their self complacency hiding from them their need of it. It may suit the profligate; but pride maintains that it

does not suit them. In their own eyes they are the ninety and nine just persons, who have no need of repentance. So utterly alienated are they from divine interests and affections that they are unable to understand the joy of the Father and the Son when one sinner is brought home. The fact that the religious folk were ever the Saviour's bitterest enemies is sufficient to put this painful truth beyond controversy. But the Shepherd rejoices in the fruit of His sufferings and toil. He shoulders His sheep, and carries it home rejoicing: By His mighty power is every saved one kept until the end. No force, either human or infernal, can wrest even the feeblest of His lambs from His care (John 10: 27-30). He brings them, not into the fold, but home to Himself. There is no fold in Christianity "One fold" is a sheer perversion in John 10:16; "one flock" is what the Saviour said. Wycliffe and Coverdale so rendered His words long before the Authorised Version was published it was departure from truth when "one fold" was adopted in preference. The "fold" savours of the bondage of the law, which men ignorant alas of the grace of God, have revived in Christianity; the "flock" suggests the liberty of divine love, which attracts, and binds, men to a personal Saviour.

The Shepherd's joy is shared by His friends and neighbours, to whom He says: "Rejoice with Me; for I have found My sheep which was lost." Those who are accustomed to intimacy of communion with the Son of God know, to their blessing what this means. His interests are theirs; His achievements in the way of saving grace furnish them with material for holy triumph and delight. But in what relation did these religionists stand to Him, who, instead of rejoicing in His joy, could only coldly criticise the exercise of His goodness to the needy and lost?

## **The Lost Silver.**

Since the first of the three parables (of Luke 15) indisputably refers to the Son, and the third to the Father, it is surely reasonable to look for the Holy Spirit in the parable that intervenes. And indeed it is blessedly true that each Person in the Godhead is equally interested in the blessing of men. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost work together in holy harmony in the gracious work of salvation.

The Saviour asked: "What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one of them, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and search diligently till she find it?" (v. 8). Here that which is lost is lifeless, in contrast with the first parable, which represents a living thing as going astray (the lost sheep). These are the two points of view from which the epistles to the Romans and Ephesians respectively regard the sinner. Activity in sin is the point in Romans; death spiritual death-is the point in Ephesians. The painstaking work of the Holy Spirit in seeking the lost is presented in a veiled form in our parable. It is a woman who acts. This suggests the Church of God, the individual members of which are the Spirit's instruments for reaching the souls of men. Many a dark heart needs the light of divine truth to be let into it, that its evil may be exposed, and its deep need of salvation be brought home. The woman's candle expresses this.

Unlike the sheep, which had strayed upon the mountains (Matt. 18: 12), the piece of silver was lost in the house. The great professing mass called Christendom is likened in 2 Tim. 2: 20 to a great house" containing a mixed medley of the precious and the vile. Thus it is not only that the profligate and the wicked are lost, but many religious persons also. Perishing souls may be found in both tavern and "place of worship." The lost sheep is the image of the one; the lost coin is the image of the other.

The joy of the woman, when the missing piece was found, is declared by the Saviour Himself to resemble the joy that bursts forth amongst the angels of God when one sinner is brought to repentance. One soul is of sufficient value to engage the interest of all heaven. Who but God knows its worth? A single weeping reprobate furnishes more delight in heaven than a whole host of religious formalists,

who wrap themselves around with the garments of their self-righteousness. It is marvellous, moreover, that the angelic host should unselfishly rejoice in the blessing of a being inferior in natural status to themselves, yet raised by sovereign grace to a more exalted position of blessing than the highest of the heavenly hierarchy have ever known or ever will know. Yet Peter says, concerning our blessings, "which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1: 12). And Paul lets us know that through the Church is being made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3: 10). They study His ways with us, and find profit and blessing thereby.

## The Prodigal Son.

It is not now the grace that seeks the lost one, but the grace that receives the repentant one to home and blessing. This is the Father's part in the wonderful scheme of salvation. The basis of all blessing for men is the atoning blood. This, however, is not the point in the parables of Luke 15, but rather the principle upon which men are blest, which is sovereign grace.

The Saviour now depicts two sons—one profligate, the other self-righteous (Luke 15: 11-32). These represent the lawless and the religious classes respectively. The younger son, having obtained his portion from his father, forsook him, and wasted his substance in a distant land. In like manner do the mass of men live in utter disregard of Him whose offspring they are, and squander His rich endowments, health, means, and faculties, in the gratification of their carnal lusts. The first man aimed at independence of God, and the love of this has characterised all his progeny since. When the prodigal had "spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land." Thus all around him were destitute like himself, so that no man could relieve the pangs of his fellow. Graphic picture of the godless man's utter inability to assuage the grief and disappointment of his neighbour's heart. In truth they are all needy together, if they would but confess it.

Presently the wanderer descends to the swine-trough. Penniless and hungry, he is thankful to be permitted to tend swine, and even to share their food. "No man gave unto him." So says the Lord of all. Let infidelity inform us how many hospitals, orphanages, and other refuges of mercy would be dotted about on the face of the earth if Christianity had never shed its gracious influence into the hearts of men.

Feeding swine giving time for reflection, the prodigal's mind turned to the father's house, and its abundant provision. His heart became attracted thither, and he resolved to return and cast himself upon his father's mercy. This reminds us of Rom. 2: 4 "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." But the transgressor made one huge blunder. He purposed to say: "I am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." Conscience should have taught him that he had fallen too low for this; for surely the first requisite of a servant is a good character. Let us take the very humblest place before our God. Such is our state by nature that we are absolutely without fitness for any place whatever in the divine presence. But he who gives up all thought of merit, and casts himself unreservedly upon sovereign grace, pleading only the worthiness of Christ and the efficacy of His blood, will find himself forthwith brought into the relationship of son to the Father with rights and privileges such as even elect angels can never know.

This the sinner of our parable proved. The great God is positively represented as running to meet him with kisses. Soon the best robe was upon him, with ring and shoes accompanying. The best robe is Christ, in whom the pardoned sinner stands complete, and with whose perfections he is henceforward covered in the eyes of God. "And they began to be merry." Not a hint as to its cessation. The Father's heart finds present and eternal joy in what His love has wrought for the objects of His favour; while

these, and all who understand their case, feast and delight themselves in the divine presence for evermore. Truly, it is good to know a Saviour God.

## **The Elder Son.**

Our Lord's religious critics could not fail to recognise themselves in the elder son, whose attitude towards the repentant transgressor, and towards the father also, because of his goodness to him, He so strikingly portrayed (Luke 15: 25-32). The elder son has a natural claim; and religionists in all ages have considered themselves in this position in relation to God-in a greater or less degree. But for this very reason they are rejected. "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1: 29). It is surely not without intention that the elder son is invariably represented in Scripture as outside divine blessing. Cain, Ishmael, Esau, and Reuben are a few cases in point. It is the confessedly guilty sinner, who has nothing to plead but what he finds in God Himself, who gets the blessing.

His elder son was in the field. "There was joy within, but he was without. "The field" is the place of labour. The sincere religionist is always a hard worker. He has a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Going about to establish his own righteousness, he does not submit himself to the righteousness of God (Rom. 10: 2, 3). Like the elder son, he is "nigh" to the Father's house, but he never gets inside, and the warmth of the Father's heart he never experiences. Occupying himself with legal works and religious ordinances, his life is cold and cheerless; so that, like the elder son, who was puzzled by the sound of music and dancing, his heart is a stranger to the fullness of joy which is found alone in the divine presence (Ps. 16: 11).

"He was angry, and would not go in: and his father came out, and entreated him.' He need not remain without; the door was not closed to him; he was as welcome as the prodigal to all the bliss of the father's house. But the whole difficulty lay there. In his self-parade-"Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment" he made it manifest that he looked for preferential treatment. In his own eyes he was one of the ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. In his anger he levels a positive complaint against his father: "thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." Here he tells out his own heart. His nearness to his father had been external only; his toil had proceeded from some other motive than love; his notion of real happiness was to be away from the father and in the company of his friends. Terrible exposure of the religious man's true state of heart in relation to God.

Hear the father tenderly pleading with the self-righteous one: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. But it was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost and is found." As far as this world is concerned, the man who has lived decently and religiously has a distinct advantage over the profligate. Health and fortune remain with him; hence the words, "all that I have is thine." But what is the value of this if pride and self-righteousness are suffered to exclude the soul from the presence of God for ever. Our parable closes with the elder son still outside, angrily objecting to the grace which had been shown to his wayward brother. He is the parent of all those who in this day scorn the idea of being "converted" and "saved," and who will never consent to the wastrels of earth being labelled "the sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling" (1 Cor. 1: 2). The very thought of it touches them to the quick.

## **The Unjust Steward.**

This parable, unlike those immediately preceding it, was addressed to disciples only (Luke 16: 1-

12) An important lesson is contained therein for those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

An unfaithful steward is held up to our view—one who was convicted of wasting his master's goods. Receiving notice of discharge, his mind turned upon his future. "I cannot dig," said he: "to beg I am ashamed." He therefore resolved to ingratiate himself with his master's debtors during his brief remaining term of office, with a view to receiving benefits at their hands at a later date. He accordingly called them together and bade one who owed his master for a hundred measures of oil, sit down and write fifty; another who owed for a hundred measures of wheat was told to write eighty. The Saviour's comment upon this has frequently puzzled even devout readers of Scripture. The Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely; for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

Let us consider this carefully. First, the one who thus commends is not the Lord Jesus, but the imaginary lord of the parable. Secondly the steward was not commended for his honesty, but for his wisdom. A clever rogue necessarily elicits from his observers admiration of a kind. The point of the parable is that the man acted with his eye upon the future. He used his brief term of stewardship with a view to the years that lay beyond. In doing this he set an example even to true disciples. Hence the words that follow: "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

To read these words of our Lord as if they had any reference to men seeking salvation would be disastrous. Salvation is by grace alone, and it is founded upon the Saviour's atoning blood. This cannot be too earnestly or too frequently insisted upon. But those who are saved have serious responsibilities concerning which they must each one give account at the judgement-seat of Christ. Hence each "disciple" should take a leaf out of the book of the unjust steward and use the brief period of life here with a view to blessing and reward in the life beyond. Perhaps there is nothing concerning which even true Christians fail more deeply than in the matter of money. Riches are called "the mammon of unrighteousness," because they are the fruit of sin. Such conditions as now prevail, one rich and another poor, could have no place in an unfallen world. A grave responsibility therefore rests upon the Christian as to how he disposes of that which he holds, be it little or much. He is indeed a steward; to Another he must render an account. He who spends all upon himself, reserving only his threepenny-piece for God, is living for the present only; he who uses his substance for God in the midst of a needy world is making friends by means of his possessions. There is no thought in Luke 16:9 of the objects of our benefactions welcoming us into the habitations above. Reference to the Greek shows that the Lord spoke in the third person—"that ye may be received." The one who welcomes the self-denying disciple to rest and reward is none other than the living God Himself, who is prepared to abundantly honour in another world those who have surrendered aught in this world for the sake of His name, and under the constraining influence of His mighty grace.

## **The Unjust Judge.**

In a materialistic day such as the present, prayer is at a discount. Sense is more than faith, and the visible is greater than the invisible. But it nevertheless remains true that man is the most helpless creature conceivable apart from the God who made him; and he who ignores this is riding for a fall—rushing forward to destruction.

Even true-hearted souls are frequently tried by divine delay in answering prayer and are tempted to give up the praying attitude in consequence. To all such the parable of the Unjust Judge has an encouraging voice. It was also given to the disciples as a stimulus to pray always and not faint. The

parable runs thus: "There was in a city a judge which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, "Avenge me of my adversary." And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' (Luke 18: 2-5).

Dispensationally there is a reference here to "the days of the Son of man." In the previous chapter the Saviour had spoken of the last great crisis, and the painful circumstances in which the godly remnant of Israel will find themselves at that time. The parable of the Unjust Judge follows this immediately, and is connected with it. In the dark days of Anti-Christian apostasy, when Christendom and Judaism will join hands in the basest iniquity, those who cleave to God will have no resource but prayer. The book of Psalms gives us prophetically many of the agonising appeals that will then be wrung from their distressed hearts. God will certainly avenge their wrongs, and judge their oppressors in His own time; the question is, will His people wait for Him, and accept no deliverance but that which comes from His hand? This is the force of the Saviour's words, "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18: 8).

At all times, and under all circumstances, it is good to trust God. Ever since the fall, it has been the tendency of flesh to plan and provide for itself in utter independence of God. This is the root cause of the misery of which the earth is full. It is the beginning of good things when a man's pride and self-will become broken down, and he turns to God in humble penitence, pleading for salvation the Saviour's worthy name and His atoning blood. Such faith is blessed immediately, and for ever. But this step, supremely important though it be, is only an initial one. It is the introduction into a life of faith, every step of which should be marked by simple confidence in God. Let Him delay to answer prayer, if it so please Him, still faith perseveres, knowing assuredly that infinite power and love will never suffer a single trusting soul to be overwhelmed. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30: 5).

## **The Pharisee and the Publican.**

This was a shaft levelled at the self-righteousness, not only of our Lord's day, but of every other day also. Two men are represented as going up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican (Luke 18: 9-14). If men are real anywhere, surely it is in the presence of God. It is reasonable to suppose that there, if anywhere, men will weigh their words, and speak as their hearts really feel. But what have we here? A man parading his merits in the Divine presence! "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." Not one word of thanksgiving or adoration for what God is in His gracious attitude towards men; every word was about himself and his own fancied perfections. What a spectacle is here! A man in the presence of the Giver of all good, yet no favour besought; in the presence of the Judge of quick and dead, and the Searcher of all hearts, yet no sin acknowledged. He asks nothing and confesses nothing.

Surely a terrible possibility is suggested to us in this parable. A man's religion may be his ruin. His very strictness of life may land him in perdition. Why? Because the religious man is apt to pride himself in his religiousness, and the moral man in his morality, and so become utterly blinded to the fact of his real sinfulness before a holy God. Rom. 9: 30-Rom. 10: 4 may well be pondered in this connection. The apostle groaned over his religious fellow countrymen because they were seeking righteousness on the principle of works, whereas righteousness for man is only found through faith in

Christ. Paul pursued the same false line himself until stopped in his career by the revelation of the glorified Christ (Phil. 3: 4-9).

The publican took wholly different ground before God. He belonged to that corrupt and hated class who collected the Roman taxes, thus helping forward the oppression of his suffering people. But he was now in the presence of God, and he felt deeply the sacredness of the place, and his own unfitness for it." The publican, standing afar off. would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, 'God be propitious to me the sinner.' "He might well smite upon his breast, for the heart is the spring of all evil. Man since the fall has been corrupt root and branch. The publican thought not of the Pharisee whether he was better or worse than himself; his own personal evil overwhelmed him as he sought to measure it in the light of God. "Be propitious to me" (for so the verse should read) was his penitent cry.

The Lord of all declared: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. "That is to say, the publican went home justified, and the Pharisee did not. This is the very opposite of all human thoughts. Weighed in human balances, the religious and benevolent Pharisee should have received the blessing, and the corrupt publican should have been driven away. But it is never so with God. This is a clear case of the kind described in Rom. 4: 5-6 of righteousness imputed apart from works. But on what equitable principle is God able to deal thus with the guilty? Let us note it carefully and reverently, it is the blood of Jesus (Rom. 3: 24, 25; Rom. 5: 9)

## The Pounds.

This parable, while similar in some respects to that of the Talents (Matt. 25: 14-30), seems nevertheless to be a distinct utterance. The Lord was approaching Jerusalem for the last time, and the hopes of His disciples ran high. Their thought was that now would be established the glorious kingdom of which prophets and psalmists have spoken for ages. The moral necessity of the cross had not yet become clear to them. They did not yet understand that man's sin required the Saviour to accept the cross at His first coming, and to wait for the Kingdom until His second coming. So the parable of the Pounds was given, in which the Lord likens Himself to a nobleman going away to a far country to receive for Himself a Kingdom, and to return, entrusting His servants with responsibilities meanwhile (Luke 19: 11-27)

In the interpretation the servants are those who "profess and call themselves Christians"; the citizens, who sent the insulting message, "We will not have this man to reign over us," are the Jewish people. At the return of the Lord Jesus, two things will take place; the judgement of His adversaries, and the reward of His servants. In the parable of the talents, the trusts varied according to ability; in the Parable of the Pounds, each man received alike. Divine sovereignty is the point in the one; human responsibility in the other.

The first man called was able to say, "Lord Thy pound hath gained ten pounds." Diligence had marked his conduct in relation to his Master's trust. Warmly did his Master commend him as a good servant saying, "Have thou authority over ten cities." What a Lord is ours! Such a recompense for fidelity in so small a matter. For diligence with this petty sum he was assigned rule over ten cities in the Millennial Kingdom. No Lord is so easily pleased as the Christ of God, and none rewards so amply, devoted service to His Name. The second man's account showed five pounds. To him was granted rule over five cities. He whom we serve notices both the quantity and the quality of what is done for Him (Luke 19: 15; 1 Cor 3: 13) Thus Romans 16: 12 tells us of Tryphena and Tryphosa, who laboured in the Lord, and of the beloved Persis, who laboured "much" in the Lord. In like manner, Neh. 3 tells us of

many who helped in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. but distinguishes some as working "earnestly. The "much" and the "earnestly" should be pondered by all who would be well-pleasing to the absent Christ.

There is, alas! a dark side to this parable. One man returned his pound to the Lord wrapped up in a napkin. In order to excuse his utter indifference to the claims of his absent Master, he slandered His character thus: "I feared Thee, because Thou art an austere man: Thou takest up that Thou layedst not down, and reapest that Thou didst not sow." This wicked servant represents Christendom's merely nominal professors, who never dream of using their powers and possessions for Him whose name they bear. All such will find themselves utterly rejected in the great day; their judgement being richly deserved if only for their miserable perversion of the character of Him who is infinitely gracious and good. Has He not shed His blood for the Perishing thereby rendering salvation available for all, apart from works or price: and what does He ask from any but the simple fervent service that naturally flows from appreciation of His marvellous Love and grace?

## **The Fig-Tree and all the Trees.**

The fig-tree is the well-known Scripture emblem representing the nation of Israel, "all the trees," in the parable now before us, represent accordingly the various nations which have to do with Israel (Luke 21: 29-31).

The Lord was giving utterance to His great Olivet prophecy. His sorrowful words about the temple being laid in ruins had drawn forth a series of questions from His surprised disciples. In His reply He spoke not only of the impending desolation by the Romans under Titus (which is the prominent feature in Luke's account), hut also of Israel's last bitter sorrow when the Antichrist is in power in Jerusalem. Concerning the latter, reference must be made to Matthew and Mark for full particulars. In all three Gospels it is made abundantly clear that deliverance will be brought in by the appearing of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven.

Our parable runs thus: "Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand. "We are thus entitled to expect signs of life to manifest themselves in Israel and in the nations with which she has special dealings before the Saviour's coming to earth to inaugurate the visible kingdom of God. This is suggestive that that great event is near, for it is indisputable that remarkable movements are proceeding amongst the people in question. The Zionist Congresses have revived the national spirit of Israel in a marvellous degree; the past few years have witnessed similar revivals of the national spirit in Greece, Italy, Egypt, and other powers, who have their respective parts to play in the stirring events that will wind up the present age. More extensive developments will yet be witnessed. Edom, Moab, Ammon, etc., long lost to view as nations, are destined to re-assert themselves and fall into position for the last great tragedy, if Scripture is to be credited. The Eastern Question, so often discussed, is in reality the Israel Question. Its centre is not Constantinople but Jerusalem. This political problem, so long the vexation of statesmen, will not be settled until the Son of man comes forth from heaven, and takes the affairs of earth in hand as the only rightful King of kings and Lord of lords. Then Israel's tribes will be re-established in the land of their fathers, and their foes and His will be put down for ever. The world's summer-time is indeed at hand, but desolating judgement storms must needs spend their force ere it can be brought in.

Meanwhile, believers in the Lord Jesus have an even more glorious expectation. For them the Saviour has promised to descend into the air with a shout, calling them home. In that moment of

moments every sleeping believer will be raised from the tomb, and every living believer will be changed, and so be caught up to be for ever with the Lord. The precious atoning blood entitles them to this, who otherwise had no hope and no claim, and no due but eternal woe. The removal of the whole Christian host will doubtless come as a tremendous shock to the world; but this must be ere the world's last fearful tragedy begins.