

# The Old Old Story

(Gospel Addresses)

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## "FIG-LEAVES."

There are but two religions in the world, and both are found in Gen. 3, for both commenced in the Garden of Eden. Man's religion is described in Gen. 5: 7; God's in Gen. 5: 21. Man's religion may assume many forms, as Brahmanism in India, Buddhism in China, Mohammedanism in Turkey, and Romanism in Spain; but one principle is common to them all, and is expressed in the little word "Do." Man is thrown upon his own resources, to work out his own salvation as best he may. God's religion, in contrast with this, is happily expressed in the word "Done." His grace has so perfectly supplied every need, that a finished work is now proclaimed to man; nothing is demanded of him but acceptance of it in simple faith.

The story of Gen. 3 is no allegory, but sober, historical fact. It is God's own account of the greatest disaster that has ever befallen the human family. The wily foe gained the ear of the woman, and then through her the ear of the man, and so brought about revolt against God. The sceptic scoffs at the notion that all the world's misery is traceable to the eating of an apple; but what lay behind that simple act? Disobedience to God; self-will; treason against the Creator. Herein we have the essence of

sin.

The guilty pair became aware of their condition before they were challenged as to it by the Lord God. "They knew that they were naked." In like manner men today feel within themselves, spite of their frequent boastings, that they are sinners against God. Who ever met a man perfectly satisfied with himself, who would not, when pressed, admit that he is not quite all he should be, or would wish to be? What is this but an acknowledgment of sinnership, even though the depth of the heart's evil may be utterly unknown? Conscious of nakedness, Adam and his wife "sewed fig-leaves together and made themselves aprons" They had each a conscience now, and a bad conscience withal; accordingly they laboured to make themselves presentable to the eye of God. But it was self effort entirely; God had absolutely no part or lot in the device. From that day onwards multitudes have followed in their steps. In so far as sacraments, temperance, benevolence, etc. (things excellent enough in themselves) are trusted in as contributing in the smallest degree to the salvation of the soul, they are just aprons of fig-leaves and nothing more.

The sound of the divine voice blasted Adam's whole scheme. Spite of their aprons" Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden." They were consciously unfit to stand before Him. Scripture abounds with instances of men who became utterly undone when the light of God streamed upon them. Isaiah cried, "Woe is me "; Job said, "Behold I am vile." Peter exclaimed, "Depart from me. for I am a sinful man, O Lord." It is happier far to discover one's moral nakedness now, than when this world is left behind for ever. The apostle hints in 2 Cor. 5: 3 at the awful possibility of some being found "naked" in the resurrection state.

Our hope, as sinful men, is in God alone. When He came upon the scene of the first great sin, He spoke forthwith of Christ, the Seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head. Further, "unto Adam and his wife the Lord God made coats of skins, and clothed them." Aprons of fig-leaves! Coats of skins! What a contrast! Not a trace of divine handiwork in the one; not a trace of human handiwork in the other. Here we have the first notice of death in Adam's world. Man's sin occasioned it, for the guilty ones must now have a covering such as would satisfy the eye of God. Every bullock, lamb, etc., that has ever been sacrificed on account of human guilt, pointed in its way to the cross of Calvary, where in God's due time the Son of His love suffered "once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3: 18). On the basis of Christ's redemption, God is able to impute righteousness to the most ungodly rebel who believes in His Son. As Rom. 3 expresses it, He is "just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Away then with all our human devices. Let us no longer go about to establish our own righteousness; let us rather submit ourselves unto the righteousness of God." For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 10: 3-4). The man who was once more diligent than any in sewing fig-leaves together — Saul of Tarsus — counted all his accomplishments in that direction as "loss" and "offal" when he came to know Christ Jesus the Lord. It was from his pen, as guided by the Holy Ghost, that the fine declaration has come down to us: "to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4: 5). Oh, the blessedness, for time and for eternity, of the man to whom God imputeth righteousness apart from works!

## **"LAME ON BOTH HIS FEET."**

The story of Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9) is a charming representation of the Gospel of God. It was no mere human kindness which David proposed to bestow upon the man, but kindness after the divine pattern. "Is there yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him?" It is

remarkable the prominence given to the name of Saul in this story. It was rather as the representative of Saul than as the heir of Jonathan that Mephibosheth was blessed. Now Saul was David's relentless foe. For years he hunted him, thirsting for his blood. Yet David speaks of showing grace to his seed. How like our God is this! "Beginning at Jerusalem," was the Saviour's word when sending forth His disciples with the gospel of divine forgiveness (Luke 24: 47). The city guilty of His blood was not merely to have an opportunity of blessing; it was to be approached first of all with the mercy of God. Deep down in every man's heart there is enmity to God and to His Son. But even so, grace abounds. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. 5: 10).

Mephibosheth was a cripple. When he was but five years old, he had a fall as his nurse fled with him after the battle of Gilboa. In consequence of this, he was "lame on both his feet." In like manner, man, in the very childhood of the race, experienced the grave moral fall described in Genesis 3, and has been a poor lame creature ever since. The doctrine of the fall is distasteful to the pride of the present day. The theory of evolution is more palatable, because it represents man as going forward, instead of backward. But if the record of Genesis 3 is the truth of God as every pious soul believes, then the theory of evolution is a lie of Satan, ruinous in its effects for all who imbibe it.

Mark, Mephibosheth was lame on "both" his feet. Even so man, since the fall, has been incapable both toward God and toward his fellow. Neither of the tables of the ; covenant is he competent to keep. As to the first, he can't neither walk with God, nor run in the way of His commandments (Gen. 5: 24; Ps. 119: 32). As to the second, he fails at every step. Every man is ready to object to so humiliating a conclusion in regard to himself, while recognising it carefully enough in his dealings with all others. Who would care to transact serious business without having everything secured in writing, with the signatures properly attested? What is this but a confession that man is a fallen creature, to be watched in all his words and ways? It is wisdom on our part to acknowledge our total moral ruin. It is not sufficient to admit that there may be shortcoming here and there; the bottom is never reached until a man owns that he is absolutely "without strength," dependent alone for salvation upon Christ who died for the ungodly (Rom. 5: 6).

Mephibosheth's condition, as representative and heir of a great enemy and transgressor, and lame on both his feet, is thus the exact picture of every man's moral condition by nature. Now observe his position. He was resident in "Lo-Debar," which means "no pasture." The world is a veritable Lo-Debar for us all. Absolutely nothing is contained therein that can satisfy our highest needs. He who makes the world his pursuit, whatever his advantages, must sooner or later come round to the wise man's opinion that it is all "vanity and striving after wind."

"Then King David sent and fetched him." Mephibosheth might well have approached David and pleaded before him the name of Jonathan. The King would certainly have honoured his covenant with the departed, and shown favour to his son. But Mephibosheth did not thus take the initiative. Even so, it is not man that takes the first great step towards the soul's blessing. The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost; and now it is the Holy Spirit who speaks the first word in the soul which leads to reconciliation with God. If God were to wait for man to act voluntarily, so deep is the enmity of the heart toward everything divine, that God and man would remain estranged eternally. Once Mephibosheth found himself in the presence of David, he learned that he was being blessed for another's sake, which put everything upon a sure basis as far as personal merit was concerned. It is the comfort of every believing heart to-day that all blessing depends solely upon what Christ is, and has done. The thought of this delivers the mind from self-contemplation, which engenders despair. Never again could Mephibosheth long after Lo-Debar; his place henceforward was with the King, in happy enjoyment of his grace. Similarly the Christian is lifted by the mighty power of divine goodness right

out of the world. He becomes a heavenly man now, with his whole soul aflame with the powerful attractions of the Lord Jesus.

In the following chapter we hear David again proposing to show kindness. The King of Ammon died, and David sent messages of condolence to Hanun, his successor. But this time his kindness was rejected. Evil counselors urged upon the young King that David only meant mischief by his embassy. Accordingly the messengers were maltreated, and their overtures repulsed. Swift judgement resulted, as was meet. Every man who has Christ presented to his attention must needs play the part either of Mephibosheth or of Hanun. The one appreciated "the kindness of God," as shown by David; the other refused it to his ruin. It is a wonderful thing to be told of the Saviour's name, and of the precious blood which alone could reconcile sinners to God, but it is a solemn thing to reject the heavenly message. The man who cannot appreciate the love of the divine heart must yet experience the severity of the divine hand.

## THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

Royal visits are always interesting, and frequently excite considerable enthusiasm amongst the people; but it does not often happen that such visits are instructive, leaving a testimony behind them to men of all succeeding generations. Yet this was the result of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, King of Israel (1 Kings 10). Her visit was not one of courtesy, such as monarchs sometimes pay one to another; nor was it a political visit, designed for the arrangement of treaties which might be to the advantage of her dominion; still less was her visit one of curiosity in order that she might see and hear the most remarkable man of his time. Her journey to Jerusalem was altogether an affair of the soul; '- the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord." Like Nicodemus later, she had a sense of need within, which she felt conversation with God's servant might remove. Accordingly she thought it worth her while to travel a thousand miles in order to lay her difficulties before him. In her case was strikingly answered Solomon's prayer concerning "the stranger" at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8: 41-43). The Son of God once held up this zealous queen as a rebuke to the indifference of men in His day (Matt. 12: 42). We will divide our subject thus: (1) what she heard; (2) what she saw; and (3) what she received.

What she HEARD. She came to prove Solomon with hard questions. "She communed with him of all that was in her heart; and Solomon told her all her questions." Precisely what her difficulties were is not recorded; it is enough for us to know that they were all removed. The soul in every age has its "hard questions." To whom can men turn to-day with their heart problems but to the Son of God? The Samaritan said concerning the expected One: "When He is come He will tell us all things" (John 4: 25). Some of the soul's "hard questions" are distinctly noticed in Scripture. We find one in Job 9: 2: "How should man be just with God?" This is the guilty man's "hard question." Bildad's remarks drew this forth from Job. He had just said: "Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man." To this Job replied: "I know it is so of a truth; but how should man be just with God? If He will contend with him, he cannot answer Him one of a thousand." It was all very well for Bildad to say "God will not cast away a perfect man." No one ever supposed He would, but where is the perfect man to be found? Certainly Job felt that he was not that man. The divine answer to the guilty man's "hard question" is found in Rom. 3: 21-26. The redemption that is in Christ Jesus enables God to justify freely by His grace every confessedly guilty one who believes in His Son.

Another of the soul's "hard questions" is noticed in Ps. 4: 6: "There may be many that say, "Who will show us any good?" This is the language of disappointment. The world has been searched, as it

were, for satisfaction, and in vain. Accordingly the poor votary of pleasure exclaims in despair, "Who will show us any good?" The Son of God, of whom Solomon was a type, can alone answer this "hard question." Hear His apostle in Phil. 3: 8: "I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but offal that I may win Christ." The heart of such a man was evidently at rest; in the knowledge of Christ he had found eternal good. Apart from Him the search for satisfaction is but strivings after the wind. The WORK of Christ is thus God's answer to the guilty man and the PERSON of Christ to the disappointed man.

Let us now consider what the queen SAW. First, she SAW the most glorious monarch of his time — "Solomon in all his glory." But this will not compare with what faith sees to-day. "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour" (Heb. 2: 9). What a sight! Then she observed that all Solomon's servants were well fed. The meat of his table" struck her. With what food does Christ nourish those who are His? Hear Him saying in John 6: 51 — "the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Do not read the Lord's Supper into this chapter, for it had no existence at the time of speaking. By eating His flesh and drinking His blood the Saviour meant faith's appropriation of Himself as the One who once was slain. I partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week but I am privileged to feed upon Christ every day and every hour of the day. Moreover, if to eat His flesh and drink His blood is to have eternal life, and if these words must be applied to a sacrament, then it follows that whoever has once partaken, however evil, is saved, and all who have not partaken, however pious, are lost. What thoughtful person would contend for anything so manifestly absurd? The Queen of Sheba noticed also the apparel of Solomon's servants; they were all well clothed. Christ's servants are clothed with 'the best robe' of divine righteousness (Luke 15: 22), conferred by grace alone. Everyone around Solomon seemed satisfied and happy. Happy are thy men," exclaimed the delighted queen. In like manner all who are Christ's have been made happy for evermore, and outside of their circle happiness is nowhere to be found.

Here we must note some points of contrast between the Queen of Sheba and the believer in Jesus. She said: "I heard . . . but I beheld not until . . . mine eyes had seen." We believe while as yet our eyes do not see. "Whom not having seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1: 8). She said moreover: "The half was not told me." Concerning the divinest of all themes, God revealed in human flesh, we read: "Even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21: 15). No finite mind could entertain even "the half" of what the Holy Spirit could tell concerning the Christ of God.

A few words now as to what she RECEIVED. It is true that she brought large presents to Solomon, but she went home enriched nevertheless. "King Solomon gave unto the Queen of Sheba all her desire . . . beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty." In like manner, our God not only meets the actual need of the sinner who comes to Him, but He forthwith enriches him with all the blessing of Christ Himself. Hence Christians are described in Rom. 5: 17 as "they which receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness." There are two things here. Righteousness is our actual need; without it we must perish; "the abundance of grace" corresponds with the "royal bounty" of Solomon. As we read in Eph. 1: 7. "Forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." As men in Christ, we are endowed with all the blessing of Christ. According to His worthiness and the merits of His atoning work is our wealthy portion for evermore.

# "KISS THE SON."

Christ is everywhere the theme of the Spirit in Holy Scripture. Not only in the Gospels, which tell of His past humiliation; not only in the Epistles, which speak of His present glory; but throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, Christ is the one theme of the Spirit of God. Happy the man who has eyes to perceive this, and a heart to appreciate it. It is the fruit of the gracious work of God Himself within.

Perhaps no book is better known than the book of Psalms. For centuries it has occupied a peculiar place in the religious services of Christendom. But perhaps there is no book less understood. It is commonly regarded as containing only devotional exercises. Certainly the heart tells itself out in the Psalms as nowhere else in the Book of God. But beyond the devotional aspect lies the prophetic; and unless this is seen, there is much in the Psalms that can never be comprehended. The whole book looks onward to the day of the Lord — that momentous day when God will abandon His present attitude of reserve, and interfere once more in the affairs of men.

The theme of Psalm 2, is Christ's future appearing. The Spirit asks in the opening verses why men are so enraged against Jehovah and His Anointed, and why they are determined to cast away their cords from them. At man's impotent rage Jehovah laughs, and insists that He will yet set His King upon His holy hill of Zion. When the moment comes for Christ to ask for His inheritance, the work of judgement will begin, and every foe will be swept out of His path.

In view of this, the Spirit in verses 10-12 offers counsel to men. "Be wise now." "Be instructed." Let us examine carefully verse 12. "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish in the way, for His wrath will soon be kindled. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (R.V.). There are four things here: — An exhortation a warning, an announcement, and a beatitude.

(1) An EXHORTATION. "Kiss the Son. It is not the kiss of affection that is meant, but the kiss of allegiance. It is the reverent acknowledgment of His title and claims. It is the moment when the heart exclaims, "My Lord and my God." Two different words are used for "Son" in this Psalm. In verse 7 we have "Ben "; in verse 12 "Bar." According to Gesenius, the one is the term of love, and the other the regal term. In other words, His relation to God as the object of His heart's delight; and His relation to men as the appointed universal Ruler to whom all must bow. Pride blocks men's path when Christ comes into view. We all like to receive homage, but we are not so ready to render it. Man's haughty mind cannot brook the thought of a superior. But God has made Jesus, whom men crucified, both Lord and Christ, and has decreed that to Him every knee must bow, and that every tongue must own Him Lord. The most stubborn heart that ever beat will be constrained to humble itself at the feet of the despised Jesus: those who bow in faith now receive salvation; those who do not bow until compelled to do so in another world will be lost eternally.

(2) We have next a WARNING, "Lest He be angry, and ye perish." Is it possible that the Son of God can ever be angry — He who sat by Sychar's well, and spoke so tenderly to a sinful woman there; He who suffered a conscience-stricken transgressor to shed tears of repentance upon His feet, and turned her not away; He who comforted even a thief in the hour of death, and took him With Himself into the Paradise of God? Can He indeed be angry? Let us remember that the divine nature is twofold: "God is Light" and "God is Love." He was angry in Noah's day, and the earth was in consequence swept clean of its transgressors; He was angry in Lot's and the guilty cities fell. He will not for ever address His Gospel to the children of men.

(3) There follows an ANNOUNCEMENT. "His wrath will soon be kindled." So the Revised

Version correctly reads. Nothing is more certain than judgement, however unwilling men may be to believe it. It is "because He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He hath ordained," that God "commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17: 30-31). The moment will assuredly come when the divine attitude towards men will undergo a total change, and He who now sits enthroned in patience at God's right hand will arise to the execution of His solemn work as Judge of quick and dead.

(4) Our text closes with a BEATITUDE. "Blessed are all they that put their trust (or, take refuge) in Him." Christ is the only refuge for sinners. He alone is our hope. It was He who suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust; and in Him alone may we confide. There will be found no refuge FROM Him when He appears, but refuge may be found IN Him by all who desire to flee from the wrath to come. But if Scripture presents Him thus to us as refuge from divine wrath, is He not necessarily GOD? Who else could shield us from the judgement of God? What mere creature could screen us from His uplifted hand? He who once was slain is indeed our Lord and our God, worthy of our heart's adoring love for evermore.

## **FOUR THINGS EXCEEDING WISE.**

It is natural to us to connect wisdom with greatness, but in Prov. 30: 24-28 we are divinely bidden to learn lessons from little things. The Lord Jesus also bade His disciples learn from lilies, sparrows, and even from the hairs of their head. The four little things of Prov. 30 are said to be "exceeding wise." Who amongst us would not desire to be exceeding wise, especially in matters spiritual and eternal?

Four suggestions concerning faith may be gathered from this portion of Holy Scripture. First, faith takes account of the future. This is illustrated in the ants. "The ANTS are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer." These little insects know that summer is not eternal. In like manner men's opportunities are fleeting. In the brief span of life here we determine our everlasting destiny. There are two cases held up for our warning in the Scriptures of men who lived only for the present. Esau for a mess of pottage sold his birthright, and is called a profane person for so doing; the rich farmer of Luke 12 who surveyed his possessions with such complacency, thinking nothing of the life beyond, is called a fool. Let us note it well; "profane" and "fool" are God's titles for men who live only for the present. Alas, how full the world is of such. Would that they might become "exceeding wise"!

Second, faith seeks a place of refuge. The CONIES illustrate this. They are "but a feeble folk, yet they make their houses in the rocks." The Syrian hyrax is here intended, a timid, cautious creature ever on the alert for danger. Noah by faith recognised that wrath was approaching, and availed himself of the shelter of the ark; the Israelites believingly sprinkled the blood of the lamb upon their houses on that night of judgement in Egypt; Ahab, on the contrary, defiantly slighted divine warning, and perished miserably at Ramoth-Gilead. The wise man has said: "A prudent man foreseeeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished" (Prov. 22: 3) Men are living in peril at the present hour. The day of judgement hastens on. Divinely prudent" are they who have fled to Christ for refuge; distressingly "simple" (however wise in their own conceit) are they who slight Him and His great salvation.

Third, faith values fellowship. "The LOCUSTS have no King, yet go they forth all of them by bands." A child may crush an individual locust; but an army of them is irresistible. Desolation attends

their progress. There is no individualism in Christianity. By the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven a divine unity has been created between believers here and Christ in glory. Every saved soul belongs to that great spiritual organisation called in Scripture "the Church of the living God." Abraham, and all other pious ones in the world's earlier ages, were just believing units; "one of the reasons for which Christ died was that He might "gather together into one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11: 52). One of our choicest privileges here is Christian fellowship. When Peter and John were released from prison "they went to their own company." In the assembly of the saints they found their consolation and strength.

Fourth, faith leads to glory. The spider (or more correctly the lizard) suggests this. "Thou takest hold of the LIZARD with thy hands, yet is she in King's palaces." In tropical countries these little creatures are ubiquitous. They may be seen crawling up the walls of both hut and mansion. Every blood-washed soul is marked for heavenly glory. God has called us by the Gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The feeblest and most insignificant believer will not miss this magnificent consummation. Neither the violence nor the craft of the enemy can hinder it.

Oh, to be "little" yet divinely "wise"! The foolish, the weak, the base, and the despised has God chosen. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (1 Cor. 1: 26-29).

## **THE GREAT ELECTION.**

Man's entire history upon earth has been, in a manner, an election time. From the beginning until now two persons have been seeking the confidence and allegiance of the children of men. Those persons are God and Satan. God is entitled by every right to the confidence and allegiance of our hearts. To our confidence, because of the absolute truthfulness of His character (for it is "impossible for God to lie" — Heb. 6: 18), and also because He is the source and spring of all our blessings. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1: 17). He is entitled, moreover, to our allegiance, for He is at once our Maker and our Judge. Satan has no rightful claim to service from us, being but a creature like ourselves; a creature, too, in revolt against the God who made him.

Looking back over the past six thousand years of human history, three special occasions may be clearly marked when men were called upon, in the most pointed manner, to choose between God and Satan. On each occasion they made "the wretched choice." Turn first to Gen. 3. There we have Adam and his wife in the garden, surrounded by everything that was calculated to fill their hearts with joy and gladness. They had every inducement to remain loyal to their God. One simple condition was laid upon them as a test of their obedience — of the fruit of the tree which was in the midst of the garden they were not to eat. The consequence of rebellion was clearly stated: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Presently the tempter came along, and, after a short parley with the woman, he boldly said: "Ye shall not surely die." This language made the position perfectly plain. It was a question of "whom will you believe" — God or Satan? Alas, for the decision! Our first parents decided to credit the tempter rather than the Creator, with all the dire results of which the world is full unto this hour. Ever since that day in Eden infidelity has been inherent in the human heart; man would prefer to believe anyone rather than his God.

Turn next to Matt. 2. The story of that chapter is familiar to us all. A Babe had been born in Jerusalem, concerning whom wise men from the East came up to make inquiry. At the mention of one

born King of the Jews Herod was troubled, which was no wonder, seeing that he was accustomed to bear that title himself. No rival could be welcome. But mark the further statement "he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." "All Jerusalem" is comprehensive enough, surely. The expression would include learned and unlearned, old and young, clergy and laity. All Jerusalem was troubled! Herod acted promptly. "He gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, and demanded of them where the Christ should be born." With the utmost readiness these men of the Bible turned up Micah 5: 2, and read out to the King the well-known words: And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule My people Israel." Yet not one step did these men take in the direction of Bethlehem to see if the promised King was there. There is nothing more heartless than mere Bible knowledge without faith, Strange as it may seem, it is possible to go down to an eternal hell with the mind crammed with Bible truth. The indifference of Jerusalem's priests and people is the more awful when we remember that Micah added concerning the promised One, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." It was thus God Himself who was coming into the world, and men did not Want Him! The question in Eden was, "Whom will you BELIEVE?" At the Incarnation the question evidently was, "Whom will you SERVE?" To this the human heart gave answer, "Herod, Caesar — anyone rather than God and His Christ."

Turn now to John 18. Once more a choice is submitted to men, and all are called upon to record their vote. Pilate has the Son of God upon his hands, and would fain be quit of the heavy responsibility. Falling back upon the custom of releasing a prisoner at the Passover, he brought forth Barabbas, murderer and robber, and bade the multitude choose between him and Jesus. Urged on by their religious chiefs, the people fiercely clamoured Not this Man, but Barabbas." The question on this occasion clearly was: "Whom will you RECEIVE?" Alas! anyone but Jesus was welcome. It is not that the multitude had the smallest regard for Barabbas; the point was that they did not want Jesus. Remarkably, on each of the voting days of which we have spoken, men chose a murderer. Satan, Herod, and Barabbas were all murderers (John 8: 44; Matt. 2: 16; Acts 3: 14).

The Christ question is with us still, and every man must give his answer thereto. No neutrality is permitted, and indeed no neutrality is possible. Whatever men may say with their lips, or whatever they may refrain from saying, every one has his opinion of Christ, and in his own heart at least every man has recorded his vote, for or against Him. The Saviour Himself has said: "He that is not with Me is against Me" (Matt. 12: 30). Neglecters of Him are in as desperate a position as outspoken rejecters, and will share together for eternity (Rev. 21: 8).

God will yet compel obedience to His Son. He has decreed that to Him every knee shall bow. In the day of His power not a tongue will be permitted to move against Him. Even hell itself will be constrained to yield respectful homage to Him. But in this there is no salvation. Blessed is the man who to-day confesses Him as Saviour and Lord, preferring to believe, serve, and receive Him to every other.

## **"WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?"**

The Christ had long been promised. Ever since the fall God had been speaking of Him to the children of men. Psalmists sang of Him, and prophets foretold His appearing and mission- He had now come, and the great test question for everyone was, "What think ye of Christ?" (Matt. 22: 42). His presence in the world caused "the thoughts of many hearts to be revealed" (Luke 2: 35). Men of necessity fell into their respective ranks, either for or against Him.

Our Lord's question was uttered in the temple, at the close of a day of questioning. The Herodians with their political query, the Sadducees with their doctrinal quibble, and the Pharisees with their legal inquiry had all been successively silenced by the Saviour. It was the last of their questioning. No man "durst from that day forth ask Him any more questions." His time had now come. While all His objectors were gathered together, He turned upon them saying, "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?"

This is the great question of the age, and every man's eternal future depends upon the answer that his heart gives thereto. The question is not as to religion, whether Christianity is to be preferred to any other belief; nor is it as to preachers, their excellence or otherwise. Concerning these things it is possible to hold correct opinions and yet perish for ever. The great root question is as to a Person — God's beloved Son. Upon the attitude of our hearts toward Him everything turns, whether for blessing or for Woe.

In the Scriptures we have many hearts telling themselves out concerning Him, and it may be to our advantage to look briefly at some of them. Take first Simeon of Jerusalem (Luke 2). That aged saint had it revealed to him by the Holy Ghost that he should not taste death before he had seen Jehovah's Christ. At a given moment he entered into the temple, where a humble village couple were presenting their offerings in connection with the birth of the Babe under their care. Instantly Simeon took up the Child into his arms, and blessed God, saying, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace . . . for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." To him that wondrous Babe was the salvation of God, and the very sight of Him banished from his spirit all dread of death. Take next the wise men of Matt. 2. After their long journey from the East they at last found themselves in the presence of the newborn Christ. What was He in their eyes? Manifestly He was to them the mighty God, the everlasting Father of Isaiah 9: 6, and the Governor of Micah 5: 2, "whose goings forth have been from of old," for they fell down and worshipped Him, pouring their treasures at His feet. Simeon blessed the parents, but not the Babe; the wise men worshipped the Babe, but not the parents. Both in what they did, and in what they refrained from doing, these pious men of old were guided by the blessed Spirit of God, who knew perfectly what was just and meet for the wondrous Child.

Hearken to Peter in Matt. 16: 16. Others were speculating as to who the Saviour might be, whether Elijah, Jeremiah, or some other (not really caring in the smallest degree); Peter, having learned of the Father, exclaimed with rapture, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Listen also to the once-blind man of John 9, when the Saviour found him in the temple, and said "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" When he learned that it was He who was addressing him, he cried, "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped Him.

What did Mary of Bethany think of Him as she poured her pound of ointment upon His feet? (John 12). To her He was the Son of God, the Quickener of the dead. Others, as in John 13, might need their feet to be washed; His were worthy to be anointed, let the spikenard be never so costly. Her adoring appreciation of Him was most grateful to His heart in an hour of sorrow.

Even at Calvary itself one heart told out its faith in Him. One of the dying thieves, at first as blasphemous as his fellow, afterwards confessed Him as the spotless Lord (Luke 23: 42). In his eyes, as taught of God, the "Sufferer by his side was the stainless One who had done nothing amiss, and for whom the Kingdom must yet be in a day to come. In the face of all the world, as it were, he thus acknowledged Him, and then followed Him, through infinite grace, into the Paradise of God.

We go further. On the Resurrection morning we behold a weeping woman at the tomb of Jesus (John 20). She was dull in her spiritual apprehension, and she utterly failed to understand the import of

what had happened, but she unfeignedly loved her Lord. In her outburst of grief, she said: "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." So much was He to her heart that the world was a desolate waste without Him, One week passes, and we find unbelieving Thomas in the presence of his Master. He had spoken very sceptically concerning His resurrection; but the sight of Him standing in the midst of His own, with the marks of Calvary in His sacred person, drew forth from Thomas the fervent cry, My Lord and my God." To this let us add the confession of the man (Paul, I mean) who heard Him speak from heavenly glory. In Gal. 2: 20 he calls Him "The Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

"What think ye of Christ?" To Herod the king He was just an intruder, to be swept out of the way, if possible; by murder or otherwise. To the religious leaders around him, who were able to tell the king where the Christ should be born, He did not possess sufficient attraction to draw them to Bethlehem to seek Him (Matt. 2: 4). In the eyes of Herod Antipas, at a later date, He was a mere wonder-worker who might perchance entertain him by the performance of a miracle (Luke 23: 8). But "What think ye of Christ" is the question for us all, and every individual amongst us will have to face it sooner or later. To the men of His time the Saviour said: "If ye believe not that I am, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8: 24). And; to Nicodemus He solemnly declared: "He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the Only-begotten Son of God" (John 3: 18). All manner of sin may be forgiven; the vilest offender may be purged from his sins in His precious blood. That which ruins men's souls beyond all recovery is their rejection of the Christ of God.

## **NEW GARMENTS, ETC.**

A fast was in progress in Judea, and both the Pharisees and the disciples of the Baptist were observing zealously. Noticing that those who followed the Saviour bid no heed to it, some challenged Him concerning the matter. After He had shown them in His reply how incongruous it would be for the children of the bride chamber to fast while the Bridegroom was with them, He added a parable, wherein He set forth the new order of things which His coming into the world had introduced for all who believe in His Name. The Son of God had not come forth from His glory in order to patch up those things which man has spoiled by sin.

Accordingly in Luke 5: 36-39 He speaks of three "new" things — new garments, new wine, and new bottles. Concerning garments, men are found in three different conditions Godward. First, there are those who have not a rag upon their back, and who don't pretend to have. These are the careless folk, who make no religious profession whatever, and who never trouble themselves as to how they appear in the eyes of God. You may see this kind in multitudes parading the streets, or disporting themselves upon the golf ground, when the Word of God is being preached. Second, there are those who are possessed of a garment of a sort, but it consists only of filthy rags, could they but see it. These are the people who are going about to establish their own righteousness, never having submitted themselves to the righteousness of God (Rom. 10: 3). Third, there are those who stand before God a righteousness which is divine, unimpeachable before His throne. These are the souls who believe in Jesus the Lord, upon whom divine grace has put "the best robe" of Luke 15.

"No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an" The old garment of human effort is described in Rom. 10: 5 as "the righteousness which is of the law"; the new garment — gift of grace — is called in the verse following "the righteousness which is of faith" Paul, who had proved experimentally the value of both, in Phil. 3: 9 calls the old garment "mine own righteousness, which is of the law"; and the

new, "that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Ever since our first parents sewed fig-leaves together in Eden men have been busily occupied with their own efforts to hide their nakedness from the eyes of God and of every other. Many would reduce Christ to the level of a mere helper, making up by His perfections for their shortcomings and imperfections. Never will God suffer His Son to be put in any such place. He has not given Him from above to be just a patch for the dilapidated Garment of man's righteousness; to everyone to whom the Gospel comes, Christ must be all or nothing. The cross has so perfectly met all the divine claims that God, in absolute consistency with His own righteousness, is able to justify for ever the sinner who believes. Christ risen from amongst the dead, and accepted on high, is the measure and security of our blessing in righteousness before the face of God. With Christ, the best robe, upon me, covered thus with His matchless perfections, my right is unchallengeable to be for ever in the divine presence above.

The Lord Jesus spoke not only of a new garment, but also of "new wine." Wine is the familiar emblem in Scripture of joy. In Ps. 104: 15 we read: "Wine that maketh glad the heart of man." Christ has introduced new joys for His people. Everything "under the sun" has been marred by sin. All around us the hiss of the serpent resounds in our ears. Foolish indeed are they who seek to content themselves with things here. Now, Christ has gone up on high, and has entered into that scene where there is fullness of joy, and where there are pleasures for ever more (Ps. 16:10). To that scene of fadeless delight He would lead the hearts of His own to day. Let us not defer the joys of heaven until the present world is no more; let us rather rise upon the wings of faith ) and live now in the spirit of our minds where we shall find our home throughout eternity. In order that this may be, the exalted Lord has poured out upon us the Holy Spirit from above. He is the living link between our souls here and Christ in His present glory. It is His office to minister His things to us, and to maintain our hearts in perpetual peace and joy. Notice the effect on the day of the Spirit's coming. So full of ecstasy and power were the disciples that some, mocking, said: these men are full of new wine" (Acts 2: 13). They were indeed full of new wine, but it was not the vintage of earth. It was the new wine of heaven.

The Christian who is in real enjoyment of his heavenly portion is a standing riddle to the man of the world. He absolutely refuses the world's sports and lies, and yet is happy. He even finds pleasure in a Payer meeting. How can this be? The observer wonders, but understands not. "New wine must be put into new bottles." This explains everything. Until a man becomes born again, and thus gets a new life from God, he is altogether incapable of understanding and appreciating divine joys. It is a world to which his heart is an absolute stranger. The new man is according to God created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4: 24) . Here we have the new bottle, which alone can contain the new wine of Christianity.

Alas, for the infatuation of the multitude! "No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, "the old is better" That is to say, Christ is presented to the soul, with all the wealth of blessing and joy which is the fruit of His atoning work, and men turn away from Him into the world behind saying, "The old is better." For what the world has to offer to-day men are not unwilling to blast their souls for eternity.

## **THE STRONG MAN ARMED.**

"When the strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; but when the stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils" (Luke 11: 21-22). This parable was uttered under peculiarly solemn circumstances. The Lord had just cast a demon out of a man; His observers, instead of praising God for

the deed of mercy, went so far in their wickedness as to attribute His power to Beelzebub. It was not the ignorant folk who did this, but the religious leaders of the people. The parable was given in order to show the true state of affairs between the Lord Jesus and the great enemy. The strong man is Satan. In all ages he has proved himself too strong for his victims. Take the drunkard. However deeply he may long at times to be free from the awful influence which controls him, he finds within himself no power to shake it off. The opium smoker of the East would tell the same dismal story. Take again the modern Spiritualist. From that diabolical snare some would doubtless extricate themselves, but it is impossible. Satan is far too strong for man.

His palace is this world — "His own palace," as the Revised Version puts it. The world was made for Christ, and it will yet be His; but for the time being, Satan is in possession. The Lord Himself twice spoke of him as the "prince of this world." Many blunder as to this. Even some true Christians imagine that because Christianity has come in, Satan's hold upon the world is not what it was in pagan times. Instead of this being true, the Spirit calls him "the GOD of this age" (2 Cor. 4: 4), i.e., of the present Gospel era. God having come to earth in human flesh and been rejected, Satan has usurped His place in the minds of men.

The strong man's palace is thus the world: "his goods" are the men and women therein. Awful thought! Independence of God was the bait offered in Eden. Unlawfully grasping at this, man became the slave of Satan. Yet how little is this realised!

"His goods are in peace." We all love peace, but a false peace is terrible to contemplate. The cemetery is a peaceful place, but it is the peace of death. Religion is largely responsible for the false peace with which many are afflicted. Religious observances and sacramental privileges apart from faith in Christ, are a terrible snare. All who are resting in these things need to be aroused. Some would rebuke those of us who would sound an alarm. We should consider it our bounden duty to arouse, however roughly, a man sleeping in a burning house; how much more serious is the peril of those who are going religiously down to destruction!

Christ is our only hope. He is the stronger than the strong, and has overcome the enemy. In Ex. 3. we have God coming down to bring temporal deliverance to His people; in Christ He came down to bring eternal salvation. In Isa. 49: 24 we have the inquiry: "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered?" And the answer is given: "Thus saith Jehovah, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered." But how has the deliverance been wrought? How has the victory been obtained? By death. Through death the Saviour annulled him who had the power of death (Heb. 2: 14). Isaiah 53: 12 puts it thus: "Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death." By submitting to death for one brief moment He has broken the power of Satan for ever. Like David with Goliath, He has cut off the enemy's head with his own weapon.

Resurrection manifested His victory. The cross was in appearance His defeat. But on the third day He arose triumphantly, death being powerless to retain Him in its grasp. "Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2: 15). He who once descended into the lower parts of the earth has ascended up far above all heavens, that He may fill all things (Eph. 4: 9, 10).

None need remain in captivity to the strong man. The Deliverer has come and the victory has been gained. When Israel in Egypt felt the bitterness of being treated by Pharaoh as "his goods," they cried by reason of their bondage, and so deliverance came. In like manner today, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10: 13).

# THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

We have here one of the many moral contrasts which are so strikingly characteristic of the Gospel by Luke. Two men are shown to us as standing in the presence of God, with the ground each took before Him. In their respective ways, these men illustrate the two contrasted righteousnesses of which the apostle speaks in Rom. 10: 5-6 - the righteousness which is of the law," and "the righteousness which is of faith." They are the Cain and Abel of the New Testament.

The Pharisee comes before us first. He went up into the temple professedly to pray, yet not a word of true prayer passed his lips. Instead, he paraded his fancied goodness before his Maker, and merely thanked Him that such excellencies were found in him. "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." Thus far he speaks negatively, proclaiming what he was not; next he speaks positively. "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." Surely he was twin-brother to the man who said: "Lo, these many years do I serve Thee, neither transgressed I at any time Thy commandment" (Luke 15: 29). But what a spectacle is here! A man in the presence of the Discerner of all hearts, yet conscious of no sins to confess; addressing the Giver of all good, yet sensible of no need to spread out before Him. Neither the holiness nor the goodness of God seem to have crossed his proud mind. Little wonder that he got nothing; for with God the rich are sent empty away (Luke 1: 53).

Let us seek to understand this man's case, for the lessons of it are meant for us all. He does not appear to have been insincere. Surely if a man is real anywhere he is so in the presence of his God! The Pharisee may indeed have been all that he claimed to be. But a terrible possibility is suggested by this story — a man's religion may be his ruin! Alas, how often is this the case! Religion and morality are frequently used by men to hide from themselves their true condition as fallen children of the first Adam, and personally guilty withal. "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecc. 7: 14). The Pharisee, though standing in God's house, and using His name, had no sense of WHO it was with whom he was having to do; else "Woe is me" would have burst from his terrified lips, as from the lips of Isaiah of old. Self-righteousness bursts like a bubble when once the reality of God's presence lays hold of the soul. Saul of Tarsus experienced the truth of this most solemnly.

The publican (or tax-gatherer) took wholly different ground before God. Whether the Pharisee realised it or not, the publican felt deeply in WHOSE presence he stood. Accordingly he smote upon his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me the sinner." His act was the confession that the heart is the spring of all iniquity, and his words were an acknowledgment that his only hope lay in God. "THE sinner" is what he said, for his whole attention was concentrated upon his own personal condition, without regard to the Pharisee or any other. To this point every man must come, ere God can meet him in blessing. "Be merciful" means "be propitious." The lamb then being burnt upon the altar in the temple court shows how God can be propitious to the guilty. The altar and the sacrifice speak of Christ and His cross. "The redemption that is in Christ Jesus" warrants God in granting pardon and justification to every contrite believing soul. We have it from the Lord Himself that the publican went down to his house justified rather than the other. That is to say, the one was justified, and the other was not. It is a clear case of righteousness being imputed apart from works (Rom. 4: 5-6). In the day of reckoning many a wastrel of earth will be found amongst the saved, while many a religious devotee will be numbered amongst the lost. For the one class feel their need of the Saviour, and bow to Him in faith; while the other class, in the pride of their hearts, pursue their own course of self-justification, in despal of the Saviour's grace.

## THREE MEN OF JERICHO.

The city of Jericho has an unique place in Holy Scripture- And no wonder, for it is a remarkable type of the present world. Men said of it in the days of Elisha: "The situation of this city is pleasant, but the water is bad, and the ground barren" (2 Kings 2: 19). In like manner, there is pleasantness all around us in the world in which we live; but there is nothing to satisfy the heart, and there is no fruit for God.

In connection with Jericho, three names are made specially prominent in Scripture — Zaccheus, Bartimeus, and Hiel. These are representative characters. Every man in the world may be classified under one or other of them. These men may be described thus: — Zaccheus the Pharisee, Bartimeus the beggar, and Hiel the infidel. It may be objected concerning the first that he was not a Pharisee but a tax-gatherer (Luke 19: 1-10). But a man may easily be a Pharisee in spirit without belonging to that ancient sect. Have we not those amongst us to-day who plume themselves upon their own goodness, and who expect God to accept them accordingly?

It was a fine feature in Zaccheus that he had some interest in the Son of God, for many in that day, as in this also, passed Him by with cold contempt. Hearing that the Saviour was approaching Jericho, Zaccheus determined that he would at least get a look at Him. Hence, at whatever cost to his dignity, as one well-known and wealthy, he climbed a sycamore tree by the roadside. His amazement must be imagined when the Lord paused at that very tree, and addressed him by name. He was soon to learn that the Prophet of Galilee was the Searcher of all hearts — God revealed below. As the Lord entered the man's house, critics murmured "that He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." But though outsiders might say this of him, this was by no means Zaccheus' opinion of himself. "He stood and said unto the Lord: 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.'" It was intolerable to his soul that one so benevolent and honourable as himself should be dubbed a sinner! One cannot help contrasting him with the centurion of Luke 7. Others said he was worthy; HE said, when he got into the Lord's presence, "I am not worthy." Here we have what the Parable of the Sower describes as "an honest and good heart."

It is humiliating indeed, but it is nevertheless true, that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Some men owe five hundred pence, and others fifty, but none amongst us have aught wherewith to pay. Godward, we are all bankrupt together. To this point the Saviour sought to reduce Zaccheus. He brushed aside all his self-parade, and at once spoke of salvation. He had not left heaven's glory, and come to earth simply to hear men tell Him how good they were; He had undertaken that mighty journey, which was soon to end at Calvary's tree, in order to bring salvation to the lost. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Thrice happy is the man who is prepared to relinquish all thought of merit, and then take his place as a perishing one at His feet.

Bartimeus was in every way a contrast to Zaccheus. The one was wealthy; the other was a beggar. The one felt he had much to plead; the other was conscious of nothing but the direst need, which he was determined should be met that very day (Luke 18: 35-43). A blind beggar! Yet so pitiable an object is a faithful representation of every man's condition by nature, could men but perceive it! "Nothing to pay": such is the Lord's account of us all, and what is this but beggary? "The god of this age hath blinded the minds of them which believe not," is the Apostle's sad description (2 Cor. 4: 4). The fact that men everywhere are found pursuing that which can only be to their hurt, while seeing absolutely nothing desirable in that which would be to their eternal advantage, should be sufficient proof that moral blindness prevails universally. Bartimeus was needy, and he knew it. Unlike Zaccheus,

he had no self-righteousness to get rid of; his one business was to submit his need to the Son of God at the first opportunity. Never before had the Saviour visited Jericho; and He never passed that way again. A week later He lay dead in the tomb. Hear the beggar making strenuous use of his one chance, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." In vain did men bid him be still; the Saviour was near, and he would reach Him if possible. Oh, that men everywhere would individualise themselves as this poor fellow did! "Have mercy on ME." It is not sufficient to approach the divine presence with the multitude who vaguely call themselves "miserable sinners"; each must face his own personal condition before God ere salvation is possible. To-day, as of old, we may hear the Saviour saying to every seeking soul: "What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?" Life, light, pardon, and salvation are blessings within the reach of all who seek them in His name.

Hiel was a Bethelite, but his name stands for ever associated with Jericho as its re-builder in the days of Ahab (1 Kings 16: 34). When that vile city was destroyed in the days of Joshua, a divine curse was pronounced against any man who would restore it. "He shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it" (Joshua 6: 26). During some five centuries this terrible imprecation had been respected, and Jericho had continued a ruinous heap. Now arises one to whom the fear of God was naught. Jericho shall be rebuilt; why should so pleasant a situation be without human inhabitant? But what of the word of Jehovah? What of the judgement pronounced? At all this the infidel sneered; he believed none of it. But the divine sentence was fulfilled nevertheless. Both his firstborn and his youngest sons were sacrificed upon the altar of his impiety. "He laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, according to the Word of the Lord, which He spake by Joshua the son of Nun." The man whose sons were thus smitten to death is the standing representative of all who set at nought the revealed judgement of God. Never was this more commonly done than in our own day. From both pulpit and pew comes the loud disavowal of all belief in eternal punishment. But men's infidel folly will no more set God's future judgement aside than Hiel's bravado set aside His judgement in the past. "According to the Word of the Lord" it will assuredly be.

Under one or other of these representative characters each one of us must classify himself. Happy is the man who takes the place of Bartimeus, acknowledging his need, and seeking blessing alone at the hands of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

## MOSES OR CHRIST?

The Law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1: 17). Two principles are stated in this passage, as diverse as possible the one from the other; and two men are named who respectively represent them. The principles are law as contrasted with grace and truth; the men who represent them are Moses and Jesus Christ. Long ago it was affirmed that "Moses hath in every city them that preach him" (Acts 15: 21); which means that in every city there are those who insist on the performance of works as the means of blessing. It is also true, blessed be God, that throughout the world Christ is preached as men's only Saviour apart altogether from works of every kind. Every man in Christendom is thus ranged under either Moses or Christ. Said the Pharisees to the man to whom Jesus had given sight: "Thou art His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples" (John 9: 28). This was at least a clear enunciation of the ground upon which the speakers stood.

Let us be sure that we understand the significance of the terms employed in our text. The different terms may be defined thus. "Law" is the declaration of what man ought to be; "grace" is the activity of divine love; and "truth" is the revelation of all things as they really are - God, man, etc.

Nothing is so generally misunderstood as the law. We mean of course the law of God as given from Mount Sinai. Many to this hour regard it as the appointed means of blessing for men, and so they pursue it zealously. But what saith the Scripture? The PURPOSE of the law is to convict. "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3: 20). As a faithful monitor it brings guilt home to the person who submits himself thereto. Its EFFECT is to provoke. "The motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death" (Rom. 7: 5). Flesh being abominably evil, the law by its prohibitions only stirs up its devilry. The very thing the law forbids is the very thing flesh longs to do. "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known covetousness, except the law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet' (Rom. 7: 7). This being its effect on man, the law is called in 1 Cor. 15: 56 "the strength of sin" — a tremendous passage for those who seek either salvation or holiness by means of works. The POWER of the law is to slay. Says Paul in Rom 7: 10, "I found it to be unto death," and in 2 Cor. 3 he calls it "the ministration of condemnation" and "of death." Since man cannot render its righteous demand, the law can but pass its stern sentence upon him.

The law has thus nothing for me as a sinner. It holds blessing before the eyes of those who can respond to it, but upon all others its inexorable sentence falls. Moses avails me nothing, unless to show me my deep need of Christ.

"Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" — two things, and yet one, for neither could subsist without the other. The Saviour was the very embodiment of grace. His every word and deed expressed it. "Never man spake like this Man," declared the officers who were sent to seize Him (John 7: 46). The men of Nazareth wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke 4: 22). Before His coming, the Spirit of prophecy testified: "Grace is poured into Thy lips; therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever" (Ps. 14: 2). He was "full of grace and truth," and the moral glory of it was before the disciples from day to day during the wonderful years of their companionship with Him upon the earth. He came neither demanding nor threatening. Not with the majesty of a King, nor with the terror of a judge, did He walk amongst men, but with all the grace of a Saviour. He who spake at Sychar (John 4) was the same Person who spake amidst flame and smoke at Sinai yet at Sychar He only sought to attract a sinner's heart. Again in Luke 7 we have a guilty one at His feet; receiving, not the stern condemnation of the law-giver, but the Saviour's pardoning grace.

The circumstances under which law and grace were introduced amongst men were in keeping with the character of their respective missions. In the midst of the most terrifying circumstances the law was promulgated. Even Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." Is this suggestive of blessing — of man being brought home to God to enjoy Him for ever? Far from it. But mark how grace came. The manger of Bethlehem and the cross of Calvary have nothing in them to terrify the heart; on the contrary, these wondrous facts appeal to the tenderest affections, and assure us of God's good-will even to the vilest of His creatures.

Truth, as we have said, is the revelation of things as they really are. The law, though true, was not "the truth." It did not tell God out to us; its stern bearing hid, rather than revealed, Him. Nor did it show what man is, but rather what man ought to be. But Christ's coming has brought all out into the light. God is fully declared. He no longer dwells "in thick darkness." His love, mercy, holiness, and righteousness, have all been perfectly expressed in Christ and His cross. Man, too, stands fully declared. I need not go the round of the prisons to learn what man is capable of; the cross tells the story more completely and truly. Infinite love received for its return spittle upon the face, the crown of thorns, and the cross of shame. Nothing more remains to be told as to what man is. Satan also stands fully declared. Liar and deceiver from the beginning, Christ's presence here brought out the murderer in him. Seeing his Creator upon earth in human form, he treasonably united all sorts and conditions of

men in order to compass His rejection and death.

"The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The law cannot help us; no blessing can it bestow upon the guilty and lost. We need grace; shall we not seek it? The truth has come; shall we, as Pilate, turn contemptuously from it? It is the divine desire that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2: 4).

## LORD, TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?

"Peter was the speaker, and the words were spoken at the close of our Lord's discourse in the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6). It was a time of deep disappointment to many in Israel. The Messiah had indeed come, but in a form altogether unexpected. They had looked for a King, and lo, a carpenter's Son! Moreover, he hinted from time to time of His impending death. In the synagogue discourse He had spoken of giving His flesh for the life of the world. What this might mean the many utterly failed to understand, but the words made it sufficiently plain that their cherished visions of earthly glory were not to be realised. And so they were stumbled. "They stumbled at that stumbling-stone," said the Apostle later (Rom. 9: 32). Those who followed the Lord Jesus in a merely carnal way forthwith threw it up. If death really lay before Him, there was nothing in Him to interest them. "There are some of you that believe not," said He. "From that time forth many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him."

Defections test us all. The unreal have frequently insinuated themselves amongst the people of God, only to turn away in due season. Such sifting times make manifest where all hearts really are. At this juncture Jesus said to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Peter, ever the ready spokesman of the band, instantly responded, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and know that Thou art the Holy One of God" (John 6: 67-69, R.V.). It is not that Peter understood the Lord's position much better than the seceders. There was much in His teaching which perplexed him, and which disappointed his own expectations, but he at least recognised the good Shepherd's voice, and so clave to Him through all. He felt that there was no other in the universe of God to whom his heart could rightly turn.

The question has its significance for our souls to-day. "To whom shall we go?" To Moses? Certainly "Moses hath in every city them that preach him" (Acts 15: 21). That is, there are in every quarter those who would put men under the law as the means of their justification before God. But for undone sinners this is of no avail. Corrupt human nature can never render the righteous requirements of the law; upon this principle can no flesh living be justified. For sinners Moses has nothing but curse and condemnation.

"To whom shall we go? "To Mary? Scripture does not so instruct us. We may well imitate her faith, and as lost ones take shelter in God our Saviour (Luke 1: 47). This lesson we may learn with advantage from the mother of our Lord. Nowhere does Scripture speak of mediation and intercession on her part for sinful men. Remarkably, in the sacred records we have Mary but twice seeking favours from the Lord, and in each case He rebuffed her as stepping out of her appointed place. See John 2: 4; Matt. 12: 46-50. Our last view of her is in Acts 1:14 as one of the praying band in Jerusalem who waited for the Holy Spirit after the Lord Jesus went on high. Not praying FOR, but WITH, her fellow-believers in the Saviour.

"To whom shall we go?" Everyone who has ever known Him has been filled and satisfied. David, when he saw His day in anticipative faith, burst forth in the language of holy rapture: "Thou art fairer

than the children of men: grace is poured into Thy lips: therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever" (Ps. 45: 2), Solomon, so despondent when surveying things "under the sun" in the book of Ecclesiastes, expressed himself ecstatically in The Canticles when the promised Christ rose up before his eyes. Paul, whose Christian career began with the sight of the Lord in glory, counted all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus (Phil. 3: 8). For us to-day, as for these men of old, it must be Christ or nothing. Apart from Him all is a dreary waste.

Peter, in his reply to the Saviour's challenge, speaks of what He has (5:68), and of what He is (5: 69) The one meets our need as sinners, and the other for ever satisfies our hearts as saints. "Thou hast the words of eternal life." This is what the Lord had been setting forth in the synagogue in Capernaum. It will suffice to quote verses 53-54: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drinks His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." Let us beware of carnalising our Lord's words by importing a Sacrament into them. The Lord's Supper, so dear to every believing heart, was not instituted when these words were uttered. What then did the Saviour mean? Just this: that such was man's guilty and alienated condition in the sight of God that nothing could avail for his blessing but His death. Himself as the slain One must be appropriated in individual faith. In this way His flesh is eaten and His blood drunk, and the believing soul receives eternal life. The writer of the familiar words, \*' the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2: 20), was eating His flesh and drinking His blood as he adoringly penned the words.

"To whom shall we go?" What is the Christ of God to our hearts? To some of those who followed Him in the days of His flesh He said: "There are some of you that believe not." They wanted Christ and the world. Their hearts were not ready to renounce all for Him. What would He say if he were to come into our midst at this hour? And what would we say to Him? Oh, that with divinely-taught Peter, we could each one exclaim: "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

## "THIS SAME JESUS."

In the present world everything and everyone is liable to change. Everything that we touch has a tendency to decay; nothing really abides the same. Times change, and we shake our heads regretfully. PLACES change. We revisit the scene of our birth after an absence of many years, and lo, the whole district has undergone a complete transformation. The old familiar landmarks have disappeared, to be seen no more. FRIENDS change. Those who delighted in our company once pass us in the street now with averted head, and we feel the smart of it within. We OURSELVES change. The child becomes a youth, the youth develops into a man, and then the gray hairs appear. Change and decay in all around I see."

Our text speaks of One who is ever the same. As touching His deity, He remains when heaven and earth have passed away (Ps. 102: 25-27); and as touching His humanity, He is the same Jesus to-day as when He trod this earth below. He is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever" (Heb. 13: 8). This comes home to us the more sweetly when we consider the circumstances under which the words of our text were spoken. The Son of God had just disappeared from the view of His disciples into the glory on high Their eyes followed Him anxiously until the words of the two men in white apparel reached their ears. The disciples had known the Saviour in circumstances of poverty and shame. Together they had endured reproach and scorn. Now He had left all these humiliations behind Him, and had ascended up to the highest seat in the universe of God. But the angels assured them that He was the same Jesus! What comfort is here! How often among men he who has outstripped his

fellows in wealth and honours coldly drops the companions of his humbler days. So common is this that we appreciatively speak of the exception as "not having a bit of pride.

Since the Saviour abides the same, we may learn what He is to-day from what He was when present amongst us on earth. Mark His grace as He permitted the city sinner of Luke 7. to rain her tears of contrition and love upon His blessed feet. His religious host would have dismissed such a person with disgust, but not He! He was the "Friend of publicans and sinners" See Him again in conversation by the well of Sychar (John 4) with one whose whole life He knew to be evil, but whom nevertheless He did not repel. The divinely appointed Judge of quick and dead setting Himself to win the heart of a gross offender against His laws is a spectacle that should move the most indifferent heart. He is the same Jesus to-day. His attitude towards sinners is still that of grace, and "Whosoever will may come."

Mark, too, His tenderness when confronted with the condition of men as the fruit of sin. At the graveside of Lazarus He wept — tender tears of sympathy with those whose spirits were wounded and torn (John 11: 35). And when He looked down upon proud, scornful Jerusalem which was bent upon refusing His grace, He wept for the people's hardness and impenitence of heart (Luke 19: 41). He is the same Jesus still; the same in His tender sympathy with distressed saints, and in His yearning over perishing sinners. His invitation is still, "Come unto Me"; the solemn words of dismissal, "Depart from Me" have not yet come upon His lips (Matt. 11: 28; Matt. 7: 23).

But the angels predicted His return. "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." A tremendous fact lies before us in these words. The world has not seen the last of the Son of God. A day is approaching when the heavens will be rent asunder, and He will be seen coming forth in majesty and power. Each one of us should challenge our hearts as to this. Would joy or horror possess us if confronted forthwith with the once-crucified Jesus? It is as certain as the sun in the heavens that every created being must yet look upon Him, and every knee must bow to Him, and every tongue own Him Lord. To him who has been cleansed from his sins by His atoning blood the prospect of beholding the Saviour face to face is "joy unspeakable." And when we thus gaze upon Him it will be the same Jesus of whom we have so often read in the Sacred Scriptures, and to whom our hearts have been drawn by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

## **"THE GOSPEL."**

On this occasion I propose to give a rambling talk concerning the Gospel, showing its source and character, and endeavouring to elucidate the meaning of the various titles under which it is presented to us in Holy Scripture. Our English word "Gospel" is simply a contraction of the Anglo-Saxon "God's Spell," which means "God's Story." The Greek word represented by it means "good tidings," and it is sometimes so translated. Luke 2: 10 is an example. How wonderful is "God's Story," and how "good" are the "tidings" contained therein will become manifest as we proceed.

It would be a mistake to suppose that every time the word "Gospel" appears in our English Bible the present divine proclamation is intended. For example, in Gal. 3: 8 we read that "the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham." This does not mean that Abraham was told of the forgiveness of sins through a dead and risen Saviour; his good tidings were to the effect that through his Seed the predicted blessing should come Again, when Heb. 4: 2 tells us that the Gospel was preached unto Israel, it is not meant that the present proclamation of grace sounded in their ears. The good tidings announced to them had reference

to the rest in Canaan at the close of their desert journey.

It would also be a mistake to confound the Gospel with which we are familiar in Christianity with the messages of God to men in other ages. John the Baptist and our Lord and His apostles preached "the Gospel of the Kingdom," announcing the Kingdom of heaven as at hand (Matt. 3: 2, etc.). This has reference to the earthly blessing predicted by the Old Testament prophets, and which is now being held over as the result of the rejection of the Lord Jesus. When Christianity is finished, this testimony will be revived, and the glory of the Kingdom will be established (Matt. 24: 14). "The everlasting Gospel" is also a distinct divine message. It will be proclaimed in the midst of the Antichrist's reign, and its burden is "Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgement is come" (Rev. 14: 7). Manifestly no such solemn pronouncement is being made at the present time.

Coming to the Gospel as we now know it, it is called first of all, "the Gospel of God" (Rom. 1: 1). Here we have the source and the spring of the heavenly message which has brought peace and gladness to myriad hearts. No creature mind could have formulated so wondrous a scheme; neither could fallen man have dared to suggest so audacious a plan as that the Eternal Son should be sacrificed in atonement for human sin and guilt. From the divine heart of mercy the thought flowed forth. There is no room for man in the scheme, save as the humble recipient of the blessing. What God purposed, He has Himself carried out, apart from creature aid of any kind whatsoever. In consequence, the glory of it redounds to Him alone, and that for ever. The Gospel is the full revelation of all that God is; therein is told out all His love, righteousness, holiness, truth and mercy.

In Rom. 1: 9 it is called "the Gospel of His Son," and elsewhere "the Gospel of Christ." This means that if God is the source of the heavenly message, His Son is the theme of it. The Gospel is the proclamation of divine facts — the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Here we have something substantial upon which both conscience and heart can safely rest. He whose utterances are not charged with these great facts should never speak of preaching the Gospel." Mere ethical teaching is not the Gospel, still less is a political harangue, even though delivered from a pulpit. Let the discourse be ever so erudite, let it be the greatest possible "intellectual treat," if Christ is not its burning theme it is a travesty to call it "the Gospel." The deep need of the human heart is not to be met by the wit of men.

In 2 Cor. 4: 4 we read of "the Gospel of the glory of Christ" (R.V.). God's proclamation tells us not only of Christ crucified, but also of Christ glorified. He who bore our sins in His own body on the tree is now sitting as Man on the right hand of the throne above. This is the public proof that the sin question has been eternally settled for all who believe in the Saviour's name. If even one of my sins remained unatoned for, since the Son of God made Himself answerable for them all, He could not be accepted in His present glory. In connection with this, the apostle speaks in 1 Tim. 1: 11 (R.V.) of "the Gospel of the glory of the blessed God." This aspect of things was so characteristic of Paul's ministry that he calls it in 2 Tim 2: 8 "my gospel" He was converted by the revelation of Christ's glory; and he delighted to proclaim the mighty fact, with all its blessed consequences, that the glory of God now shines in the face of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is also called "the Gospel of peace" (Rom. 10: 15). The first grand result of believing the testimony of God concerning His Son is "peace with God" (Rom. 5: 1). This means, not merely a happy frame of mind, but the blessed knowledge that every question between God and the soul has been settled by the death of Christ, and that every cloud has been thereby dispelled from the horizon for ever. Our joy may fluctuate continually, for this depends very much upon ourselves — our conduct, and the measure of our daily trust in God; but peace knows no fluctuation, for it depends, not upon

anything within us, but upon divine facts outside of us, the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. There have been two proclamations of peace on the part of Christ; first, during His life here (Acts 10: 36); and second, after His resurrection (Eph. 2: 17). The first was the announcement of God's attitude towards men, even though rebellious; the second is the declaration of the assured result of Christ's atoning sacrifice for all who believe God.

The Gospel is also "the Gospel of our salvation" (Eph. 1: 13). It not only proclaims to us the forgiveness of past offences — it tells us also how God has lifted us entirely out of the position in which we once stood as children of Adam, and put us into a new position "in Christ" before Him. The deliverance of the Christian is as complete as the deliverance of Israel from the land of Egypt.

But by far the most comprehensive title of all is that found in Acts 20: 24 — "the Gospel of the Grace of God." In God's precious message to men concerning His Son, all His heart is declared Grace beyond the utmost bounds of human imagination is therein proclaimed — grace which picks up the vilest of earth, and fits them for the eternal companionship of the First-born Son in glory. In the coming ages God will display "the exceeding riches of His grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2: 7).

## "ANATHEMA-MARANATHA."

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema-Maranatha." A truly extraordinary passage to find in such a common-place chapter as 1 Cor. 16. It was manifestly the outburst of a flaming soul. Upon the subject in question the writer felt strongly, and accordingly he expressed himself strongly. Christ was everything to him. He was his Saviour, Lord, Object, and Hope — the Centre indeed of his whole spiritual system.

It was not always thus with Paul. He told King Agrippa "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth Which thing I also did," etc. (Acts 26: 9-10). No man ever despised the name of Jesus more intensely than he; no one ever devoted himself so earnestly to the extermination Of all who loved His name. But the transaction outside the gate of Damascus changed everything for Paul From that moment the Son of God became his all-in-all.

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ." Knowledge must precede love. I cannot love a person whom I do not know. A man may know all the facts about Christ, and yet not know Him. Historical faith cannot save. I know WHOM I have believed (2 Tim. 1: 12). To know the Lord Jesus is to trust Him; and to trust Him is to love Him. "Faith worketh by love" (Gal 5: 6) But why should I love Him? What claim has He upon my affections? Has He accomplished anything on my behalf? Oh, let us heed the apostle's glowing words: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1: 15). Is there anything In this that should appeal to the heart? Hear the apostle again: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5: 8). Callous indeed must the heart be that can remain unmelted in the presence of such grace as is herein expressed.

Our text is very sweeping in its denunciation. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema." "If any man." He spares no one. Yet the apostle had met all sorts of people. Persons religious and persons irreligious; persons moral and persons immoral; persons honest and persons dishonest. He makes every thing turn upon Christ. A man may be both moral and religious, yet be lost for ever. John Newton's lines are true enough —

What think you of Christ? is the test

To try both your state and your scheme;  
You cannot be right in the rest  
Unless you think rightly of Him.

He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the Only-Begotten Son of God” (John 3: 18).

"Anathema" means "accursed." The devoted apostle waxed indignant at the thought that anyone could hear of the Lord Jesus Christ and yet not love Him. Contrast with this his meekness under personal injury. Everything of that kind he could bear without one word of angry retort; but let Christ come into the question, let His name be involved, and his whole soul was immediately in a flame.

Let us not misunderstand the apostle's anathema. It is not that he desired the destruction of any. Indeed, he had drunk too deeply into the Spirit of Christ to entertain any such sentiment. Concerning his own rebellious fellow-countrymen his heart's desire and prayer to God for them was that they might be saved. He had even on one occasion wished himself accursed from Christ for them (Rom. 10: 1; 9: 1). He yearned over the souls of men everywhere. The point in 1 Cor. 16: 22 is his holy indignation against men upon whom full Gospel light had shone, and who found no place in their hearts for Christ. How far would this apply to the dwellers in Great Britain?

One cannot but connect his solemn curse here with another in Gal. 1: 8. "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." He had proclaimed the Gospel to the Galatians in its entirety; every pretended development of it on the part of others could be error only. What would this strong-speaking apostle say could he walk up and down in the midst of Christendom at this hour?

"Maranatha" is a compound of two Aramaic words, meaning "the Lord cometh." He thus brings to bear upon men's consciences that great day when everything will be brought to an issue for eternity. The Lord's descent into the air will remove to glory every believing soul; His public manifestation in the clouds of heaven will seal the doom of every foe. The door may soon be shut; the Gospel day may soon be over; happy the man who has found shelter in Christ the Lord. The long-neglected truth of the Lord's coming may well thrill every believing heart, while calculated to strike terror into the bosom of every rejecter of His grace.

## **"HE BECAME POOR."**

Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich. — 2 Cor. 8: 9.

There are three things in this remarkable passage concerning which no creature mind can give us any really adequate account: first, the original riches of our Lord Jesus Christ; second, the depth of poverty to which He condescended; and, third, the wealth of blessing which is now the portion of every believer in His name

"He was rich." There are various ways in which riches may be measured. Many would estimate them by material possessions. Take an illustration. You and I are out walking together, and presently we notice a mansion standing in the midst of its grounds, and you tell me that such an one is the owner of it. I reply, "He must be a rich man." "Oh, but," you say, "that is not all he possesses. He has other estates dotted about in England, Scotland, etc." I remark, "He must be rich indeed!" But what are any

man's material possessions compared with all that belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ? Col. 1: 16 tells us, "by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him." Who can tell us all that such a verse means? Men are finding out that they do not yet know all that may be known of the "visible" what then of the "invisible"? As the Creator and Sustainer of all, everything belongs to Christ. Not every man, however, would estimate riches by material possessions; with some, moral surroundings would count far more. A millionaire in a loveless, selfish home might conceivably feel poor indeed if he were to look into the cottage of a labourer, and see love and happiness reigning there, and his heart would tell him that the poor man has the better portion. But what was the moral atmosphere in which the Son of God moved ere this world knew Him? Who can describe the brightness and blessedness of that heavenly scene where love eternal reigns? And that scene was His everlasting home.

But, "though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." Here we need to tread very cautiously. Of what did He impoverish Himself when He came into this world? Certainly not of His deity. During His sojourn here, "all the fullness in Him was pleased to dwell" (Col. 1: 19). Not a single divine attribute did He abdicate in becoming human. Omnipotence displayed itself in His command of winds and waves, and also in His supremacy over death. Omniscience was manifested in His perfect ability to read the thoughts and hearts of men. Neither, in becoming poor, did He leave "the bosom of the Father," as some have said. This is not a geographical, but a moral, expression (John 1: 18), and it shows the unique place which He had in the Father's love. This He never for one moment left, neither did He forfeit it. Yet "He became poor." Let us content ourselves with noticing the actual circumstances of His pathway here. He was born in a stable, and cradled in a manger. The condescension would have been amazing had He consented to be born in the palace of the Caesars, but what shall we say of Bethlehem and the manger? Who amongst us has known such circumstances as these? Observe Him also in Matt. 17 in the matter of the tribute money. Though but a coin was required to cover both Peter and Himself, the fish of the sea had to furnish the sum. He had it not. During His progress through the land there was no demand for Him in the mansions of the rich and noble. "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head" (Luke 9: 58). But what were all the painful experiences of His pathway when compared with the cross of Calvary?

Friendless and robeless in the hour of His supreme grief! And when all was over, He had but a tomb that was lent by another. God would not suffer His beloved Son to be buried with the thieves. Isa. 53: 9, rightly rendered, beautifully expresses this: "His grave was appointed with the wicked, but He was with the rich in His death, because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth." Accordingly, Joseph of Arimathea came along, and craved the honour of burying the body of Jesus in his own new tomb. One thing that impressed me greatly in America was the sumptuous tombs of certain millionaires. They would be more suitably called temples. Their own wealth supplied these; but the Son of God was laid in the lent tomb of another. "For your sakes" was all this. Have we, one and all, been at His feet in humble acknowledgment of His matchless grace? Can each individual amongst us say, "the Son of God loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2: 20)?

"He became poor," says the apostle, "that ye through His poverty might be rich." Who is there, throughout the length and breadth of the Church of God, who can adequately declare the wealth of blessing which Christ has secured for all who believe in His name? The first of blessings is the forgiveness of sins. How do we regard that? When the four men of Luke 5. brought the palsied man to the Saviour their hope was that He would heal his body. Yet His first word was, "man, thy sins are

forgiven thee." A sound body is much to be preferred to a fortune; but even a sound body will not compare with the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness is, however, only the initial blessing of Christianity. It is the first expression of a grace which knows no limit. Hence the apostle speaks of forgiveness "according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1: 7) In the same chapter we get the magnificent statement, "He hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Moreover, "in the ages to come He will show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2: 7). What a spectacle will the bloodwashed host present to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places! An innumerable multitude of the base and despised of earth brought into eternal association with the Son of God, accepted in His acceptance, and loved as He is loved.

Beyond all the blessings which He bestows, there is the knowledge of Himself Well may we sing:

—  
Were the vast world our own  
With all its varied store,  
And Thou, Lord Jesus, wert unknown  
We still were poor.

Happy are the people to whom it may be truly said: "YE KNOW the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

## **THE VICTORY OF CHRIST.**

There is something exhilarating in the thought of victory. Take a lesson from the battle-field. Two armies have met in conflict, and both are now going their several ways. The one host is dispirited and panic-stricken, cursing perhaps, the commander who has led them to defeat and shame; the other host is exultant in triumph and filled with cheer. The troops acclaim their leader, and are proud of their association with him. It makes all the difference to men's feelings whether they are on the side of victory or on the side of defeat.

Now on which side are we — we who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? Without hesitation we reply, on the side of victory. Let us now, in a brief way, go over what Christ has wrought.

First, observe the point from which He started forth. That point was God-head glory. The opening verse of John's Gospel in three terse sentences proclaims the eternity of His being, the distinctness of His personality, and His true divine nature. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." When present on earth He could say to the Father in the hearing of His disciples, "Glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17: 5). Every Christian loves to seize every opportunity to confess the true deity of the Lord Jesus.

Next, observe the point to which He went down. Our text tells us "He descended into the lower parts of the earth." That means the grave. But what were the steps which led Him into such depths? Go with me to the manger of Bethlehem, and whom have we there? It is the Son of God, Maker of heaven and earth, Judge of quick and dead. What brought Him down from the glory that was proper to Deity to such circumstances of humiliation and shame? It was our salvation. Follow Him another step — to the cross of Calvary. We see His lifeless body taken down from the tree and laid away in Joseph's tomb. What is the meaning of such a spectacle, which might well fill the angelic host with amazement? The

meaning is this: if He would deliver poor sinful man, lying under the doom of death and the power of Satan, He must enter and break the very citadel of the foe. What apparent triumph for Satan when he had his Maker and Lord sealed up in a tomb! But 'He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.'" Of what avail were all the devices of the creature? When the third day came the Saviour arose; and the stone rolled away, with the angel sitting as if in contempt upon it, testified to the reality of His glorious victory.

Now observe the point to which He has gone up. "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things." He has gone up as Man to the highest seat, and the whole universe is destined to be flooded with His glory. Such is the purpose of God concerning the Son of His love. What a magnificent sweep we have here! From the degradation of death and the grave to the right hand of God, far above all heavens. What delight for all who believe; but what confusion for the foe! This is the Christ in whom we have put our trust. Can we not therefore sing with exultation, "the victory is ours"? In His triumph we read our own.

Let us consider some of the results of Christ's great victory. First, our sins have been completely put away. In this connection Heb. 10 attaches the deepest significance to the present seat of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God. The very fact that He is there is the public proof that the sin-question, as far as His believing people are concerned, has been settled for ever. Seeing that He made Himself answerable for all our sins and iniquities at the cross of Calvary, He could not now be in heaven's glory had not every one of them been perfectly expiated. But not only have our sins been put away, but the power of death has for us been broken. Christ's empty tomb attests this. To John in Patmos He could reveal Himself as the living One, dead once, but alive for evermore, and having the keys of death and of Hades (Rev. 1: 18, RV.). Prior to the consummation of Christ's great victory even pious souls dreaded death. Job called it "the King of terrors"; and Hezekiah, when told to put his house in order because he was to die, and not live, turned his face to the wall and wept sore. But the language of Job and the conduct of Hezekiah would be alike unsuitable for the believer to-day. Heb. 2: 14 tells us the Saviour took part in flesh and blood "that through death He might destroy (or annul) him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." He has acquired the right to take His own into heaven's glory without passing through death at all, and this right he will exercise in the moment of His coming again (1 Thess. 4: 16-17). As the Resurrection He will raise every sleeping believer; and as the Life He will transform every living one (John 11: 25-26). If meanwhile He suffers any of His own to fall asleep, death is but the caretaker of the body until He wants it; and the happy spirit, freed from all earthly care, is at rest in the peace and delight of His heavenly presence. Truly "the victory is ours!" Whatever the circumstances of the moment, however painful the experiences through which we may be called to pass, however suggestive of defeat these may be, we are yet on the side of triumph, and this the exalted Lord will make manifest in His day.

## **ONE GOD AND ONE MEDIATOR.**

The great truth stamped upon the opening verses of 1 Tim. 2 is that God is every man's sincere well-wisher. He desires all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth. It is a lie of Satan that some persons come into the world marked out beforehand for eternal ruin. If this were true, every Gospel overture in Holy Scripture would be but a mockery and a sham. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33: 11).

Christians are responsible to take their character from God Himself. This is why the apostle urges that prayer be made for all men, and for rulers in particular. If God wishes well to all, Christians must seek the blessing of all in like manner. In this connection, two weighty truths are affirmed. "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, a man, Christ Jesus." It is humiliating indeed that God should need to insist upon the reality and the uniqueness of His being with the creatures of His own hand. But ever since the deluge men have been guilty of devising gods of their own, to their folly and ruin. The nation of Israel was called out into a position of separation from all others to bear testimony to the unity of the God head. In Deut. 6: 4 we have Moses saying to them: "Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah." But Israel miserably failed as a witness for God, copying the ways of the Gentiles, and becoming as idolatrous as they. This has resulted in the severest discipline for that unfaithful people.

The unity of the God-head was thus the distinguishing testimony of the Mosaic age; to this is added, now that Christ has come, the unity of the Mediator. It is not enough for sinful men to know that there is one God; the heart yearns to understand how that God may be reached and known. Job in his distress said: "He is not a man, as I am, that I should answer Him, and we should come together in judgement. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9: 32, 33). Realising that man cannot bridge the gulf that sin has made between himself and God, Job felt the need of a mediator. Christ alone meets this need. From God-head glory He stooped to manhood in His ineffable grace. This enables Him to "lay His hand upon us both." But His incarnation could not of itself remove one single sin. "The extension of the benefits of Christ's incarnation," of which men of the Ritualistic sort speak so sagely, is nothing but meaningless jargon. Remission is impossible apart from blood. Accordingly the apostle adds: "Who gave Himself a ransom for all." The manger was a necessary step to the cross, where the foundation of all blessing for the guilty children of men was by Him well and securely laid. He is now risen and exalted. "Christ Jesus" is His resurrection title. His resurrection is the public proof before all the universe that every claim of the throne of God has been met by His atoning sacrifice. When Moses, the mediator of the old covenant, went up to God after the affair of the golden calf, he said to the people: is You have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto Jehovah; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32: 30). No such language of uncertainty could rest for one moment upon the lips of the Lord Jesus. The cross of Calvary admits of no "peradventure." In this world He made atonement, full, ample and perfect; and then, in the power of it, He went up to God on behalf of all His people.

The Mediator is one. No other dare we profanely put alongside Him, be it Mary, saints, or apostles. This would be to His public dishonour, and to the injury of our own souls. Christendom has been as grossly unfaithful in relation to the truth of the unity of the Mediator as ever Israel was in relation to the truth of the unity of the God-head. This sin God will not fail to judge when His present long-suffering is exhausted. Meanwhile, Christ may be universally proclaimed. He is Mediator, not between God and Israel, as Moses in the past, but between God and men. He gave Himself a ransom, not for a single nation, but for all. For this reason, Paul the apostle, once the most conservative of Jews, loved to describe himself "a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth."