

## Gospel Words — Fifth Series.

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A Series of 4pp. Gospel Tracts by W.K. for distribution after preaching.

### 1 The Sower

Matt. 13.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 323-324. Gospel No. 5: 1.)

In the preceding chapter the Lord had pronounced solemnly on the Jews. They had spoken against the Son of man, and there was forgiveness for it; but they were hurrying into that blasphemy against the Spirit which admits of no forgiveness. No sign should be given but that of Jonah the prophet — the death and resurrection of the Son of man. That evil generation must have its last state worse than the first. And thereon the Lord formally disowns His relationship natural, stretching His hand toward His disciples and saying, "Behold, my mother and my brethren!" — only such as do the will of His Father that is in heaven.

Accordingly in the first parable of Matt. 13 the Lord addresses the multitudes which from the beach heard Him in the boat, and presents Himself as a sower. "Behold, the sower went forth to sow and as he sowed, some [seed] fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured them. And others fell upon the rocky places, where they had not much earth; and straightway they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was risen, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away. And others fell upon the thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked them. And others fell upon the good ground, and yielded fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He that hath ears, let him hear" (vers. 3-9),

The Lord could not, did not, forego the rights of God, as later He made known in the parable of the Householder, and of Himself, the Son and Heir sent to receive the fruits (Matt. 21: 33-41). But, well knowing the sad issue, He was come for the deeper purposes of grace, whatever be man's evil and rebellion. He is "the sower" who "went forth to sow." He begins a new work on God's part, though man

cannot escape the responsibility of receiving and rejecting the seed sown, "the word of the kingdom."

Alas! man is indisposed, sinful man, to receive the word that grace sends through Emmanuel, God's Son yet Man in the humiliation of love. And we have light unequalled given by His words; for "never man spake like this Man," His enemies themselves being witnesses. He explains the various cases of human unbelief with a simplicity and depth all His own.

The wayside hearers are those who receive nothing from God. The wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in the heart. Unless the conscience is reached and sin is judged before God, there is no quickening. The man that only hears abides in unremoved death; he is not born anew; he cannot see or enter the kingdom. The seed, instead of taking root, is devoured by the birds, that is, the enemy.

In the second case appearances were better. The seed fell in stony places and forthwith sprang up, where there was little earth. It was but a work in man's nature. And as hasty feeling received the word and it had no root, so when trouble or persecution arose because of the word, they as quickly shirked suffering. When the sun was risen, they were scorched, and withered away. A divine work is laid in the conscience, and life abides. Here all was superficial and evanescent.

The third case looks at first rather more promising, the seed that fell among thorns. But the thorns grew up to their ruin. Here the bad result was slower; for though the word was heard, the anxiety of this age and the deceitfulness of riches choked the word, so that fruit could not be.

It is remarkable that in these instances the word is not "understood." For there is no true spiritual understanding of the word without the work of God, without life; or, as the third Gospel puts it, without believing and being saved. How is it with you, dear reader? Have you so learnt and judged yourself that you listen to Him assured there is only death within? Are you no less sure that life for you or any is solely in Christ? that it is in no institution, still less in the church? Do you know by faith that life is in Christ for every soul that believes in Him? So God declares in His word. This fallen man resists and resents. His confidence is in his own powers, or in something or some one like himself, not God's grace; for, having an evil conscience, he distrusts God.

Christ came on an errand of infinite love from God. In Him man if he had not been blind would have seen what he should have been toward God, and what God is toward man. Christ was the wholly dependent and the unfailingly obedient man; but God was also in Him reconciling the world to Himself, the perfect expression of divine love to the guilty and miserable. But man would have neither: his unrighteousness hated true righteousness; and his enmity to God hated the love that came to save and bless him. As He said Himself, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other hath done, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But [it is] that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause" (John 15: 22-25).

As this is absolutely true, so is man evidently lost. But God declares the truth that He may repent and believe the gospel. It is by the word of truth that we are begotten of God. And this shows itself from the first in our receiving the word, which reveals how evil we are before God, and how good He is to us in giving His own Son to die for the ungodly. Thus it is God commends His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. Such is God's righteousness for the unjust, God's salvation for the lost, as He makes known in the gospel to every one that believes.

So here the beginning of our goodness is in the real owning of our badness, and yet believing God's grace to us in Christ. Here, when the seed is received, it is "into the good ground." The souls hear and understand and bear fruit, one a hundredfold, one sixty, one thirty. For among believers there are differences. When the eye is single, all is bright and blessed; but flesh and the world hinder, so far as they are allowed; and all therefore do not bear fully.

## 2 The Darnel of the field

Matt. 13: 24-30.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 339-340. Gospel No. 5-2.)

For the due understanding of this parable, observe that it is the first in which the kingdom of the heavens is likened to this or that. The opening parable of the seven contained in the chapter is of such a comparison; it presents the Lord as Sower before that kingdom was set up. The other six suppose its establishment; not in manifested power and glory according to O. and N.T. prophecy, but in mystery, as here made known by our Lord, rejected by men and exalted by God on high, unseen but none the less real and glorious, affording scope for faith no less than unbelief as being a day of profession. It is Christ's ascension which gives occasion to the kingdom of the heavens here revealed to faith and assuming a character of grace in keeping with His rejection.

We have the Lord's own interpretation that "He that soweth the good seed is the, Son of man" (ver. 36). This it was of moment to explain; because His heavenly position might, have seemed incompatible with such activity of grace. There ought to be no doubt that He was the sower before He took His seat on high as in the first parable. Whatever the means or instruments employed, He it is that is still sowing good seed in His field. And as He says, "The field is the world." As He is the rejected but glorified Son of man, it is no longer the land of Israel, but the world. The needy, the guilty, the ruined world is precisely the object of His gracious care. Among the lost sheep of the house of Israel He had laboured in the flesh, and in vain (Isa. 49) for the mass, who refused and hounded Him to the cross. Now from the right hand of power He sowed the good seed in His field, the world. Nothing less was suited to His glorious plans, any more than His love. Undoubtedly He will another day bring Jacob again to Him in sovereign mercy; but meanwhile He is given for a light to the Gentiles, and salvation to the end of the earth. "The field is the world."

O my readers, hear His voice, that you receiving His word, now sent to any and to all, may be sons of the kingdom. Even before the kingdom of the heavens was set up, our Lord said (ver. 9), "He that hath ears, let him hear." So He says still at the end of His interpretation of this first likeness of the kingdom (ver. 43). It is not the law laid down to an ordered people on penalty of death. It is the word, wherever received in faith, to produce fruit. The great principle the Lord introduced when here is individual responsibility. This He reiterates from on high. The kingdom when set up in no way enfeebles it, as we thus learn. And though the church, as we know from elsewhere, brought in communion of saints, common subjection, and common action, yet never does God sanction the giving up of individual responsibility. The presence of the Spirit gives power to the word for conscience and heart to conciliate what self-will under Satan ever seeks to dislocate.

Christ is life, and righteousness, and salvation. If you believe on Him, these are yours in Him; and they are found not otherwise nor elsewhere. Man cannot quicken, nor a minister, nor yet the church. Christ is all: so scripture testifies; and if you receive Him on God's word, this is the work of the Holy Spirit, Who glorifies Him. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are admirable and abiding institutions; but

they are perverted to poison when put in the place of Christ and of faith in Him. Hence it is the word for individual reception. If you reject Christ and receive not His saying, you cannot escape One that judges you: the word the Lord Jesus spoke, that shall judge at the last day. Oh! neglect not so great salvation, nor His authority.

And the danger is the greater, because Christ's enemy, while men slept, came and sowed darnel also among the wheat. Indistinguishable at first, they became manifestly different ere long. For the darnel are the sons of wicked ones. They are found all over the field, the world of Christian profession. Such is Christendom, to speak of nothing worse, and there were soon greater abominations from early days too. But these are bad enough and prepare for every evil from beneath. The darnel are the heterodox and the lawless among the baptised.

Yet this does not make the field to be the church but the world, save in their eyes who understand neither, and are so deceived as to confound them. Hence we may see that, when the Lord forbade His servants from uprooting the darnel, He in no way denies in the church the discipline which the Holy Spirit demands (1 Cor. 5). It is the extermination of the wicked professors He prohibits under His figure of gathering up the darnel from the field. And experience falls in with this. Disobedient servants of His have rooted out the good seed, oh! how often, under the plea of getting rid of the darnel. Grace is to reign now. "Let both grow together until the harvest," saith the Lord Who will then send forth the executors of judgment.

The season for harvest will be a marked change: a different work with different workmen. The reapers are quite another class, His angels, whose business is to gather up first the darnel, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but the wheat are gathered into Christ's barn above. It is a vain dream that the world is to improve under the action of the gospel or the church. On the contrary the normal state of the wheat-field was spoiled as a fact from early days; and the servants are forbidden to employ their ineffectual efforts to efface the evil, which must go on till the consummation of the age. Then shall the Son of man intervene with His angels. Revival or reformation can in no way abolish the mischief the devil wrought while men slept, as they quickly did. God secures His own work by grace all through: the good will surely be gathered into the heavenly granary in due time. But the field was soon spoiled through man's lack of care and Satan's craft; and this cannot be adequately dealt with till the Lord come in judgment of the quick.

Look and listen then to Him now. Receive Him at God's word to life eternal. He is the way, the truth, and the life; and there is no other; that you who live may henceforth live not to yourselves but to Him Who for you died and was raised. Thus may you await His coming not only in peace but with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

### **3 The Mustard seed.**

Matt. 13: 31, 32.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 355-356. Gospel No. 5: 3.)

It is well to understand that "the kingdom of the heavens" does not mean heaven itself but its reign over the earth while the King rejected by man is seated on high. The six later parables present successive comparisons of that kingdom in its chief characteristics: three are its public aspect, and so, like the first, were addressed without to the great multitudes; the three last, like the explanation of the first similitude, or Parable of the Darnel, were spoken in the house only to the disciples, as dealing with what needed spiritual intelligence.

Another distinction is obvious. The Parable of the Mustard Seed, like that of the Leaven, shows what the kingdom is like, in marked difference from its predecessor, as it becomes more apparent still in its successor.

"The kingdom of the heavens is like a grain of mustard which a man took and sowed in his field; which is less than all the seeds, but, when it hath grown, is greater than the herbs, and becometh a tree so that the birds of heaven come and roost in its branches" (vers. 31, 32).

Here the Lord gives us to see the least and lowliest beginning of Christian profession growing to be a power in the earth. In Luke 17: 6, He employs the same figure of a grain of mustard; as indeed it was a proverbial expression for what is diminutive. But the grain soon shot up so as to leave the pot-herbs behind, and afford shelter to the birds it notoriously attracts.

So it was to be, so it has long been, with that which bears His name here below. The Lord marks beforehand the surprising contrast between the extreme littleness of its first estate when sown, and the height to which it was ere long to advance. He is not here pronouncing on its inner or moral nature. He shows from the first what all the world can see when it came to pass. It is one of "the mysteries (or secrets) of the kingdom of the heavens," but secrets given for the disciples to know. And the Lord here sets out the fact, in due time palpable to all mankind, that what began the most minute was to develop into a conspicuous and protective power on the earth, according to the well known figure of a nation or political system in Isa. 11: 33, 34; Ezek. 31; Daniel 4, etc.

Now this was no mystery for Israel any more than for the Gentile powers. It was expressly allotted to the ancient people of God, as we read in the Psalms and the Prophets. So in the days of depression when captivity befell "the rebellious house," God made use of a tree to illustrate His ways with them, and their ways before Him which drew out His sternest chastening. But He adopted the same figure to assure the believing heart that in His mercy all will be reversed in the day to come, and that He will plant the tender twig on a mountain high and eminent, even the height of Israel. "And it shall bring forth boughs and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar; and under it shall dwell all birds of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I Jehovah have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I Jehovah have spoken and will do it" (Ezek. 17). It is all of His mercy; but how could the result in this case be otherwise? For Jehovah of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem and before His ancients gloriously.

Wholly different was to be the proper portion of the Christian on earth. "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth . . . Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens. Blessed are ye when they shall reproach you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you" (Matt. 5: 3-12). Even those whom God set first in the church were expressly charged by our Lord against power and glory of an earthly sort. "Ye know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Not so shall it be among; you. But whosoever would become great among you shall be your servant; and whosoever would be first among you, let him be your slave: even as the Son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20: 25-28).

Thus the Lord lets us know in this parable that, in the face of His revealed will, Christendom would soon manifest a portentous change, and from its primitively low estate vie with the powers of the

world in earthly grandeur and influence. We are called now to walk apart from the world, its power and its glitter, content to be hated as our Master was (John 15), cherishing also the secret of God's grace and the relationships it gives us, and suffering with Christ meanwhile. "But if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him" (Rom. 8). "Faithful is the saying: for if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2: 11, 12). Now is the time for us to have tribulation in the world, till He come to take us to the Father's house, and we be manifested also with Him in glory when He is manifested. The day of glory with Christ will make ample amends.

But how is it with you, dear reader? Is Christ the object of your faith? If so, it is well indeed with you now and evermore. If He is nothing to you beyond any other whom men discuss, notwithstanding God's testimony to Him, it were better for you that you had not been born. Refusing God's light and love in Him Who went down below all depths for sinners, you cannot escape the judgment which He will execute on all the impenitent and unbelieving, that despise Him and the saving grace of God in Him. Before that everlasting judgment there shall be a day of Jehovah of hosts upon all that is proud and mighty, and upon all that is lifted up; and it shall be brought low. Jehovah alone shall be exalted in that day. Meanwhile God commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent. Oh, that His goodness may lead you to repentance! The time is short: delay not. Your sins are many and great. The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from every sin: nothing else can.

## 4 The Leaven

Matt. 13: 33.

(B.T. Vol. 20, p. 373-374. Gospel No. 5: 4.)

The Lord Jesus here pronounces the fourth parable of the seven, the third likeness of the kingdom in these mysteries.

"Another parable spake he unto them. The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was wholly leavened" (ver. 33).

Individuals are not the question here any more than in the two that precede, especially in that of the mustard seed which is most akin as the structure marks. Individuals had their place in the opening parable, and, hearing, were born again, and were each fruit produced by the seed. If received into good ground, there was life and fruit; if not, the word of the kingdom had no vital effect. But in the parables that follow before the multitude, we have successive states which characterise the kingdom while Christ is hidden on high. The first is the ruin of the harvest here below by the mixture, while men slept, of darnel with the wheat; which mixture must be left for the returning King to deal with at the end of the age. The second is the portentous rise of what was planted an exceeding small thing; but it grew into an earthly power of attractive pretensions. Neither of these clearly has to do with the individual, but, as it suits "the kingdom," with the state of things, and each in its due sequence.

What then signifies "the leaven"? Does the bearing of it revert to the opening parable and its appeal to individuals? Does it not rather continue the line of the comparisons of the kingdom? Surely the latter only, setting forth the assimilating effect of a doctrine, or creed, over a certain measured sphere till it was wholly permeated. This very distinctly differs from seed with a principle of life that bears fruit, a suited and frequent figure in scripture. Never is leaven so employed elsewhere. From earliest days it symbolised a corruption that tended to work and spread, as in the Passover, authoritatively applied in 1 Cor. 5 to evil which must be purged out, By our Lord it was used to set forth the teaching of Pharisees

and Sadduces, of which the disciples were to beware. Compare Gal. 5: 9 for doctrine, as 1 Cor. 5 for immorality.

In no case then does scripture warrant leaven as a figure of quickening, in no case identify it with the washing of regeneration, and renewal of the Holy Spirit which God shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Living water is as different as can be from leavening; which, being a process of fermentation, causes dough to rise and makes it pleasanter to the natural taste. If Christ be in Levitical language the unleavened bread the redeemed eat, leaven has its appropriate use in the two wave-loaves which represent the Pentecostal first fruits; for the regenerate have still evil in their nature. Hence the sin offering which always accompanied the wave-loaves; whereas for the wavesheaf, figuring Christ risen, as there was no leaven of course, so no sin offering could be thought of. The same principle explains the leavened bread alone with the sacrifice of peace offerings for thanksgiving. Where fallen nature enters, so does leaven; whatever the promises of grace, God takes account of it. But quickening is the direct energy of Christ, Who is life acting by the word of faith.

Hence, the best, that can scripturally be said of leaven is of doctrine working among men, as here in three measures of meal till it was wholly leavened. The kingdom was not only from the humblest beginning to become a towering power on the earth, like any worldly state, with its elevation coveted by those that found shelter there. It was also to penetrate men's minds within a definite sphere, forming and fashioning them according to the teaching presented. What the spiritual character of that doctrine might be is hardly within the scope of what is said before the crowds. And we know that what spread over a large part of the shattered Roman empire and beyond, after the Christian profession rose up to worldly power and influence, was a mere creed, and by no means God's gospel for faith obedience: an idolising of the sacraments and of the crucifix, and a setting up, if not of gods, yet of mediators to the dishonour of the One; not the word of the cross as His power to those that are saved. It was no longer God choosing the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, or the weak to shame the strong, but the wise, mighty, and noble choosing the symbol of Christendom as the object of visible homage, and even the means of advantage or ambition. Such was the work of the "woman." The Lord had long been in the back ground.

My reader, see that you be not deceived nor deceive yourself. The unseen enemy has boundless and subtle wiles; and you are exposed, but ought not to be ignorant of his devices. Christ only can avail your soul for salvation. And He is as acceptable, as He is unfailing, Other foundation can none lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. It is not when we become strong or godly; but just as we are that He saves and to the uttermost: while we were yet weak, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. Only hearken to God's call. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

## **5 The Treasure hidden in the field**

Matt. 13: 14.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 7-8. Gospel No. 5-5.)

Here the importance of the Lord's speaking to the disciples in the house is manifest. He began with explaining the parable of the Darnel of the field. They are not exterior facts of the kingdom like those said without to the crowds, but spiritual views for His followers only. If those spoken openly have been misinterpreted through the natural mind, the later are yet more exposed to it.

"Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid, and for the joy of it goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth the field" (Matt. 13: 44).

The gospel or the soul's salvation is by no means what this parable or the next presents, though often so interpreted. In reality, one can hardly conceive any thing more opposite. For the gospel is the revelation of God's grace in Christ; salvation is a free gift, like eternal life. It is in no way true that the man, who has it brought before him, sells all that he has to purchase that treasure; still less does he buy the field, which is certainly something else very different, to acquire the salvation of his soul.

Never since the world began has any soul been led by the Spirit to sell all that he had to buy life or pardon, salvation or glory. And if any have sought in this fashion to be delivered from evil or to gain God's favour, we may be sure that their suit was rejected; for it is an ignoring of guilt and ruin, a frustrating of God's grace, and a making void in effect Christ's death. On the other hand it is allowed fully that, in those that are Christ's and have Him as their portion, there may be and there ought to be a like devotedness to any extent in our measure. But this is a very different thing, and not what the parable teaches.

It is overlooked that the soul's need and blessing we have had already in the opening parable of the Sower, as it is indeed a personal question, antecedent to the mysteries of the kingdom, and carefully presented as distinct, before any likeness of the kingdom begins. Those likenesses bring out larger considerations, whether outside or within. And the Lord is the "man" here, as nobody can doubt in His field of wheat spoilt by the darnel (ver. 24).

Thus read, all flows without jar and in accordance with all truth. It is the Son of God incarnate Who is compared to one who found and hid the treasure in the field. And, in this aspect, "the field" retains its significance as "the world," instead of being twisted into "the scriptures," or "the letter" or "the Christian profession"; it is "the world" where Christ found His own, who constitute His "treasure." The meaning is then not only enforced by but agreeable to the rest of God's word. And the Lord's consequent action is no less in harmony. For what can be more certain than that He emptied Himself to become man, and, when found in that fashion, humbled Himself and became obedient unto death—even death of the cross? Nay, we may press the analogy closer still from the known facts of the case. He was as Messiah heir of David's throne, but gave up all in His death, which purchased the world and redeemed His own who were in it. Even His enemies, who blaspheme and deny Him Who bought them (2 Peter 2: 1), are His purchase. But His own have also in Him redemption through His blood. So plain is it that purchase and redemption are not the same, nor equally extensive. For clearly the purchase is not of the treasure only but of the field (or world) wherein the treasure was hid. Redemption is not thus universal but belongs only to those that believe, as all scripture teaches and this parable illustrates. Christ has paid (to say the least) the full price, to reconcile "all things, whether the things on earth or the things in the heavens" (Col. 1: 20); and the day is near, when God will head up the universe in Him (Eph 1: 10), the Heir of all things, at His coming. Christ bought the world, but His joy is in the "treasure" which is to be with Him and like Him in that day.

How then do you stand as to Him? To be bought, as is the field of the world, is only the more terrible if you deny Him. And all that call not on Him, all that neglect so great salvation, do deny Him, though they may not break into heresies of perdition. You are summoned by God in His word to believe on Him. So believing you shall have mercy: for it is written that whosoever does believe on Him shall not be ashamed. All who reject Him, high or low, poor or rich, must bear their doom to endless shame and woe, Oh, why sin against God and His Christ and your own soul? Why regard lying vanities, whatever they may be, and forsake your own mercy?

Christ, the world-rejected Lamb, is worthy, and He has brought to your door redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Is not this your deep need whoever and whatever you are? In none

other is remission; in Him it is as perfect as Himself. Oh, delay not, nor turn away. It is yielding to His enemy and yours, to the liar and murderer from the beginning. Consider too how your unbelief insults God in all the ways of His grace. "As though God did beseech through us, we pray (says the apostle) on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5: 20). Unbelief directly dishonours the Father Who sent, and the Son Who in love deigned to be sent. And the Holy Spirit is sent down since Christ's ascension to testify of His Person and work and glory. Oh! beware of doing despite to the Spirit of grace. For we know Him that said, Vengeance belongeth to Me: I will recompense.

## 6 One Pearl of great price

Matt. 13: 45, 46.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 23-24. Gospel No. 5-6.)

As the leaven followed suitably the mustard seed in the parables spoken without, so does the pearl duly come after the treasure in those within, the house. None of these conveys what was shown in the parable of the sower before the likeness of the kingdom. In that first parable did the Lord set out the word as the germ of life and spiritual understanding to the believer. The comparisons of the kingdom of the heavens, external and internal, present subsequent truths and larger considerations; whether of the outward course of the dispensation while the rejected Lord is on high; or of its spiritual aspects for the guidance and enjoyment of the faithful who have the mind of Christ.

After the Lord explained within the house the parable of the darnel to his disciples, the latter class opened, as we have seen, with the treasure. Now is given the far more precise instruction of the "one pearl."

This, which is evidently true as a sketch, helps to save the reader from serious misconception of the particulars. From early times men, having lost the fresh fulness of grace in the gospel, began to bend scripture generally to meet the first need of the soul. Hence the mustard seed was diverted by many to teach the work of grace in the heart from its small beginning, as the leaven was supposed to mean the gradual work of sanctification to bring about a universal change. Even the parables within the house are turned to the same account, only employing great things, instead of small, to show in the treasure the value of what we should make our own, and in the pearl the dream doubled to make it certain.

No believer doubts that the Lord Jesus is the richest of treasures, and the jewel above all price. But as the general structure and the bearing of the discourse point to a different aim, so the special forms of these similitudes are inconsistent with the assumption that the work of divine grace in the heart is intended. How plainly untenable it would be to suppose a sinful or even an exercised soul selling all he has to buy the world! in order to possess the treasure said to be hidden there. Nor can any deny the truth that Christ in His joy over the treasure did, as He alone could, buy the world. in order to have the treasure of a people out of the earth for heaven.

A late dignitary, who treated the parables in a very interesting way, thought this interpretation "strangely reverses the whole matter." What matters overturning an error however old, if we can only receive and enter into the truth with simplicity? The fact is that spiritual men have long felt the inadequacy of popular views. The word of the Lord abides. Be this our criterion. "Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a man of merchandise seeking goodly pearls; and having found one pearl of great value, he went and sold all whatever he had and bought it" (Matt. 13: 45, 46). Now is it not harsh in the extreme to infer that lost sinners are compared to a man inquest of goodly pearls? It is untrue even of

the uncommon case of the rich young ruler, irreproachable as his conduct was, who clung to his wealth, and forfeited treasure in heaven, and left Christ full of sorrow. He never knew his ruin and did not even seek to be saved. And never was a greater mistake than that Saul of Tarsus answers to the merchant, "determinate, discriminate, unremitting." He was, as he said, "chief of sinners" and, like every other, saved in sovereign grace.

It is Christ then Who really seeks and buys. It is Christ Who alone has also the perfect discernment of the moral beauty He saw and prized above all. Indisputably He alone of men understood and sought goodly pearls; and this one pearl of great price He saw, in divine counsels, to be saints like Himself holy and blameless in love — yea, one with Him, the church glorious, which He will present to Himself, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. He alone was in Himself perfectly what the saints are in divine purpose to be; and shall be in fact at His coming again, as in principle they are even now.

He that is in Christ is exhorted, as he has life in Him, to have in himself the moral mind which was in Christ Jesus, to obey and serve in love as He did absolutely, to count all things loss and dung that he may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having his own righteousness but that which is through faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God on the condition of faith. But the parable sets forth what is the ground and pattern and spring of all such effects in the Christian, in the Lord's own love to saints seen as the reflection of His own beauty, the one inestimable pearl, for which He sold all else, glory on high, kingdom below, all whatever He had, to buy that pearl. It might be, it was, in the depths, submerged in what was lowest and vilest; but He saw the end from the beginning, He discerned what grace would effect, loved us and gave Himself for us, as He will have therein the object of His love and rest in His love on high.

O my friend that reads these words, flatter not human nature, nor your own character. In an ungodly family you may have been shocked with the horror of open evil, and have walked morally; in a godly one you may have been guarded from corruption and trained in religious habits. Yet it strangely reverses, not the point of this parable only, but the whole force of revealed truth, and of the gospel particularly, if you compare yourself in your natural state to a merchant in quest of goodly pearls, still more if you credit yourself with such devotion, in your unconverted days, as would give up all you have to win Christ. Since man was created on the earth, never was such an instance; and if it had been, how could it avail for a sinner without new birth or redemption?

The same apostle, who tells us this was his experience as a saint, condemns all he had been previously (though more moral and religious than you) as filth. He also proclaims from God of the entire race, that there is not a righteous person, not even one, that none understands, that not one seeks after God, that peace's way is unknown, and no fear of God is before their eyes. He further declares that it was not merely so among the Gentiles, but that the law expressly pronounces this sentence on those under the law, spite of all their privileges. Now the gospel is sent to all as equally lost. For, says he, there is no difference; for all sinned, and come short of the glory of God. Hence God justifies freely though the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Whom God set forth a mercy-seat through faith in His blood. The very object is to cut off boasting of self in every form, that no flesh should boast before God. He that boasts, let him boast in the Lord.

## 7 The Dragnet

Matt. 13: 47-50.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 37-39. Gospel No. 5: 7.)

The last similitude of the chapter is the counterpart of the first; for as this is the sowing of the good seed in the world, where the harvest is spoiled by the enemy's darnel, so that is the judicial dealing with the bad fish after the good had been gathered into vessels before the consummation of the age.

"Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like a dragnet cast into the sea and having brought together of every sort; which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach, and, sitting down, gathered the good into the vessels and cast the worthless out. Thus shall it be in the consummation of the age: the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from amidst the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping, and the gnashing of teeth" (ver. 47-50).

Here again we have what was meant, not for the multitude, but for those who had ears to hear. The Lord speaks to the disciples only in the house. It is for the spiritual mind.

We may notice here as elsewhere how carefully the truth was communicated, so as not to impair the Christian hope. The Jew has had times and seasons set out and discriminated to guard him from being deceived by the cry, The time is at hand. Now that the Christ was rejected of Jew and Gentile, the unequalled tribulation must be before the times of refreshing from the presence of Jehovah and His Christ. But for the Christian it is of all moment not to confound the proper hope with prophecy, but to wait for the Lord to receive us to Himself precisely as the early saints did. Whatever events are revealed, and they are many, varied, and momentous before the day of the Lord, His coming remains immediately before the heart without any predicted events to intervene.

In fact, we now know that many centuries have transpired; but from the parables here and elsewhere we should never have gathered such an interval as might hinder constant looking for Christ. We could not from the letter have gleaned, but that the fishermen, who first cast into the sea the dragnet, at length filled out of every sort, were the same that drew it up on the beach, and sitting down gathered the good into vessels and cast the worthless outside. He Who knew the end from the beginning had all before Him but disclosed with a wisdom self-evidently divine. Mistake there was none: only the rashness or ill-will of unbelief can say so. If taught of God, we wait for the Lord Jesus now, as the apostles did. Our hope, as our faith, is the same. All hangs on His word, which can fail no more than His love. And those who have fallen asleep have in no way missed their hope; for it remains true as ever, that the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we, the living that remain to the coming of the Lord shall in no wise precede those that are fallen asleep, but shall together with them be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4).

The parable does mark in the first place the fishermen completing their work of filling the dragnet from every kind, and drawing it ashore; next, sitting down and sorting the good fish into vessels, while they cast away those unfit for food. This was the fishermen's work of delicate discrimination; and the more striking as the servants were forbidden in the first similitude to gather the darnel. To deal with the wicked is in both parables assigned to the angels. They are, as the interpretation goes on to say (not only explaining, but adding), to come forth and sever the wicked from amidst the righteous. This is another truth, which must not be confounded with the fishermen's work of gathering the good into vessels. Both are true, but they differ in their nature and objects. We, the servants or fishermen, have to do with the good; the angels will execute judgment on the wicked. The Christian is called to the work of grace. So it was even among the Jews of old. "If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth," said Jehovah to Jeremiah: not the vile from the precious, but the precious from the vile.

How is it with you, dear reader? To be within the dragnet is no security. Are you Christ's? He

Himself welcomes the anxious and the restless and the wretched and the despairing. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Yea, He declares, "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out." And He deigns to give the most lowly and gracious reason: "For I came down from heaven not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." And His will that sent Jesus is, "that every one that seeth the Son and believeth on Him shall have life eternal; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6: 37-40).

What more do you want to win your hearts than these words, if you believe the Lord? To honour Him is to honour the Father, Who refuses to be honoured otherwise. And no wonder; for to Him it is that His God and Father is indebted for His glorification morally in a world which had departed from Him, and done Him foul wrong, not only among Gentiles, vain and dark and proud, but in His own people guiltier and prouder still. Then and there it was that the Lord Jesus vindicated Him, not only in emptying Himself and becoming man, but in humbling Himself when man and being obedient unto death — yea, death of the cross. There it was also God made Him Who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become God's righteousness in Him. Then it was He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree that we being dead to sins should live to righteousness.

Fear not therefore to receive the Lord Jesus at God's word, as your quittance from all that you have done and are, and as your new start; for He Who died is risen, the giver of a life in Him, which speaks to you of victory, and is the pledge of holiness. Fear not: only believe.

## **8 The merciless Bondman**

Matt. 18: 23-35.

Gospel Words, 5th Series. No. 8.

The grace which forgives to the uttermost is characteristic of Christianity. Christ Himself bore witness of it habitually, and expressly to the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee. It is the prime message of the gospel; and the church assumes it to be settled for the least member of Christ's body.

Peter suggested what he regarded as a perfect limit of forgiveness, and enquired whether seven times satisfied; the Lord answered, Until seventy times seven. Grace declines a stipulated term and demands the widest margin; but the parable indicates solemnly the doom of him who has no heart for it. Whatever the man pretended to, the only true God, the Father, was unknown, and Jesus Christ Whom He did send: life eternal was not his.

"For this the kingdom of the heavens is likened to a king who would make a reckoning with his bondmen. And when he began to reckon, one debtor for ten thousand talents was brought to him. But as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and the children and all that he had, and payment to be made. The bondman then falling down did him homage, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay all. And the lord of the bondman, moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt. But that bondman, on going out, found one of his fellow-bondmen who owed him a hundred denarii, and having laid hold he was grasping his throat saying, Pay what thou owest. His fellow-bondman then, falling at his feet, besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee. And he would not, but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay what was owing. But his fellow-bondmen, having seen what was being done, were greatly grieved, and went and fully explained to their lord all that was done. Then his lord, having summoned him, saith to him, Wicked bondman, all that debt I forgave thee, since thou didst beseech me: oughtedst not thou also to have pitied thy fellow-bondman, as I also pitied thee? And his lord, in wrath, delivered him to the tormentors

till he should pay all that was owing to him. Thus also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if ye forgive not from your hearts each his brother" (Matt. 18: 23-35).

But one debtor is specified, and his debt enormous. Even if of silver, Haman offered no more in lieu of destroying the entire Jewish people. Not less guilty is the sinner before God. No wonder he "was brought to Him": of himself he would never come. All depends on the reality of one's submission to God's righteousness. If he be not born of God, it is superficial. Profession may have no root of faith, but spring from the mere feeling of terror on the one hand or of sympathy on the other. It may be but creedism or deference to public opinion. It is often mental apprehension. In all such cases there is no thorough self-judgment, no divinely formed repentance, and hence no true sense of the grace of God, nor real appreciation of Christ and His work, whereby faith knows. But the sentence of judgment (for God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of them that hold the truth in unrighteousness) may alarm souls into the profession of the Lord's name apart from living faith. So it was when our Lord preached; as He warned such as quickly received the word with joy, and soon gave it up in trial. So it was yet more, when the gospel went out in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. A single case is more impressive than a crowd. Further, as individually one believes, so too judgment will be individual.

Here the debtor who did not keep the word, nor bring forth fruit with patience, "on going out," soon betrayed his emptiness. He, being a dead stone, who had never tasted that the Lord is good, ruthlessly assailed his fellow that owed him a comparatively small debt. And his lord incensed at cruelty so selfish after such grace, consigns him not to prison only but to the tormentors in irretrievable ruin.

O my reader, deceive not your soul: God is not mocked. Read not only Gal. 6: 7-10 but Rom. 2: 7-11, which press not the grace that saves, but the indispensable character of those that are saved. "He shall have judgment without mercy that showed no mercy."

How is it then with your soul, my reader? Have you received Christ and believed the gospel to the remission of your sins? For this is the A B C of God's message based on Christ's redemption. There is far more given in His grace; but with this most needed and touching answer to our deep want God begins. He remembers no more our sins and iniquities, as He often assures us; but He would have us to know them blotted out by the Saviour's blood, as we remember Him and show forth His death habitually. What can be conceived more contradictory of His grace than a hard vindictive spirit? Are not we who are forgiven distinctly charged to forgive? Nay more, are we not solemnly warned that Christ's heavenly Father will award unsparing judgment, not to open adversaries only, Jew or Gentile, but to the Christian professor especially, if from his heart he forgives not a brother's trespasses? Can any course be more fraught with danger than glossing over Christ's plain meaning under the fond claim that, whatever come, we are safe? He that believes to the saving of the soul is neither presumptuous nor cowardly where Christ is at stake, but keeps His word and denies not His name, sharing His life and displaying His character.

The bondman with the debt to God of 10,000 talents is historically the Jew, availing himself greedily of a gracious oblivion of all in the gospel, but so little imbued with the Spirit of Christ, as to hate and persecute, forbidding any mercy to the Gentile because of his injustice to Israel, little indeed compared with the Jew's wickedness against God. Therefore, as the apostle shows, is wrath come upon them to the uttermost (1 Thess. 2: 16). So also we see in the Acts of the Apostles, that though the blotting out of their sins was preached to them on their repentance and turning to God, they did not truly profit by His mercy. They dogged enviously and as enemies the steps of His messengers, whom He sent next to the

Gentiles. Thus they pleased not God and were contrary to all men, and afford the sad witness that, if the despiser of Moses' law died without compassion on proof of two or three witnesses, much sorer must be the punishment of those that trample down and count unholy the blood of the covenant and do despite to the Spirit of grace.

## 9 The Labourers hired

Matt. 20: 1-16.

Gospel Words. 5th Series. No 9.

People have little difficulty in understanding the general drift of the answer to Peter, who said, Behold, we have forsaken all and followed Thee: what shall we have therefore? Our Lord shows that God will be debtor to no man, and that for every loss on account of His name every one shall receive again a hundredfold and inherit life eternal. But He adds the cautionary words, Many first shall be last, and last first. For as Christ is the motive where faith is, reward is but the encouragement to him that follows the Saviour, it cheers him when already on the way. Make the reward the object, and all becomes mercenary. Even where Christ is the constraining power, there is danger of clouding Him under an overweening estimate of sacrifices for His sake; and hence the need to think of the shortcoming implied through self-reliance. In every case however God never forgets but assuredly repays.

Why is it that there has been such perplexity and difference from of old to the present about the parable which opens chap. 20? It is because man bulks so largely in his own eyes that room is not left for the sovereign grace of God. Now this is the very thing the Lord here asserts. Pious men might and must more or less distinctly allow it in His saving souls; but the Lord claims it for His dealing with service. And it ought not to be a question that in the parable not salvation but service is the matter in hand. Alas! in all ages the tendency has been and is to confound the two things to the deep injury of both; for if mixed up, no soul who has a due sense of his unprofitable service can or ought to be assured of his salvation; yet without that assurance God's grace is not fully received, nor has Christ's blood practically cleansed the conscience, so that the service is vitiated correspondingly from first to last. And no wonder; for never can exist the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope, which we are exhorted to hold fast firm unto the end.

Now what can be plainer in scripture than the truth that "the free gift of God is life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6: 23)? In John, Gospel and Epistles, it is no less plain that the believer has that life now. No doubt, it is in the Son, and alone in Him rightly and securely; but "he that believeth on Me *hath* life eternal" (John 6: 47). And the First Epistle was written that God's children might *know*, that they believing on the name of the Son of God have life eternal. They do not wait for His coming again to have it; they have it now for their souls, they will have it for their bodies also, and in its proper glorious sphere, when He comes for them. And it is of life eternal by-and-by that the Synoptic Gospels speak.

But the parable contemplates, not conversion, nor life eternal, but labouring in the vineyard. How can those that know the gospel fall into a mistake so evident and profound as to overlook this? It was for Christ that Simon Peter left all and followed Him. Christ drew him, not reward, though reward there is; for God is not unrighteous to forget any work or labour of love shown to His name in the service of the saints or of the gospel. But it is divine love in Christ, seen by faith, which draws the soul after Him, and makes His call effectual. Such alone do work that pleases God; and life eternal is therefore shown in Rom. 2 to come at the end of a fruit-bearing course; but the utmost care is taken in the same epistle

to declare that we are justified freely by His grace (Rom. 3: 24). Yea, it excludes any work on our part from that great act of His grace. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt, but to him that worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4: 4, 5).

In the parable on the contrary it is a question of work done for the householder, who calls and sends into his vineyard.

"For the kingdom of the heavens is like a householder which went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard; and when he had agreed with the labourers for a denary\* the day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing in the marketplace idle; and to them he said, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing; and he saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard. And when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto the steward, Call the labourers and pay them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a denary. And when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received every man a denary. And when they received it, they murmured against the householder, saying, These last have spent one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. But he answered and said to one of them, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a denary? Take up that [which is] thine, and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? or is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last" (vers. 1-16).

\*A denary was a silver coin, and of far more value than our penny. "The denarius a day was the pay of a Roman soldier in Tiberius' time, a few years before this parable was uttered (see Tacitus, Annal. i. 17). Polybius, ii. 15 6 (but in illustrating the exceeding fertility of the country), mentions that the charge for a day's entertainment in the inns of Cisalpine Gaul was half an as. = one-twentieth of the denarius. This we may therefore regard as liberal pay for the day's work." Alford's Gr. Test. i. 200, fifth edition.

Plainly the Lord lays down the true spring and principle of service. It is confidence in him who calls. All is set out with divine wisdom. The workmen first called agreed to the terms. Those at the third hour went to work on his word; "whatsoever is right I will give you," as did those at the sixth and ninth hours. The last batch at the eleventh went there simply at his call: "Go ye also into the vineyard." With these last the steward is directed to begin, giving each a denary. This aroused the murmurs of the earliest workmen, who resented the householder's liberality. But he stopped the mouth of their spokesman at once. The injustice complained of was solely in the complainant. "Didst thou not agree with me for a denary?" Grace reserves its title to bless. "Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last." The despised enjoy the grace that abounds beyond all question of man, and those who indulge in selfish thoughts justly sink. God Who never fails in righteousness maintains His right to act according to His own goodness. He is sovereign even in this where man sets up his claim to his own chagrin. Indisputably just, He is good and will act upon it, as He loves to do: what loss and misery those make for themselves who dispute it!

## 10 The two Children

Matt. 21: 28-32.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 88-89. Gospel No. 5: 10.)

The proud men who were blind to the glory of Christ, and averse alike to God's grace and truth raised the question of His authority. It is always so with such as value themselves, and love not God's intervention, and are jealous of those that do His work. He could have pointed to witnesses greater than John; though among women-born none had risen greater than John the Baptist. But the works which the Father gave Him to complete testified yet more. So did the Father's voice. And the scriptures which bore witness of Him He treats as the highest possible, for they have a permanence which no mere words can possess. But here the Lord met their unbelief by appealing to the baptism of John: whence was it? Of heaven, or of men? They saw their dilemma, and fearing man, not God, they answered, We cannot tell. Confessing their incapacity, chief priests and elders though they were, as the cover of their dishonesty, they are left without an answer. The Lord however presents them with a portrait, not of themselves only, but of those they despised.

"But what think ye? A man had two children and he came to the first and said, Child, go work to-day in the vineyard. And he answered and said, I will not; but afterward he regretted and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise; and he answered and said, I [go], sir, and went not. Which of the two did the will of the father? They say, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say to you, that the tax-gatherers and the harlots go before you into the kingdom of God. For John came in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the tax-gatherers and the harlots believed him. And ye, when ye saw, regretted not afterward to believe him" (vers. 28-32).

It is a plain and direct dealing with conscience. For two classes were then before the Lord's eye: the rude and profligate, the careless and profane, who made no pretension to religion and pursued worldly profit and open sin; and the respectable and decorous, who piqued themselves on heeding the rites of religion and on their own decent character. Now mankind in Christendom is the same still, tested by a standard more searching than John's, though his was a mighty work, as the Lord bore witness to him. Viewed in themselves or in the light of testimony, how living is the picture! The one class puts shameless insult on God, and glories in lawlessness. But an appeal comes which convinces the daring sinner of his outrageous evil: he breaks down in self-judgment, he turns to God and serves Him whom he had set at nought. The other class, on the contrary, claims credit for its proper ways; and as conscience is untouched, they are self-satisfied, and God remains unknown. How exactly such souls answer to him who says "I go, sir, and went not!" Are there not many like him now?

Hence when John, who did no miracles nor claimed official position, came preaching a baptism of repentance for remission of sins, people flocked freely to be baptised, confessing their sins. But as the rule, the Lord here shows that it was not those who justified themselves before men that were baptised by John. They disdained to enter the kingdom by the same strait gate and narrow way as was open to the tax-gatherer and the harlot. But there can be no other way to God for the sinner. The grace of the gospel condemns sins and insists on repentance still more than John coming in the way of righteousness; for the gospel proclaims that nothing but the blood of Jesus, God's Son, could cleanse from sins, and that His blood does cleanse us from every sin. How deadly and defiling were our sins that such a propitiation alone could avail! Therein is a test far deeper than John's preaching, excellent and efficacious as it was; for it was repulsive for a moral man and zealous Jew to confess his sins, like a tax-gatherer or a harlot. How intolerable to be put with such on the same common level of guilt and ruin! This is precisely what the gospel does even more thoroughly; and it is therefore of all things most

odious to the self-righteous formalist.

When John came, calling men to confess their sins in view of the coming Messiah and the kingdom of the heavens, conscience answered to his call in those who had walked in gross lusts and indifference to the religious world. "The tax-gatherers and the harlots believed him." They knew in their souls that they had led a life of shame and iniquity; and they bowed to a call which they recognised to be of God. But not so those who stood well in their own eyes and in the public opinion of the day. They therefore annulled for themselves the counsel of God, instead of justifying God by being baptised by John as the despised ones did (Luke 7: 29, 30). The self-righteous when they "saw, had no regret afterward to believe him."

Hence too, since that day, when the gospel is preached, men who are boastful of their religion, their church, or their character, are ever its bitterest enemies. The Jews as the general fact not only refused it but tried to stir up the Gentiles against it everywhere. Nothing in their eyes more hateful than that grace which denied the value of their righteousness, and announces God's righteousness that He may be just and justifier of him that has faith in Jesus. For this openly declares that there is no difference, all having sinned and coming short of God's glory; as it also declares to all who believe, that they are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Therefore, being apart from works of law, the gospel is as open to the Gentile as to the Jew, since God is one, Who shall justify circumcision by faith, not otherwise, and uncircumcision through their faith since they believe. Jesus the Lord is the way to the Father: the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And salvation is in none other name under heaven that is given among men whereby we must be saved. Did any wonder at the Lord eating with sinners and the disreputable? His answer was, They that are strong have no need of a physician, but those that are sick. But go and learn what that is, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; for I came to call not righteous but sinners. Do you, dear reader, know Him thus?

## **11 The guilty Husbandmen**

Matt. 21: 33-44.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 104-105. Gospel No. 5: 11.)

The parable before us is morally historical. It presents briefly but fully the ways of God with His people of old up to their ruin in the rejection of the Christ, and not morally alone but nationally. The Lord even adds from the scriptures His own consequent exaltation, and their setting aside meanwhile, Himself in humiliation the stumbling-stone of unbelief, but about to return in power as the executor of judgment in this world.

"Hear another parable: There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and made a fence round it, and due, a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and left the country. But when the season of the fruits drew near, he sent his bondmen to the husbandmen to receive his fruits. And the husbandmen took his bondmen, and beat one and killed another and stoned another. Again he sent other bondmen more than the first, and they did to them likewise. And afterward he sent to them his son, saying, They will feel respect for my son. But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, and get his inheritance. And they took and cast him forth out of the vineyard and killed [him]. When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come what will he do to these husbandmen? They say to him, He will wretchedly destroy those wretches, and let out the vineyard to other husbandmen who shall render him the fruits in their season" (vers. 33-41).

It is plain that the Lord here takes the ground, not merely of relationship and conscience as in the

preceding parable of the two children, but of responsibility to render fruit to God Who had done all possible for His people to that end. The prophet Isaiah had similarly appealed in his chap. 5. Here the Lord adds a great deal more, but on the same ground, and with similar result, only yet more plainly proclaimed. For it is not only that the vineyard, instead of grapes, brought forth wild grapes. Here the upshot was growing enmity manifested to the lord of the vineyard. In both what could have been done on behalf of the vineyard that He had not done? The prophet announced that Jehovah was going to lay His vineyard waste; and so it has been, as the state of the Jews proves. The Lord shows the patience that for ages waited on those active among the Jews, if there might be fruit for Jehovah. But His bondmen, the prophets, whom He sent to recall His people to their duty, met with nothing but contempt, ill-usage, and death. Others He sent increasingly, as the evil grew; but they fared alike contumeliously.

Lastly, He sent His Son. The Lord spoke of Himself. But the dignity of His person and the intimate nearness of His relationship to Jehovah gave the opportunity to the religious leaders among the Jews to demonstrate their contempt and deadly hatred to both the Father and the Son, as the Lord says in John 15. Could evil go farther? Other sins, shameful and ungrateful as they were, became in comparison as nothing. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. He that hateth Me hateth My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other did, they had not had sin; but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father." And they had been fully warned. For they simply fulfilled what was in their law, "They hated Me without a cause." It was not only utter unrighteousness, but deadly enmity to Jehovah and His Anointed, to the Son, their own Messiah.

And the Lord, on the near approach of this fatal result of their rebellious alienation from God, Himself puts the question to them, "When therefore the Lord of the vineyard shall come, what will He do to those husbandmen?" And they could not but answer, "He will wretchedly destroy those wretches, and let out the vineyard to other husbandmen who shall render him the fruits in their seasons." So it is that the guilty own in their consciences their just punishment for positive rejection of One so good and faithful, and of their own obligations to Him, yea, of apostasy carried out to blood.

Is this nothing to you, reader, with the still greater privileges of Christendom? Are you hardening your heart against the truth, and shrinking from the God Who came so near to you in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not reckoning to men their offences, and having put in His servants the word of reconciliation? Beware then of a fate not better but worse than what befell and is to befall the Jews. "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, this was made the corner-stone: of Jehovah this is, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Therefore I say to you that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits of it. And he that falleth on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust" (vers. 42-44). Such is the danger of stumbling now; such the judgment the Lord will execute on living man when He appears in glory. And the time hastens. See therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken in the prophets, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, if one declare it unto you."

## **12 The Marriage feast**

Matt. 22: 1-14.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 117-119. Gospel No. 5-12.)

The parable of the guilty husbandmen at the close of Matt. 21 shows the issue of God's testing men on the ground of His own claims and their responsibility to yield Him fruit. It is just the question raised with the Jew and settled by the rejection of their own Messiah, the Son, yet to be avenged when He comes again.

In the parable with which Matt. 22 begins the Lord handles a wholly different case. It is therefore, what the last chapter nowhere furnished, a likeness of the kingdom of the heavens; and therein God is manifested in the ways of His grace, not man under His just claims. God no longer requires fruit from man, though He may and does produce fruit in those who receive His grace in Christ. But in the gospel it is no question of demanding fruit from man. He is represented as in sovereign majesty making a marriage-feast for His Son. This means a total change in His ways: not God requiring from men what is due, but His own grace blessing them in honour of His Son. "It is more blessed to give than to receive"; and this not the law but the gospel vindicates for God, Who gave His dear and only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have life eternal.

"The kingdom of the heavens is likened to a king which made a marriage-feast for his son; and sent forth his bondmen to call those who had been called to the marriage-feast; and they would not come. Again he sent forth other bondmen, saying, Tell those that have been called, Behold, my dinner I have made ready: mine oxen and my fatlings are slaughtered; and all things [are] ready come to the marriage-feast. But they slighted [it] and went off, one to his own land, another to his traffic; and the rest, seizing his bondmen, insulted and killed [them]. And the king was wroth and, sending his troops, destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then saith he to his bondmen, The marriage-feast is ready, but those that were called were not worthy. Go therefore unto the outlets of the roads, and, as many as ye shall find, call to the marriage-feast. And those bondmen went out to the roads, and gathered together all as many as they found, both wicked and good; and the marriage-feast was filled with guests. And the king on coming in to behold the guests saw there a man not clothed with a marriage-garment; and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in here not having a marriage-garment? But he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind his feet and hands, and take and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few chosen" (vers. 2-14).

Here too we have an historical unfolding, not of the past under law, but of God's dealings in grace. We begin with the gospel of the kingdom before our Lord's death in verse 3. Next in verse 4 the gospel goes forth on the ground of His finished work. Only then was the urgent message that "all things were ready"; and then, too, the rebellious hostility ripened into insult and bloodshed; as also in due time retribution came on those murderers and their city (vers. 5- 7).

But grace must reign and do its wondrous work, whatever the hindrances. Accordingly the offence of the Jew is salvation to the nations, and the loss of the one is the wealth of the others. The Jews but filled up their cup of sorrow, and wrath came on them to the uttermost, as far as the gospel is concerned; and this salvation of God has been sent to the nations, who also will bear, as the apostle added. This luminously follows in our parable (vers. 8-10).

Nevertheless God is not mocked under gospel any more than under law; and contempt of His grace brings an even sorer punishment than violation of His law. The acceptance of God's testimony by faith is and always has been the soul's turning-point from death to life, from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God and His kingdom. And His testimony has ever been to Christ, whatever the measure once, whatever the fulness now. Hopeless effort under law was used to drive to Christ those who were not won by promise. Grace and truth came as a fact through Jesus Christ, Who is both life

and righteousness to the believer, as He is the image of the invisible God and declared Him. Christ is all, and in all. This therefore becomes the surest of tests, as it is the fulness of grace.

But the King, when He entered to behold the guests, saw one who had not on a marriage-garment. This was conclusive. The King provided all in His royal bounty; but here was a man who preferred his own clothing. It was no question of anything else. The man's robe might be splendid or sordid. But it was not the marriage-garment. It was therefore a direct offence against the grace which alone could and did provide according to the king's majesty and magnificence. Nothing could justify such wanton scorn of the king's honour and goodness; nothing could excuse the man's preference of his own things, especially on an occasion expressly to honour the King's Son. The man was speechless at the charge. The outer darkness must be his portion: *there* shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

It is not providential judgment like that which befell the city of murderers; it is personal and absolute, away for ever from Him Who is love and light, from Him Whose grace was so thoroughly despised. To render this all the more impressive, a single individual is thus specified, though the moral at the close prepares us for its applying to individuals far and wide. "For many are called (*i.e.*, by the gospel), but few chosen." In result it is but a "little flock"; not because grace was not ample for them all, but because grace is abused and Christ is in so few, though He is all in such as have Him.

Have you then, my reader, received the Christ, Jesus the Lord? If so, "walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and assured in the faith as ye have been taught [in the written word of God], abounding in thanksgiving." See to it that you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new, renewed into full knowledge according to the image of Him that created him: wherein there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all things, and in all. Remember that there is no putting on Christ on high, unless you have put Him on now here below. Here we have the joy and duty of confessing Christ; as it will be His to confess us before His Father and before the angels.

If baptism be made the marriage-garment, it is only a less destructive delusion than making it the Lord's incarnation. In the one case the baptised in Christendom would be all elect, if it were not a contradiction in terms; in the other case, all mankind would be. The parable is really subversive of both these dreams, and is meant to show that no mere profession can save, that only the reception of God's grace in Christ will stand in that day.