

## Gospel Words — Seventh Series.

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

### 1 The Wicked Servant

Luke 12: 45-48.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 323-324. Gospel No. 7-1.)

Instructive and solemn is the picture which the Lord draws of the servant in verses 45, 46, rendered still more full and precise in verses 47, 48, when a notable difference comes to light.

When our Lord announced His departure to the Father's house, and the mission of another Advocate, the Holy Spirit to be in and with the disciples, He was no less distinct in promising His own coming again to receive them unto Himself, for the same place as Himself on high. And when gazing into heaven after their ascending Master, they were told, by unimpeachable testimony that He should thus come as they had seen Him go. There is no doubt that in apostolic times the church walked in this hope, and that the mouths of preachers and teachers then spoke of it out of the abundance of their heart. Yet none ever regarded it as a question of date, any more than the Lord Who revealed it as a simple and pure and constant hope from His love to their love. And this difference is the more striking, because, the day of His appearing, which in due time follows His coming for His heavenly saints, is associated with prophecy and its judgments and signs in both the Old Testament and the New.

Hence the earnestness with which the apostle taught the converts, like those in Thessalonica from their first start, to await God's Son from the heavens, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus our deliverer from the coming wrath (1 Thess. 1: 10). Not only did He write of His coming with all His saints in 1 Thess. 3: 13, but of His coming for them to raise and change them, as a necessarily antecedent action in 1 Thess. 4: 12-17. He does much more; for he identifies himself and all saints with it as their proximate hope by saying, not "they" as at a distant future, but "we, the living, that survive" (in contrast with those meanwhile "put to sleep by Jesus") until the coming (or presence) of the Lord,

shall not precede those put to sleep. Both were to be caught up together. The aim of the Spirit of truth, Who knew the end from the beginning, and expressly gave the message "in the word of the Lord," was to put the hope over before the heart, made sure of its fruition, but by set purpose not sure when, so that all the saints might be always looking for it. It was impossible otherwise to have the hope common, constant, and living. Infidels and those under their influence mock, as if it was the apostle's error, at that which was really the perfect wisdom of God in giving "one hope," which never did nor can pass away till His coming shall be its crown.

In the parable the Lord points out from the first that putting off the hope would betray the evil heart of unbelief, the root of other evils.

"But if that bondman say in his heart, My lord delayeth to come, and shall begin to beat the menservants and the maid-servants, and to eat and drink and be drunken, the lord of that servant will have come in a day when he expecteth not, and in an hour that he knoweth not, and shall cut him asunder and set his portion with the unfaithful" (verses 45, 46).

It is not a doctrinal mistake (though this is not a slight thing with God's word and Spirit to direct aright), but the far more serious aberration of the "heart," which is too easy where this doctrine may be held. How sad the soul's state where Christ's coming is unwelcome; and the bondman does what his heart likes! Thus is the separative power of the hope lost, and its attraction to Him Who is coming and His word. Violence ensues towards his fellows, who become disagreeable, as the world with its enjoyments become pleasant company. Can any words more graphically sketch Christendom's practical ruin, of which the first symptom was the heart's plea, My Lord delayeth His coming? This will not hinder but rather hasten His coming unexpectedly, Who will punish his disloyalty and assign his portion with the faithless, notwithstanding all his boast of Christian privileges.

In the verses that follow, the Lord rules, that sad as the heathen's case may be in the day that hastens, incomparably worse is the Christian professor's. "And that bondman who knew his own lord's will and made not ready nor did his will, shall be beaten with many [stripes]; but he who knew [it] not and did things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few. And to every one to whom much has been given, much shall be required of him; and to whom they commit much, of him they will ask the more" (verses 47, 48).

O my reader, forget not that You have an open Bible, hear the gospel, are sometimes troubled when you think of your sins and feel ashamed because you shrink from confessing the Lord's name, as much as you love the world and the things of the world. "The end of those things is death;" after which comes judgment. How will your guilt and the madness of your unbelief seem then when it is too late? Oh, turn not away from Him that speaks from heaven of His cleansing blood, Whose voice will soon shake earth and heaven also. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." His grace now is as sure to the believer, as His judgment will be shortly terrible for the unbeliever. God is not mocked.

## 2. The Fruitless Fig-tree

Luke 13: 6-9.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 339-340. Gospel No. 7: 2.)

Men are apt to dwell on shocking events, and to measure the guilt of the victims accordingly. So it was when the Lord warned of the crisis for the Jewish people which His presence could not but bring about. For He was there in the testimony of the truth and in the humiliation of grace, not yet in the

power and glory of the Kingdom; He was there for faith to receive, but for unbelief to refuse or despise. If rejection unto death was before Him, they were on the way to the sure dealings of God in judgment. Then it was that some reported to Him the tragic end of the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. But our Lord in answer corrects their own thought of exceptional guilt in that case, and solemnly warns them that, except they repented, they should all perish in the same way. Nay more, He points to the eighteen men, not slain by an unfeeling and truculent Roman, on whom the tower of Siloam fell. Yet were they debtors beyond all the men in Jerusalem? On the contrary He repeats, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." This is God's voice to sinful man in the present disorder of the world. Man is no competent judge of the tangled scene; but he is loudly called through such events to judge himself before God, in short to repent. And the Lord gives the call divine force: "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

O my reader, except you repent, worse impends over you than what befell those then occupied with passing sorrows. How often their blood was mingled afterwards with their sacrifices by their own infuriate zealots! Worse, far worse, impends over you than when the burning ruins of the temple buried its multitudes, who vainly trusted the sanctuary instead of repenting of their sins. For what is any judgment in providence compared with the everlasting judgment of God? And what is more inevitable for man? "It is appointed to men once to die, but after this, judgment." How unutterably appalling for the unrepentant! For it surely means no less than everlasting destruction.

The Lord adds a parable also to enforce the truth. "A certain one had a fig-tree, planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, Behold, three years I come seeking fruit on the fig-tree and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? But he answering saith to him, Sir, let it alone this year also, until I shall dig about it and put manure. And if it produceth fruit thenceforth,-; but if not, thou shalt cut it down" (vers. 6-9).

Can any doubt be that the Lord has in view the elect nation planted, not casually, but in His vineyard, with every advantage of site and of care? But no fruit was found. Of this there was more than adequate witness. For three years it is waited on for fruit, but there is none. It was worse than useless. It was a nuisance. Cut it down, said the owner. But He Who felt for God's rights and called the guilty to repent felt also compassion for man, and urges the plea, "Let it alone this, year also." New and final measures were to be taken. "If it shall produce fruit thenceforth,-; but if not, thou shalt cut it down."

Alas! we know the issue. No wonder the Lord leaves a blank. What had He not done? What had He not suffered? Even on the cross He cried, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." But as they bore no fruit — nothing but leaves, so they in their pride should not be forgiven, rejecting every proof of their need and guilt. Hence they have lost not only their place as a nation but their religious status. The fig-tree is withered away. It was the people under law; never more shall there be fruit of it for ever. Thank God, there will be a generation to come; and it will believe in Him. That generation, not this, will repent. That generation, not this, will say, Blessed be He that cometh in the name of Jehovah. His blood will wash them from their sins, instead of being as now a curse on them and their children. And He will write His laws in their minds, as He will give them to their hearts, never remembering more their sins and their lawlessnesses. For it is the new covenant of God's grace, not of man's works only to show them worthless and evil.

Meanwhile God is sending His glad tidings to you. to Gentile as well as Jew; yea now to the Gentiles emphatically, for it is the day of grace. He now enjoins men that they should all everywhere repent. Oh! hear the call and own yourself lost that you may receive the Saviour. This He is to the uttermost now toward all that repent. How would it be with you if He were come to judge the habitable

earth in righteousness? How could you stand before the Judge? It is now His call that you repent. He waits to be gracious to you in all your ruin and to save you from your sins. He can afford and loves to do it, for His blood cleanseth from every sin.

### **3 What is God's kingdom like**

Luke 13: 18-21.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 356-357. Gospel No. 7-3.)

The kingdom of God is no secret hid in Himself. It is a purpose revealed of old in His word. When Moses and the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea which covered Pharaoh's host, they sang, "Jehovah will reign forever." But this, like every thing else under the law, for the present failed through their sins. At length they rejected Jehovah's reign, desiring a king "like all the nations." Saul their choice was their sorrow and shame; but God in pity gave them David and Solomon. Even then all was but provisional, and at best but a type of God's Son, the true King, Who alone will make good His throne on the holy hill of Zion.

When the Lord Jesus presented Himself to the Jews, they proved their evil estate by denying and crucifying Him, as their prophets had foreshown. And He Who knew all beforehand told that they should not see Him henceforth till they should say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Jehovah. But they surely will, and He will build up Zion, appearing in His glory. So the nations shall fear Him, and all the kings of the earth His glory. This will be the kingdom in the manifest sense, to which all the prophets gave witness, postponed as yet through Israel's unbelief. When their heart shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away; to this day alas! it remains unremoved.

Meanwhile the Lord in His ministry here below announced the mystery or secret of the kingdom of God (Mark 4: 11), while the King, rejected on earth, is absent on high. The consequence is that divine power is not manifested in the removal of Satan and the putting down of all the enemies; it works spiritually in those that believe, whilst a vast system of mere profession grows up and spreads to a certain extent here below. This last and by the Jews wholly unexpected result is what our evangelist was inspired to set out in our Lord's two comparisons.

"And he said, To what is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I liken it? It is like a grain of mustard which a man took and cast into his garden; and it grew and became a great tree, and the birds of heaven lodged in its branches. And again he said, To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened" (vers. 18- 21).

The moral design of our Gospel is well illustrated by the peculiar introduction of the two parables at this point. No intimation marks that they were then uttered. The first Gospel gives them in their place where the seven parables disclose the kingdom of the heavens, or rather its mysteries, as a complete whole. The parable of the Sower is separated from them and given in connection with His own ministry in Luke 8; the others of Matt. 13. Luke does not at all record. Here the object is to enforce the solemn lesson of what man is in presence of "all the glorious things that were done by him" [the Lord] Adversaries might be put to shame; and all the crowd might rejoice. But man is the same as ever, and turns all to vanity and self-exaltation. Christendom with better privileges is not really better than Israel. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." "Ye must be born again." "If any one be in Christ, [there is] a new creation: the old things are passed away; behold, new things are come. And all things are of God who reconciled us to himself through Christ." What are outward changes in His eyes? Yet man,

professing man, without life in Christ, can show or effect nothing more.

As the Lord described, such has been the course of God's kingdom. In chap. 8 Luke tells us of the very different work wrought by the seed that figures the word of God. Even so it does not by any means produce in result what the Sower desired. For the enemy is not yet dislodged from his bad eminence, and he avails himself of both the flesh and the world to spoil and hinder, besides his own destructive wiles. Still grace gives effect in good ground, and fruit is borne a hundredfold.

But in the parable of the mustard seed which a man cast into his garden, we hear of the lofty growth from the lowly beginning of what bore the Lord's name here below. The symbol of a tree is taken, and of one that from a very little shot up to give shelter to the birds of the sky. So earthly potentates as the kings of Egypt and Assyria are described by Ezekiel, and the king of Babylon by Daniel; only that here stress is laid on the incongruity of what was originally small with its towering development in time. None can deny either fact in Christendom. As the philosophic Guizot says in his Lect. ii. on Civilization, "It was the church with its institutions, its magistrates, its power, which strove triumphantly against the internal dissolution which convulsed the empire, and against barbarity; which subdued the barbarians themselves, and became the link, the medium, the principle of civilization, as between the Roman and barbarian worlds." What a mighty factor on earth the little flock became!

In the parable of the leaven, it is not the rise of earthly power out of what was originally despised, but the spread of doctrine till a given sphere was permeated. In it the creed-work of Christendom is portrayed. There is no thought of vital energy, only of a certain quantum assimilated by doctrine. Certainly grace in power is never so symbolised but doctrine such as that of Pharisees, Sadducees, or Herodians. Of this the natural mind is capable. The creed of Christendom, truth even, might be held, and held firmly, without faith and in unrighteousness (Rom. 1). The action of the Holy Spirit appears in neither comparison.

O my reader, hear the word of God. Receive Christ, Who alone is the Saviour and gives life eternal. It is "of faith that it might be according to grace." Ordinances may figure truth but cannot save. On the ground of works you are lost; but Jesus is Lord and Saviour. "Ye are saved by grace through faith; and this not of yourselves [which some might have thought]; it is God's gift; not of works that none might boast." Jesus is the way, the sole and sure way, to the Father. Look to Him only, and call on Him. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich to all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. The word of truth is the gospel of salvation to the believer.

## **4 The Uprising of the Housemaster**

Luke 13: 25-30.

(B.T. Vol. N1, p. 371-372. Gospel No. 7-4.)

Do you believe these plain words of the Saviour? Do you, my dear reader, believe that the time is short, the Lord at hand, and the solemn change impends from grace to judgment? The scripture before us is but one of many like warnings, The day of grace will close with the "falling away," the apostasy. When once the House-master will have risen up and barred the door, how appalling to stand without and knock in vain! Did it ever come home that this might be your own case? Evade it not.

The appeal arose out of the question, Are those to be saved few? The prophets had intimated such a remnant in terms as searching as they were repulsive to Jewish feeling. The Lord's words are a direct

dealing with conscience. "Strive earnestly to enter through the narrow door; for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and shall not be able." Men are ready enough to do or suffer much for salvation. They welcome a means which allows of their efforts if not. deserts. But "ye must be born anew" is hateful, unless it be within their ability to hinge it on an ordinance, which works without bringing the soul into the presence of God. This is what men naturally dread and shirk. They refuse to face God about their sins. Anything but the repentance which accompanies believing Him that sent Jesus. For He treats man, moral or not, as alike lost, and insists that salvation is in none other than Him Whom man despised and crucified. "For neither is there any other name under heaven that is given among men whereby we must be saved." It is therefore by grace through faith ; and this not of ourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works that none might boast. Hence strive earnestly to enter through the narrow door of being begotten by the word of truth. Entrance by any other way, however attractive, is vain and ruinous.

Thereon the Lord intimates the certainty that at an unexpected moment the Master of the house will close the gospel call. "When once the house-master hath risen up and shut the door, and ye shall begin to stand without and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, open to us; and he answering shall say to you, I know you not whence ye are; then shall ye begin to say, We did eat and drink in thy presence, and thou didst teach in our streets; and he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves cast out. And they shall come from east and west, and from north and south, and shall recline in the kingdom of God. And behold, there are last who shall be first, and there are first who shall be last" (vers. 25-30).

It is the rejection of Christ that tests souls; Christ in humiliation is the stumbling stone. So it was for the Jew then; so it is at bottom now for others. Yet is it thus that He has both glorified God and made propitiation for our sins. Christ crucified is to Jews a stumbling-block and to Gentiles foolishness; but to the called, both Jews and Greeks Christ is God's power and God's wisdom. There could be no gospel of grace without righteousness. Yet scripture is clear that it is not in the sinner to whom the gospel is preached. For "there is none righteous, no, not one." Hence the gospel is God's righteousness, not man's; and its ground is the redemption that is in Christ. And His righteousness is unto all, that they might hear the glad news, and upon all those who believe, that they might know themselves justified by faith.

But this is not all the truth. He, the Lord Jesus — He will appear in glory to judge the habitable earth. In vain will men in that day say, Lord, open to us. He who now calls in love will sentence the guilty. He will say, I know you not whence ye are. For had they heard the word in faith, they had received, not only pardon and peace, but life in Christ. And His life is the only and the sure source of the fruit of righteousness which is by Him to God's glory and praise. Not receiving Christ to life eternal men are but "workers of iniquity," the baptised no less than the circumcised, the Mahometan quite as much as heathen. Past privileges are pleaded to no purpose. "We did eat and drink in thy presence, and thou didst teach in our streets." Neglected opportunities, slighted mercies, only aggravate guilt. He shall say in reply, "I tell you, I know not whence ye are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." To the wicked, Gentile, Jew, or of Christendom, there is no peace: least of all to those who have heard most.

There indeed shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth, when in the kingdom the unbelieving Jews see their boasted fathers and prophets, but themselves cast out. But there is deep cheer for the despised Gentiles. For the Lord adds, "And they shall come from the east and west and from the north and south, and they shall recline in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last who shall be first,

and there are first who shall be last." Do you say, how terrible and true of unbelieving Israel, how blessedly true of the Gentiles who believe? What will it be for you who have heard the gospel, and neglected so great salvation? What possible hope can be in that day! But blessing in faith there is now and ever.

## 5 The Guests

Luke 14: 7-11.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 7-8. Gospel No. 7-5.)

It is beautiful and blessed to mark how our Lord turns the least things of daily life to everlasting account. This we find in all the Gospels, in none more than in that of Luke; whose design under the power of the Spirit was to contrast the God of grace with fallen selfish man, that through the faith of Christ and His work he might be saved and walk accordingly. Thus it is that the Lord spoke a parable unto those that were invited i.e. as guests, noticing how they chose out the first places (ver. 7).

"When thou art invited by anyone unto a wedding, recline not in the first place, lest perhaps a more honourable than thee be invited by him, and he that invited him and thee shall come and say to thee, Give this [man] place, and then thou begin with shame to take the last place. But when thou hast been invited, go, put thyself down in the last place, that when he who hath invited thee come, he may say to thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have glory in presence of all that recline with thee. For everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (vers. 8-11).

It is a world of evil, and man is fallen under sin and Satan, which gives occasion to grace and its ways, as God was then displaying in Christ. This tests the heart, which naturally seeks its own things, honour or power, ease or pleasure, money therefore as the means of gratifying self, whatever may be its direction. Here it was present honour that men coveted : and it is as true now as then. The true Light, coming into the world, laid every man bare.

But He has done infinitely more. He, the Lord of lords, and King of kings, was the faithful witness, the living exemplar of all He taught, of all that pleased the Father. Who ever took the last place as He? If born in Bethlehem David's city, to mark prophetically the "ruler in Israel," none the less was He the One "Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." Yet was He to be smitten with a rod upon the cheek (Micah 5: 1, 2), as He was born in a manger, because there was no room for such in the inn (Luke 2: 7). As the parents fled with Him into Egypt from the face of the destroying king, so did they return with Him to dwell, not only in Galilee the despised, but in its most despised Nazareth; so that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

So it was throughout the days of His flesh. Son of the highest, and subsisting in the form of God, He did not esteem it a thing to be grasped to be on equality with God, but emptied Himself. He did not and could not divest Himself of deity, but He did of glory, taking a bondman's form, having come in the likeness of men. And who ever humbled Himself as He did unswervingly? Who but He could say, and say with absolute truth, "Lo, I am come to do Thy will, O God?" Others, His servants may have done miracles as mighty, or, as He said, "Greater works than these;" but He and He alone never did His own will, always the Father's. And this is the perfect moral place of man which He took and kept to God's glory.

But more even than this had to be if God were to be glorified about sin, if men were to be saved through faith from their sins? Would He stoop down to a depth unfathomable and bear the divine

judgment of evil, so that the guilty might by grace be freed? Therefore it was that having been found in figure as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, death of the cross. Him Who knew no sin God made sin for you, that you might be made God's righteousness in Christ. It was God's perfect way: no other could avail.

Do you believe this, poor soul, miserable in the sense of your guilt, weary under sin's intolerable load, despairing haply of efforts to do the law of God? Not thus, never thus, can you come to God. He waits to be gracious, He can save to the uttermost; He gives all you need without money and without price, but only through your believing on Jesus, Who only is the way, and the truth, and the life; and He is the propitiation for our sins. How could it be otherwise? Did not the prophet say (seeing the great prediction as though come, seven centuries before the great fulfilment), "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53: 6).

Believe God's call on you to doubt in yourself, to hear Christ's word (for the law can only condemn a sinner), and believe Him that sent Jesus in love as a Saviour. And what is His message to you? "Verily, Verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath life eternal, and cometh not into judgment, but is passed out of death into life" (John 5: 24). The bold unbeliever braves the word of God and refuses to humble himself; the serious unbeliever tries to do better, trusting himself and his powers. The true believer owns himself lost, and finds Christ a Saviour indeed and in truth. Oh! look to Him and live.

To the believer Christ is life as well as propitiation; and because He lives, we shall live also. He is our life now while we are on earth. Thus only do we live to God; and we are called all through to have Him as our object, and way, our motive, strength, and end. The apostle knew, and, walking thus, could say, To me to live is Christ (Phil. 1: 21). Obedience, as He obeyed, is what the believer is sanctified to, in that humility which is content to be nothing in the world as it is. Christ took the last place. Let us who love Him seek to be as near that place as grace enables each.

In the regeneration He will say to each of His own, Friend, go up higher. Then shall the poor and despised apostles sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Then shall they that are Christ's, risen from the dead, reign with Him. The Corinthians sought to reign now, as do most in Christendom. But they were humbled, and by grace humbled themselves. Profit by that lesson; and God will exalt you in due time.

## 6 The Host

Luke 14: 12-14.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 22-23. Gospel No. 7-6.)

The Son of God was the true Light, Who, coming into the world, casts light on every man. It is not that all are enlightened by Him, but that He set each in the light. So here He lays bare alike guest and host. High and low, Jew or Gentile, Pharisee or Sadducee, priest or philosopher, were far from God; according as it is written, There is not a righteous man, not even one; nor he that understandeth; there is not one that seeketh after God: there is no fear of God before their eyes. If the law spoke thus of Israel, as it did, much more palpably did it apply to the heathen with their religious abominations and their unspeakable demoralisations; that every mouth might be stopped and all the world be under judgment to God.

Man seeks his own things and his own will; nor is any thing pleasanter to the natural man than to

exalt himself. The Lord Jesus brings before us from first to last a mind wholly different. "For ye know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8: 9).

Such was the mind in Him and in all its perfection only there. But it is the mind God would have in His own now; and thus it was Christ spoke as we have here. It is an entire reversal of human thoughts generally, of Jewish feeling in particular. Settled down in the earth as it is, men seek present pleasure, worldly honour, earthly advantages. What did this age give Christ? A manger when born, nowhere to lay His head, and a cross to die on. What does Christ give to him that believes? Eternal life, and everlasting redemption. Life was in Him; and He gives it in Himself. Redemption He obtained by His death, and we have it in Him through His blood, the forgiveness of offences. Hearing His word, and believing Him Who sent Jesus, we are thus doubly blessed. Our evil He takes away, and His good He freely imparts for ever.

Thus believing we can profit by all He was and all He says. He has laid the axe to the root of the tree of self-seeking, and shown the blessing of humbling ourselves in a world quite out of course, in plain denial of a nature that seeks to be uppermost. Here He opens out the beauty of unselfishness in faith, love being the spring, glory the recompence and rest.

"And he said also to him that had invited him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen nor rich neighbours; lest haply they also invite thee in return, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, invite poor, crippled, lame blind; and thou shalt be blessed; for they can not recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just" (vers. 12-14).

"It is more blessed to give than to receive," as He Himself not only said but acted on, Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by demons. If we have not that power, as things have long been, we are called to walk, as He walked, in love, and in distinct testimony of separateness to God from the pride of the world and the selfishness of the first man. Hence His exhortation would form our hearts for His path here below, instead of walking as men according to public opinion, which is just the spirit and course of the age. For if we are His, we are "heavenly" even now (1 Cor. 15: 48, 49); as we are destined by grace to bear the image of the Heavenly at His coming.

Let our hearts then go forth to welcome the despised and suffering here below, and to show "the kindness of God" to poor, crippled, lame, blind. And the more too, in order to win their ear through the heart to hear of Him Who alone can take away the guilt and power of sin for eternity, Who alone brings through faith in Himself into the place of sons of God even now. Thus is the believer blessed himself; and those who, touched by unworldly love, receive the Saviour by believing on His name. And both will have their portion, when He comes, "in the resurrection of the just."

For scripture never speaks of one common, simultaneous, and indiscriminate resurrection. There shall indeed be a resurrection of both just and unjust. But God's word is clear and positive that the resurrection of the just differs not more in character and consequence than in time from that of the unjust. Hence the Lord calls the former a resurrection of life, the latter a resurrection of judgment (John 5: 29): the one for such as have believed on Him and done good; the other for those that, dishonouring both the Son and the Father, only did ill, and are judged accordingly. In the great prophecy of the Revelation (Rev. 20: 4-15), we find the gap, which severs these two resurrections, to be that special reign with Christ which follows the resurrection of life before the resurrection of judgment.

How is it then with you, dear reader? Had you in your own person spiritually all the disabilities of the poor, crippled, lame, and blind, you are none the less welcome to God's feast, to the glad tidings of

His grace. Listen not to the tempter, but to the Saviour. Put not off His call. You are really worse than if yourself had all these bodily ailments together and with no means to alleviate them. For what state can be so awful as that of a lost sinner? And is not this actually yours? He Himself is express that He came to seek and save such. Oh, receive Him now! God's word warrants you. It is the only way a lost sinner can please Him. Doing good will follow here below, and the resurrection of the just at Christ's coming (1 Cor. 15: 23). Fear not, but believe God, Who has no purpose so dear to Him as the honour of His Son. Oh, no longer dishonour Him, the Son of His love, the Saviour of the lost!

## 7 The Great supper

Luke 14: 16-24.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 37-38. Gospel No. 7-7.)

Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God, said one to the Lord. Far different is the real thought, as was shown in the parable. Grace is repulsive to nature; man shrinks from God and slights His call.

"A certain man was making a great supper, and bade many; and he sent forth his bondman at supper-time to say to those that were bidden, Come, for things are now ready. And they all at once began to excuse themselves. The first said to him, I bought land and must go out to see it; I pray thee, have me excused. And another said, I bought five yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to prove them; I pray thee, have me excused. And another said, I married a wife, and on this account cannot come. And the bondman when he came up reported these things to his master. Then the house-master in anger said to his bondman, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring here the poor and maimed and blind and lame. And the bondman said, Sir, What thou didst command is done, and yet there is room. And the lord said to the bondman, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel [them] to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you, that none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper" (vers. 16-24).

The corresponding, though scarcely the same, parable in Matthew 22: 2-14 is a likeness of the kingdom of the heavens, which gives prominence to the wedding feast for the king's son, to the dispensational difference of the Jews, and to the judgment that befell their city. Here man's moral roots are more laid bare; and where sin abounded, grace surpassed.

There was no harm in buying land, in acquiring oxen, or in marrying a wife. The evil lay in pleading these things, or any else, to set aside the call of God. The heart is at fault, which makes present interests or even duties a reason for putting God off and neglecting so great salvation. Have you, my reader, no object or pursuit, which stands between you and the knowledge of God and His Son which is life eternal? Be not deceived. Sin gives Satan the means of blinding every soul to the light of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ, as well as to his own ruin and exposure to the Gehenna of fire, where one's worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. Your peril is extreme.

God in the gospel meets you in your need and guilt and danger. He asks nothing, He gives all things; and they are now ready. He provides a great supper; He invites freely. Oh, begin not once more to excuse yourself. Too long have you turned aside. Why should you die in your sins, lost for ever? The Son of man expressly came to save the lost. But it is through faith.

Those who first had the invitation valued what was before them, forgot God's judgment for eternity. The Lord recorded their folly that you might fear God — the beginning of wisdom — that you might hear and live. He would give you another life, which is only in Himself, life eternal; and this life

in Him loves the will of God, as it refuses the baits and bribes of the enemy. It begins with faith-obedience, and is sanctified by the Spirit to obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Thus one becomes a child of obedience instead of fashioning oneself according to the former lusts in one's ignorance. The ball of God is paramount. He calls one to receive His grace in Christ. This is His commandment that we believe the name of His Son Jesus Christ. The first of rights is that God should have His rights; and He commands us to believe on the Lord Jesus.

See the activity of God's love. He is not content with gathering in the poor and maimed and blind and lame from the streets and lanes of the city. He will have His bondman go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them in importunate earnestness to come in. He insists that His house be filled. What a God is ours! A just God and a Saviour. He is assuredly. Why then trifle, when all blessing is proffered in Christ, when all is and must be ruin where He is refused? For does He not say to you, that none of those that were bidden shall taste of His supper? Are you not bidden? Come, then; for He welcomes in the name of His Son. Come without delay — dangerous everywhere, most of all in presence of your sin and of God's everlasting judgment. Now it is all grace, grace reigning through righteousness unto life eternal by Jesus Christ our Lord. Practical love follows, and practical obedience. It is the first step that weighs. That it might be open to you, it cost the Saviour all in unfathomable humiliation and the sacrifice of Himself for you and your sins. Oh, put. off no more, but believe and be blessed in and with Him!

In vain men talk of a larger hope. There is no Saviour but Christ, nor any way to the Father but Himself by faith. For not to believe is to give very deep insult to God and to His Son. There is another evil yet worse; the abuse of His grace, the attaching of indulged lusts and passions, of unjudged pollution of flesh and spirit, to that worthy Name. Should such men taste of His supper?

## 8 The Lost Sheep

Luke 15: 3-7.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 53-54. Gospel No. 7-8.)

Grace, the grace of God, is hateful to man's pride. The self-righteous take offence. What is the good of their decorous behaviour, of their prayers at home, of their public devotions, if they be no better than loose and open sinners? Yet the Lord (Matt. 21: 31) solemnly assured the chief priests and the elders of the people, who built on their religious character, that the tax-gatherers and the harlots go into the kingdom before them. They are ready to repent and believe. So here the taxgatherers and the sinners draw near to hear the glad tidings, while the Pharisees and the scribes kept murmuring, He receiveth sinners and eateth with them.

Yes, it was true; nor was He ashamed of divine love to the lost, but gloried in it, and vindicates it against all cavillers. Is God to save nobody? If He save, it can only be by His grace through faith. Let us hear the Son plead His God and Father's title to save sinners.

"And he spoke this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having a hundred sheep and having lost one of them, doth not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after that which was lost until he find it? And having found he layeth [it] on his shoulders rejoicing, and, when come to the house, he calleth together the friends and the neighbours, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I found my sheep that was lost. I say to you, that thus joy shall be in heaven over one sinner repenting, [more] than over ninety nine righteous, such as have no need of repentance" (vers. 3-7).

Man, selfish man, is not so indifferent about his lost sheep, as he thinks God to be about a sinner.

A bad conscience makes him doubt God's love, still more does bad religion. The Lord Jesus alone represents God truly and perfectly. There He was in their midst the Saviour of sinners, the Son of man come to seek and save that which was lost. Did He not proclaim it from the first in the synagogue at Nazareth? Did not the prophet Isaiah predict seven centuries before, that Jehovah's Spirit should be on Him Whom He anointed to evangelise the poor, to preach deliverance to captives, and sight to blind? The miracles of His ministerial life were for the most part signs of His grace to the guilty and wretched: for this His death in atonement would give the ground of God's righteousness; as all proved His unfathomable love for us when powerless and ungodly.

He, the Lord of glory, pursued the wandering sheep till He found it. What did it not cost Him? Teaching the disciples, weaning them from Jewish elements, showing them heavenly things, forming their hearts according to God, exercising their perception to distinguish good and evil, were all blessed to the ninety nine in the wilderness; but what about the lost one? The Good Shepherd leaves the rest safe, in quest of the stray sheep. After it He goes in earnest love, as if He had none else; and having found it, He lays it, on His shoulders rejoicing; and when come to the house He calls together the friends and the neighbours, that they may rejoice with Him over the lost one found, He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. By His stripes were we healed. For we were as sheep going astray. If we returned, as we can now say, it is only because the Shepherd and Bishop of souls came to seek and save us.

The mere idea never dawned on Pagans of old, north, south, east or west. They admitted sympathy between God and His faithful worshippers; but what must befall the unfaithful? What would make and keep faithful? Their gods, on their own showing, had lusts and passions, evil demons self-evidently, and deserving punishment like their adorers. The true God declared Himself in Jesus, Who came to bring God truly known into the world, and to put sin out of it, as He surely will in its season. As God is light and love, so did the Lord prove Himself to be, Whom none could convict of sin, Who died for sinners, suffered for their sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God. Yes, He is the true God, and life eternal.

Why then stay longer? Are you not away from God? Are you fit for His presence? If you know you are not, what is to fit you? Christ is the way, and the only way, to the Father. But what of your sins? He, Who came in love to reconcile you to God, took the load on Himself; He alone could bear it, and bear it away for ever. And God in the scriptures calls you to believe on the Lord Jesus, His Son, your Saviour. God raised from the dead Him Who died for sins and sinners does not this give you confidence?

You hesitate. Why? Do you love darkness rather than light? Alas! is it not because your works are evil, and your heart is proud, and you therefore hate the light which makes all manifest? Hear then His warning word. You cannot escape the resurrection of the unjust; you cannot escape the Judge of quick and dead. Jesus, Whom you now refuse as Saviour, will judge those works of which you now boast; Jesus will prove their worthlessness to your everlasting shame, when He sits on the great white throne. What thenceforward must be your portion, if you reject Him now? "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3: 36). May you now hear and live.

## **9 The Lost Drachma**

Luke 15: 8-10.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 68-69. Gospel No. 7-9.)

The parable which follows the lost sheep presents the sinner's case in another form. It is not as that animal foolish and straying, but like a coin without life, a dead thing. Both are true of fallen man. As all are gone out of the way, and none seeketh after God, with destruction and wretchedness in their ways (Rom. 3), so were all dead in their offences and their sins, by nature children of wrath one as another (Eph. 2). But grace goes forth to save and does save; not the creature's grace, but God's. This the Pharisees and scribes disliked; but the Lord demonstrates it, and draws the despised near to hear One so capable of telling out the love, of which He was the brightest witness and the richest gift. These parables are a pair, as the opening word indicates.

"Or what woman having ten drachmas, if she have lost one drachma, doth not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently till she shall have found it? And on finding, she calleth together the friends and the neighbours, saying, Rejoice with me, because I found the drachma which I lost. Thus, I say to you, there ariseth joy in presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15: 8-9).

Herein is a scene within the house, and a woman is active in seeking out the lost object; as in the former a man strenuous to recover the stray one without. But in both it is divine grace, grace entirely above man or woman, which the Saviour sets before us so vividly; and the lost one is man or woman whom grace seeks and saves.

Is it nothing to you who read these lines that you are "lost"? that you have turned your back on God? and that you are utterly hard and insensible in your alienation? Assuredly He is not cold or indifferent Who so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son; that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have life eternal (John 3). Not hard nor regardless of guilty man is He Who commends His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, — died for the ungodly (Rom. 5). Herein is love, not that we loved Him, but that He loved us and sent His Son as propitiation for our sins (1 John 4). Such is the true God Whose compassion the Lord Jesus here makes known.

He here represents the painstaking of grace by a woman who spares no pains to win back her lost silver piece. She cannot rest about it. If sinners are beguiled by the enemy to disbelieve their ruin, the direct contrast is plain in her. She lights a lamp; she sweeps the house; she searches carefully till she finds it.

It is not otherwise with the Holy Spirit. In the redeemed He is come to dwell, and causes the saints, however opposed in their old natural state as Jews and Gentiles, fitted together, to grow into a holy temple in the Lord, even now being builded together for God's habitation in the Spirit. Also He takes a most energetic part as well as loving interest in awakening the sinner from the slumber of death. It is He that makes the candle of the word shine into the dark recesses of the heart. It is He that probes the guilty conscience. It is He that discovers the fatal evil of darling sins in the light of God.

Oh, have ye not experienced these gracious workings in your souls? Have you not felt as you read or listened to scripture, that somehow God was speaking to your conscience? Beware of turning a deaf ear to Him Who warns and would win you to Himself from all evil. If He press home the certainty that God will have every work and word brought into judgment, He does not fail to remind you of the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering. Do not longer ignore that the goodness of God leads you unto repentance? What goodness can match His spending the Only-begotten on you? What was it for the Lord of all to become Servant of all — yea, to die as a sacrifice for sinners.

Fear not to lay your hand on that infinite offering for sin. If the blood of bulls and goats could be no more than a witness by the way, if their effect could be but provisional and temporary, it is not so

with the blood-shedding of the Lord Jesus. By His blood peace was made for those who had been at war with God; and who can wonder? For His blood cleanses from all sin. It is God's word which so testifies to you. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven? And his voice then shook the earth; but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I will shake not the earth only but also heaven" (Heb. 12).

It may be remarked, that as the first of these three parables points evidently to the Lord Jesus, so does the second to the Holy Spirit, and the third yet more unmistakably to the Father. How blessed is it, that all the divine Persons of the Godhead are engaged on behalf of the lost one that he may be saved! Who can deny that this the Saviour preached when here? And the Spirit has inspired the scripture for you to hear and believe.

## 10 The Lost son

Luke 15: 11-32.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 85-86. Gospel No. 7-10.)

The Saviour adds a third parable to complete as well as confirm the truth of God's grace in saving the lost who repent. The first set out the heedless active straying of the sinner; the second, his insensible dead state till the Spirit works through the living word; the third uses the figure, not of a sheep or a coin, but of a man to point the fact of an inward work in the conscience, and of the reception the returning soul finds in the Father's love and the privileges of grace.

"And he said, A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to the father, Father, give me the share of the property that falleth to me. And he divided to them the means of living. And after not many days the younger son gathered all together, and went abroad into a far country, and there wasted his property by dissolute living. And when he squandered all, there arose a mighty famine in that country; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine; and he longed to fill his belly with the husks which the swine were eating; and no one gave him. But coming unto himself he said, How many hirelings of my father's have abundance of bread, and I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go unto my father and will say to him, Father, I sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hirelings. And he arose and came unto his father. But while he was yet a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him much. And the son said to him, Father, I sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said unto his bondmen, Bring out the best robe and put [it] on him; and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fatted calf, kill [it], and let us eat and make merry; because this my son was dead and came to life again, he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry" (vers. 11-24).

Impossible to conceive a sketch more graphically true. The younger son indicates very emphatically the sinner's path from his start in self-will and independency to open profligacy and the depths of degradation. Such were "some of you" even very far; such were most in a measure. We shall hear of another form of sin at least as evil before we have done. But this far country " knows what extreme famine is. No one gave him." But as the wasteful feel the pressure of dire want, so that even swine's fare becomes desirable, God turns all for good in His grace.

O my reader, have you known such an experience? Have you ever tried to shake off parental

authority, especially where pious? Have you, when you could, plunged into the pleasures of sin, the more eagerly because you were debarred under a father or a mother's eye? Have you fallen into the depths of immorality, and been "almost in all evil?" And in your misery have you learnt what the world feels toward one who has lost all? "And no one gave him." What! none of those who helped to drain the once full purse? No, not one. So the Lord describes the lost son. Are you like him in sin and misery? May you be also in repentance. For coming to himself he saw the folly, evil, and ruin of his life, His mind is made up. He must clear his burdened conscience, and confess his iniquity. He will go to the One before Whom he had sinned, and have all out with Him, to His vindication and to his own shame.

The terror of the Lord may alarm, but the goodness of God leads to repentance as here and always. It produces true self-judgment in His sight. But whatever the hope of mercy that draws, spite of shame and self-loathing and grief at one's own sin, the grace of God much more exceeds. "While he was yet a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him much. And the son said to him, Father, I sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his bondmen, Bring out the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fatted calf, kill it; and let us eat and make merry; because this my son was dead and came to life again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry."

How incomparable is God's grace! With slow and sad steps came the prodigal, hope mingling with shame and many searchings of heart, in the rags that told the tale of ruin to the uttermost. Not so the father, who saw him a long way off, but moved with pity, ran, fell on his neck, and covered him with kisses just as he was. What was the impression made by such love? If ever such a vile son, certainly there never was such a father. The son speaks out his conscience, but not "make me as one of thy hirelings": the father's love arrests this. Nor was it after all the humility of grace, but rather of law, drawing inferences from his past misconduct.

But in the gospel it is a question of God's love, giving Christ and resting on what is due to Him and His work, before which the sinner's evil vanishes. "Jesus was found alone," the ground of all blessing. Therefore is it God's righteousness, not man's. The best robe is brought out and put on the repentant prodigal, a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. Beyond all re-instatement, the lost son now found is blessed and honoured as never before. He put on Christ, not Adam even unfallen; he became God's righteousness in Him. He feasts, and not he only but all that are of God on the fatted calf; yea God Himself rejoices in it with a joy proper to Himself and far deeper than that of all the rest, put together.

In the elder son the Lord vividly portrays the self-righteous, the murmurers against grace such as the Pharisees and scribes; and they are many in every age, especially where scripture is current and men boast of religion. As he is represented returning from the fields and approaching the house, the music and dancing there struck his ear offensively, when he learnt from a servant that it was his father's joy over his returned brother (25-27). He was angry and would not go in (28). And when his father went out and entreated (for what will not grace do?), he answers with self-complacency that insulted his father and the object of his compassion as much as it exalted himself. "Lo these many years do I slave for thee, and never transgressed thy commandments; yet never didst thou give me a kid to make merry with my friends. But when this thy son came that devoured thy living with harlots, thou killedst for him the fatted calf" (29, 30). What an answer of patient love the father's! "Child, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead and came to life again, was lost and is found" (31, 32). It is the day of grace, not judgment. He who despises grace will be judged another day.

## 11 The Prudent Steward

Luke 16: 1-13.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 102-103. Gospel No. 7-11.)

This parable, though addressed by the Lord to His disciples, is a word of warning and instruction to all. It shows, not the way to the heavenly dwellings, but the character of those who get there.

"There was a certain rich man who had a steward; and he was accused to him as wasting his goods. And having called him, he said to him, What [is] this I hear of thee? Render the account of thy stewardship; for thou canst no longer be steward. And the steward said to himself, What shall I do? because my lord is taking the stewardship from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. I am resolved what I will do that when I have been removed from the stewardship, I may be received into their houses. And having called to him each one of the debtors of his own lord, he said to the first, How much owest thou to my lord? And he said, A hundred baths of oil. And he said to him, Take thy bill [writings], and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then he said to another And thou, how much owest thou? And he said, A hundred cors of wheat. He saith to him, Take thy bill [writings], and write eighty. And the lord praised the steward of unrighteousness, because he did prudently. For the sons of this age are for their own generation more prudent than the sons of light. And I say to you, Make to yourselves friends from the mammon of unrighteousness that, when it shall fail, ye may be received into the everlasting tabernacles. The faithful in a very little is faithful also in much, and the unrighteous in a very little is unrighteous also in much. If therefore ye were not faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true? And if ye were not faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two lords; for he will either hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (vers. 1-13).

In a general way man, especially the Jew, has wasted the goods entrusted to him, and forfeited his place. But grace gives him the opportunity of turning these earthly things to everlasting account. It is sheer folly to hold fast the brief present, regardless of the unending future. The Lord praises not the past waste any more than the selfish unrighteousness, but the prudence that sacrifices time and its passing interests in view of the unseen eternity and heavenly glory.

Christ by His infinite sufferings for sin and sinners has made this possible. The first man brought in ruin by sin; Israel made bad worse and earned a curse by his transgression and apostasy. Grace and truth came not by law but by Jesus Christ Whom God made sin for us as He bore the curse, that the guiltiest might through the faith of Him go free. He Whose grace opens the way into blessing beyond all thought has been wronged and plundered without measure. It is not the aim of this parable to show the way in which He is vindicated, and the evils of the sinner are blotted out, and His own righteousness by faith takes the place of man's righteousness sought no matter how assiduously, but always in vain. Thus it comes to pass that no flesh can glory, but he that glories truly must glory in the Lord.

It is Christ alone Who, heard in faith, gives a divinely sound judgment of ourselves and of things around us. Conscience alone is powerless to cope with temptation and blinding wiles of the enemy, ever alluring by what is in sight, seemingly fair and desirable. Without faith it is impossible to please God. To believe in Christ, the Word become flesh and dying for us, the Propitiation for our sins, that we might live of His life, how blessed for us! and how worthy of God! This is grace, this is truth. It centres in Christ, the object of faith; Who gives new eyesight to discern, and decision to abandon the sin-stained present, for an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, reserved in the heavens

for the faithful.

How is it then with you, dear reader? Are you setting your mind on earthly things? cleaving to the dust in quest of the unrighteous mammon, instead of making friends out of it that you may be received, when it shall have failed, into the everlasting tabernacles?

Every thing like Judaism is on God's part now obsolete. It is no longer a system of earthly rewards or punishments, of a worldly sanctuary, of present ease, honour, or advantage. Heavenly things are revealed by Him Who was then rejected on earth and is now glorified on high. There alone are the true riches. The bait of Satan is the mammon of unrighteousness. This may procure the pleasures of sin for a season, and present results on the earth. But what will the end be? where must go those who in contempt of Christ lived only for that which is to fail?

The steward's prudence is a lesson for disciples. See the promptness of his course and his careful consideration of the debtors, the generosity too which gave right and left. This, and this alone in the unscrupulous steward, is commended for our imitation. What men call ours is really another's (ver. 12). It is easy to be generous with another's goods; and so faith would consider them. Such is Christ's yoke; and His yoke is easy, His burden light. To accumulate and keep or use for self is unbelief and covetousness. Faith gives freely, makes friends with what is but mammon, and turns it to everlasting account, when, faithful in a very little, we shall have much. The true riches then shall indeed be ours: for with Christ, His own Son, God will also freely give us all things. We are but stewards now, and are exhorted by the Master to the generosity of grace. It is vain, it is impossible, to serve God and mammon.

## **12 The Rich man and Lazarus**

Luke 16: 19-31.

(B.T. Vol. N2, p. 117-118. Gospel No. 7-12.)

In the second half of this chapter the Lord still makes known the truth which came into evidence through His rejection. The light of eternal and heavenly things is let in on the present state and life on earth. The first man is fallen, evil and lost. If the Jew pre-eminently had been God's steward, he was unjust, and his occupation gone. Prosperity was no test of divine favour. That which is exalted among men is abomination in the sight of God. Since John, the Kingdom of God is preached: it is therefore an urgent question of pressing into it, and this on the part of "every one"; for grace opens the door to any. His death was at hand, which gives the believer even from the tribe of Judah or of Levi righteous deliverance from the law; so that there is no adultery, when one 'belongs to Another raised up from the dead, in order to bear fruit unto God, as the apostle wrote to the Roman saints.

How solemn and momentous the issues in the unseen world!

"Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, making good cheer splendidly day by day. And a certain pauper by name Lazarus was laid at his gate-way, full of sores and desiring to be filled with the things that fell from the table of the rich man; nay, even the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the pauper died and was carried away by the angels into the bosom of Abraham. And the rich man also died and was buried; and in Hades lifting up his eyes being in torments, he seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom. And calling he said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame. But Abraham said, Child, remember that thou in thy lifetime didst fully receive thy good things, and Lazarus likewise evil things; but now here he is

comforted and thou art in anguish. And besides all these things, between us and you a great chasm is fixed, so that those desiring to pass hence unto you cannot, nor those from that side may cross unto us. And he said, I beseech thee then, father, that thou wouldest send him unto the house of my father (for I have five brothers), that he may thoroughly testify to them, lest they too come into this place of torment. But Abraham saith [to him], They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one from the dead go unto them, they will repent. And he said to him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, not even if one rise out of the dead will they be persuaded" (vers. 19-31).

The Saviour depicts a man easy and luxurious in a world of misery, without faith in a world of sin, morally decent, outwardly religious, but living to self and practically infidel. Who did not know it in Israel? Who is not familiar with it in Christendom? Lazarus represents the contrast of the pious beggar laid hard by with none to pity his bodily sores but the dogs. The Conqueror of death lifts the veil. Then appears the truth for eternity: Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, the rich man that enjoyed himself in torments! What mattered the funeral pomp? or if the poor man had not even a grave? The angels carried the godly soul to the bosom of God's friend; the rich man left the vain and transient show of this world, and opened his eyes in the flame of Hades, aggravated by the sight of the blessed afar off — yea, of him there who on earth awakened only his disgust. Now he implores of his father Abraham that Lazarus might allay his burning tongue with the merciful touch of water at the tip of the finger!

It is not a picture of resurrection to come, but of what instantly follows death, though expressed in figures drawn from the body through which we now derive our sensations. The believer once wretched is comforted, the godless is in anguish. Like the parable before, it reveals not the means of salvation, but the character and end, whether of the saved or of the lost. Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God. If we suffer with Christ, we shall also be glorified with Him. To try to reign now is a danger and delusion: if we endure, we shall also reign together. Even Christ is not reigning yet, but rejected by man He is waiting on the Father's throne.

The latter verses (27-31) bring out the all-importance of faith; as the Jew, long favoured, is now the standing witness of ruin through unbelief. The testimony of God in His word, O.T. or N., is the ground of faith. Even a Lazarus sent from the grave would not avail to convince those who do not listen believingly to Moses and the prophets. In fact another Lazarus was raised by the Lord Jesus not long after; but instead of convincing the Jews, he only provoked the murderous nature of the chief priests and the Pharisees (John 11: 47-53). The carnal mind is enmity against God, and rises, proudly and most of all, against His grace in Christ. Yet by grace only are any saved through faith. Hence it is by hearing the word of truth; and this is now in the richest form and fulness, the gospel of our salvation, as the apostle calls it. For God has gone beyond all thoughts and wishes of man in raising up Jesus our Lord from the dead, Who, as He was delivered for our offences, was raised for our justification.

It is Christ's death and resurrection which alone could save. Therefore is it God's righteousness, not man's, that He might be just and the justifier of him that believeth on Jesus.

There is no other way, no other salvation.. To the poor is the gospel preached; but it had not been God's gospel, unless it were equally open to and reliable for the rich. For the truth of Christ is mighty to make the lowly boast in his elevation, and the rich in his humiliation. To Him be the praise and the glory now and evermore. Amen.

Assuredly for you, my readers, no great gulf is fixed between God and you. Christ is still speaking from heaven as a Saviour that you may believe; and as faith comes by a report, so the report is by the word of God. Your guilty conscience may well dread an impassable gulf; but there is a perfect way, a

safe bridge fixed between God and you; and Christ is that way. Oh! take it now, this way to the Father  
in the Son; for the Holy Spirit deigns and loves to proclaim the glad news to you.